



Licensed Mental Health Counselor

Co-Parenting With a High-Conflict or Narcissistic Ex

A PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

Strategies, Scripts and Worksheets to Help You Protect Your Peace and Support Your Child



COMMUNICATE
EFFECTIVELY



SET & MAINTAIN
BOUNDARIES



REGULATE
YOURSELF



DOCUMENT
OBJECTIVELY



PROTECT
YOUR CHILD



*A calmer you.
A more secure tomorrow.*



HEAL | SET BOUNDARIES | CREATE A HEALTHIER FUTURE

JAMI SAPERSTEIN COUNSELING

1. Shift the Goal

High-conflict co-parenting becomes more manageable when the goal changes from getting the other parent to understand, agree, apologize, or behave fairly to managing your own communication, boundaries, and parenting.

What am I still hoping my co-parent will finally give me?

What would change if I stopped requiring that from them before I could move forward?

My controllables

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| ■ My tone | ■ Whether I respond |
| ■ When I respond | ■ What information I share |
| ■ My boundaries | ■ My behavior around my child |
| ■ My documentation | ■ How I regulate myself |

Not mine to control

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ■ Their interpretation | ■ Their accusations |
| ■ Whether they apologize | ■ Their personality |
| ■ Their attempts to provoke me | ■ What they tell other adults |

2. BIFF Communication + Don't JADE

BIFF: Brief, Informative, Friendly, Firm. Answer the necessary parenting issue and remove the emotional argument.

Instead of...	Try...
"You know that's not true. I told you three times about the appointment. You never listen and then blame me."	"The appointment is Tuesday at 3:00 PM. I will send you the doctor's recommendations afterward."
"Stop trying to control everything. This is my weekend."	"I will follow the parenting schedule. Pickup is Friday at 5:00 PM."

Don't JADE: Don't Justify, Argue, Defend, or Explain. Overexplaining often gives a high-conflict person more material to argue with.

Before sending, check:

- Is this about the child?
- Did I answer only the necessary issue?
- Did I remove unnecessary explanations?
- Is a response actually required?
- Did I remove accusations and sarcasm?
- Would I be comfortable with a neutral third party reading it?

Practice message I received:

My first emotional response:

My BIFF response:

3. Do I Need to Respond?

1	Does the message concern the child's health, safety, schedule, school, expenses, or a decision requiring my input? If NO: a response may not be necessary.
2	Is there a clear question or request? If NO: consider not responding to commentary, insults, or accusations.
3	Is it urgent? If NO: regulate first. You do not need to answer while activated.
4	Can I answer in 1-4 neutral sentences? If YES: use BIFF and stop.
5	Is the conversation becoming repetitive? Restate the boundary once; do not keep litigating the same point by text.

My pause rule: Unless there is a genuine emergency, I will wait _____ minutes / hours before responding when I feel activated.

4. Difficult Messages: 20 Response Examples

1. Incoming: "You're an awful parent. The kids don't even want to be with you."
Possible response: "I will be at the agreed pickup location at 5:00 PM."
2. Incoming: "You always make everything difficult."
Possible response: No response unless a child-related question is included.
3. Incoming: "Change weekends. I already made plans."
Possible response: "I am not available to change this weekend. I will follow the current schedule."
4. Incoming: "If you cared about your child, you'd pay for this."
Possible response: "Please send the invoice and the portion you are requesting."
5. Incoming: "Tell your boyfriend/girlfriend to stay away from my child."
Possible response: "I will continue to make parenting decisions during my parenting time consistent with our agreement."
6. Incoming: "You never told me about the school event."
Possible response: "The school notice was sent on September 10. I am forwarding it here."
7. Incoming: "Call me NOW."
Possible response: "Please send the child-related issue in writing. If this is an emergency, state the emergency."
8. Incoming: "I'm taking you back to court."
Possible response: "I will continue following the current parenting plan."
9. Incoming: "The child says you scream all the time."
Possible response: "If there is a specific concern about the child's wellbeing, please send the details."
10. Incoming: "I'm not bringing her back until you agree."
Possible response: "The scheduled return time is 6:00 PM. I expect the parenting plan to be followed."
11. Incoming: "You need therapy. You're crazy."
Possible response: No response.
12. Incoming: "Why aren't you answering me?"
Possible response: "I respond to non-urgent child-related messages when I am available."
13. Incoming: "Your rules at your house are ridiculous."
Possible response: "I understand we have different household rules."
14. Incoming: "You ruined the family."
Possible response: No response.
15. Incoming: "The child wants to stay with me, so I'm keeping him tonight."
Possible response: "The parenting schedule states return is at 7:00 PM. I will be available for the scheduled exchange."
16. Incoming: "I'm not paying. That's your problem."
Possible response: "The expense is \$____. Your portion under our agreement is \$____. Receipt attached."
17. Incoming: "Tell her she can't go to the party."
Possible response: "I will address activities occurring during my parenting time."

