
Lakeview Beacon

Helping People Find Solutions

Announcements

*

Carol Murray completed training in Treating Couples When Pornography is an Issue

*

All therapists are currently accepting referrals. We can be reached at 929-0300

Janet Hughes x107
Darcy Britten x106
Jill Kimball x105
Laura Slaughter x103
Barb Cain x102
Carol Murray x101

Welcome Janet Hughes

Lakeview Counseling is pleased to announce that Janet Hughes has joined our staff. Janet brings with her thirty years of experience working with older children, adolescents and adults. She has worked in the school setting for over twenty five years and also worked in private practice for ten years. Janet's experience working with families in our community is deep and we are very excited to have her on board at Lakeview!

Janet holds a Masters of Social Work Degree from Michigan State University. She is a member of the National Association of Social

Workers as well as, the Academy of Certified Social Workers. Janet will be seeing adolescents (male and female) as well as, adults, including families and couples. We are excited to have her on board.

Please contact Janet at 929-0300, extension 107 or janet@lakeviewtc.com



Lakeview Counseling
1844 Oak Hollow Drive, Suite B

Phone: 231.929.0300
Traverse City, MI 49684

UNDERSTANDING AND COPING WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE

by Carol Murray

In your lifetime, you are likely to have at least one relationship with a high-conflict individual. This type of relationship is confusing and hurtful. At first, you think that you are the reason there is conflict, so you try to adjust your attitude and behavior. You just can't understand what is wrong with the other person. If you are in the relationship long enough, you come to realize that you are not the problem.

Common characteristics

The common characteristics of a high-conflict individual include: at times wooing you, at other times demeaning you; blaming outside forces for a problem and never taking responsibility; persistent control and manipulation of others; becoming defensive when given negative feedback. This type of person often brings about a lot of drama in which they are either the victim or the hero. They express anger with aggression (ie: bullying, verbal abuse, violence) or by being passive aggressive (they do nothing at first, stew, then attack). They are not very good at nurturing or comforting others. They distrust the intentions of others, bordering on paranoia. They are not mindful about tact, timing or respect when communicating, especially when upset.

Joseph Shannon, PhD, is an expert on this topic. He describes a relationship with a high-conflict individual as being

like a wooden fence. Every time the person hurts you, it is like driving a nail in the fence. When they apologize, the nail gets removed but the hole remains. After a while, with so many holes in the fence, the structure collapses.

What causes someone to be high-conflict?

The answer is: any of several things. For one thing, they may have atypical brain chemistry. The #1 cause of this is stress. The body produces cortisol to near toxic levels, and as brain chemistry changes, so do behavior and emotions. Another explanation related to the brain is that the pre-frontal cortex, which is our "brake pedal", never fully develops. This affects our ability to think rationally and to problem-solve, as well as live by moral principles and the ability to feel guilt and remorse.

Another contributing factor is the quality and stability of life during childhood and adolescence. Parent(s) may have been abusive, neglectful or absent. The person may have been exposed to real life violence as a child, either in the home, at school, or in their neighborhood. Exposure to violence creates fear, which leads a person to want to learn how to have control so as to never experience this fear again. The person may have had poor learning experiences because of exposure to poor role models. The parent(s) may have been

mentally ill, immature or substance abusers. Peers may have been bullies,

Most high-conflict individuals have a mental health disorder known as a personality disorder. There are subtypes of this disorder. Borderline Personality Disorder is one subtype. This person is sensitive to perceived abandonment, is always involved in some type of crisis and may call your entire relationship into question over something small. Narcissistic Personality Disorder is another subtype. This person is morbidly preoccupied with him/herself, lacks empathy and is good at faking behavior and emotions. Histrionic Personality Disorder is another subtype. This person is like a teenager trapped in an adult body. They have shallow emotional expression, an unending need to be the center of attention, constantly need reassurance and immediate gratification. Another subtype is Paranoid Personality Disorder. This person is tense, guarded, suspicious, self-righteous, rigid and petty. Prolonged and untreated depression and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder can also contribute to creating a high-conflict individual as both of these disorders create much stress in a person's life. A person with OCD can be stiff, perfectionistic, emotionally aloof or stoic and overly conscientious about control.

When dealing with people, remember you are not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion.

Dale Carnegie



Stay committed to your decisions, but remain flexible in your approach.

Tony Robbins



When your values are clear to you, making decisions becomes easier.

Roy E. Disney

How can you know if someone is high-conflict?

Knowing a lot about their history is important. Were they abused, neglected or abandoned by parent(s)? Were they exposed to violence? What type of role models were they exposed to as a child and as an adolescent? Do they have a history of lying, stealing, scams, bullying and cruelty, self-harm or substance abuse? Do they have a long history of interpersonal conflict; known as “high maintenance”. They have a history of troubled relationships. In their youth they may have engaged in self-abusive behavior (cutting, burning, compulsive skin-picking, breaking bones, excessive tattooing and/or body piercing). They require a lot of attention and act-out when they don’t receive it. They have a lot of aggressive energy. They distort or rewrite events as though living in their own world. They trigger intense confusion, hurt, even anger, in you.

What can you do to cope with a high-conflict individual?

First and foremost, take care of yourself. Make sure that you are following the guidelines for a healthy life: nutrition, sleep, exercise, meditation/prayer, and maintaining a balance with your work and personal life.

Keep in mind that the high-conflict individual is NOT likely to change. Your attempts to do so may be wasted time and energy. If at all possible, stay “below the radar” or leave the relationship.

If you must continue in the relationship, here are some

guidelines for YOU to use during interactions.

- When really angry, keep your mouth shut! Wait 12–24 hours and ask yourself: am I being petty? am I over-reacting?
- Citing Joseph Shannon again, practice being appropriately assertive using “D.E.S.K.” D= describing the behavior; E=expressing the feeling you have about the behavior; s= stating the need or want you have and asking for a change in the behavior; K=knowing you might not get it!
- Work at accepting the person even though you don’t like the behavior(s). Find something about them to respect and praise.
- Learn what the triggers are for the high-conflict individual and avoid these “hot buttons”
- Set clear limits and stick with them.
- If you sense danger or are in danger, get help immediately.
- Seek counseling for yourself.



Lakeview Counseling

TO REACH US:

PHONE:
231.929.0300

FAX:
231.933.6378

ON THE WEB!
WWW.LAKEVIEWWTC.COM

Additional resources

BOOKS

Help! I'm In Love with a Narcissist, by S. Carter and J. Sokol

The Sociopath Next Door, by M. Stout

Stop Walking on Eggshells:
Taking Your Life Back When
Someone You Care About has
Borderline Personality Disorder,
by P.T. Mason and R. Kreger

It's All Your Fault: 12 Tips for
Managing People Who Blame
Others for Everything by Bill
Eddy

WEBSITES

highconflictinstitute.com

psychcentral.com ("Search"
Personality Disorders)

helpstartshere.org

Lakeview Counseling

1844 Oak Hollow Drive, Suite B
Traverse City, MI 49686

Carol Murray, LMSW, ACSW, Diplomate, Director
Jill Kimball, LMSW, ACSW
Darcy Britten, LPC, NCC

Barbara Cain, LMSW, ACSW
Laura Slaughter, LMSW, ACSW
Janet Hughes, LMSW, ACSW