18. Incoming: "You're poisoning the kids against me."

Possible response: "I support the children's relationship with both parents."

19. Incoming: "Answer my question. What is wrong with you?"

Possible response: "The answer to your scheduling question is yes/no. Pickup is at 4:30 PM."

20. Incoming: Multiple hostile messages in a row

Possible response: Respond once, if needed, to the actionable child-related issue. Do not answer each message.

5. Gaslighting Reality Check

Use this when an interaction leaves you confused, guilty, or questioning your memory. The purpose is not to prove the other person wrong; it is to restore your own orientation to observable facts.

What happened?	What was said afterward?	What evidence/facts exist?	What do I know to be true?

6. Trigger & Regulation Plan

The goal is not to become emotionally unaffected. The goal is to prevent activation from determining your response.

Messages/behaviors that activate me:

What I notice in my body:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Heart racing | ☐ Tight chest |
| ☐ Shaking | ☐ Nausea |
| ☐ Heat/anger | ☐ Freeze/numbness |
| ☐ Compulsion to answer immediately | ☐ Other: _____ |

My regulation sequence:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Put the phone down | ☐ Take 5 slow, longer exhales |
| ☐ Move/walk for 5-10 minutes | ☐ Draft but do not send |
| ☐ Reality-check with facts | ☐ Wait until my body settles |
| ☐ Reread as if I were a neutral professional | ☐ Use my prepared BIFF script |

My personal rule before responding:

7. My Co-Parenting Boundaries

A boundary defines what *you* will do. It is not a demand that the other person change.

Communication channel(s) I will use:

Topics I will discuss:

Topics I will not engage in:

My usual response window for non-urgent messages:

What qualifies as an emergency:

What I will do if messages become insulting or repetitive:

Exchange boundaries that reduce conflict:

8. Keeping Children Out of the Middle

Children should not have to carry messages, gather information, defend either parent, choose sides, or regulate an adult's emotions.

Child repeats criticism of you

"I'm sorry that felt confusing. You don't have to choose sides. You are allowed to love both of your parents."

Child asks who is telling the truth

"That's an adult issue. You don't need to figure out who is right. My job is to take care of you."

Child says the other parent is upset with them

"Adults are responsible for their own feelings. You are not responsible for making a parent happy."

Child is afraid to enjoy time with you

"You never have to feel guilty for having a good time with either parent."

Other parent sends a message through the child

"Thank you for telling me. I'll handle that directly with your other parent. You don't need to be the messenger."

What does my child most need from me when conflict occurs?

9. Objective Documentation Log

Record facts, not diagnoses or assumptions about motive. Documentation should be concise and behavior-based.

Date/time	Event / agreement	What occurred	Child impact / follow-up

Example: "Pickup scheduled 5:00 PM; parent arrived 6:25 PM; child missed first hour of school event." Avoid: "He was late because he is a narcissist and wanted to ruin the event."

10. Emotional Detachment & Radical Acceptance

Acceptance does not mean approval. It means stopping the repeated struggle with facts you cannot control so that your energy can return to parenting, recovery, and your own life.

I may never receive:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ■ Accountability | ■ An apology |
| ■ Validation | ■ Fairness |
| ■ Consistency | ■ Empathy |
| ■ Agreement about what happened | ■ Cooperative communication |

What has trying to obtain these things cost me?

What becomes possible if I stop making my peace dependent on their response?

Complete this sentence:

"I cannot control _____ . I can control _____ ."

11. My Personal High-Conflict Co-Parenting Plan

My primary goal for my children is:

My communication rule is:

My BIFF reminder is:

When I feel triggered, I will:

I will not respond to:

I will document:

I will keep my child out of conflict by:

The person/professional I can consult before responding to a serious issue is:

The boundary I most need to practice is:

The part of my own life I want to reclaim is:

My reminder:

I do not need to win the argument. I need to protect my stability, act consistently with my values, and keep my child out of adult conflict.