

What Is New Ways for Families®

© 2015 Bill Eddy, LCSW, Esq.

New Ways for Families is a comprehensive new method developed by the High Conflict Institute for handling high conflict cases in family court. It is a structured method with short-term counseling at the front end of potentially high conflict cases. It can be ordered whenever a parent or the court believes that one parent needs restricted parenting (supervised, no contact, limited time), at the beginning of a case or any time a parent brings a motion for restricted parenting – including post-judgment litigation.

This method emphasizes strengthening skills for positive future behavior (new ways), rather than focusing on past negative behavior—while still acknowledging it. It is designed to save courts time, to save parents money, and to protect children as their families re-organize in new ways after a separation or divorce, for married or never-married parents. It is designed to help manage any separation or divorce case, but specifically to manage cases with allegations of domestic violence, child abuse, substance abuse, false allegations, and/or alienation.

This method was developed after studying the dynamics of high conflict court cases. To be successful, all professionals need to participate in focusing parents on practicing four BIG skills: flexible thinking, managed emotions, moderate behaviors and checking themselves. These are the opposite of how high conflict people normally think and act, and the opposite of what the adversarial court process normally reinforces. By reaching parents at the beginning of the court process, they may become immunized against becoming “high conflict” parents.

There are four basic steps:

Step 1: Getting Started

Parents can agree to use New Ways, or a judge can order it while also making temporary parenting orders, support orders, and restraining orders. Then, each parent selects his or her own Individual Parent Counselor from a list of local counselors trained in the New Ways method. Before the counseling begins, each parent prepares a Behavioral Declaration and a Reply Behavioral Declaration, which are the only declarations provided to their counselors.

Step 2: Individual Parent Counseling

This includes 6 weekly sessions with a separate, confidential counselor for each parent using a Parent Workbook. Both parents are ordered into this counseling at the same time, with no presumptions about who is more difficult. The focus of these sessions is strengthening and practicing the four BIG skills: *flexible thinking, managed emotions, moderate behaviors and checking yourself.*

Step 3: Parent-Child Counseling

This step includes three sessions with each parent and their child/ren, generally alternating weeks over six weeks. The parents share the same non-confidential counselor. They each use the Parent-Child section of their Workbook for these sessions. The Parent-Child Counselor does not write a report, does not form expert opinions or make parenting schedule recommendations. These are for the parents to decide after they have learned their new skills. The focus of these sessions is the parents teaching their children the same skills they learned in their Individual Counseling, hearing the children’s concerns, and discussing new ways their family will operate.

Step 4: Family (or Court) Decision-making

Finally, parents use their new ways skills to develop a lasting parenting plan with the assistance of their attorneys (if any), Family Court Services, a private mediator or a collaborative team. If

they are unable to settle the case, then they go to Family Court and the judge makes their decisions for them. However, the judge first quizzes each parent on something he and she has learned in New Ways. The judge then proceeds with a more traditional hearing and makes orders for long-term parenting, support, and other orders. These can include restraining orders, batterer's treatment, drug treatment, parenting classes, a psychological evaluation, etc.

New Ways for Families can be used at any time by any family, from the beginning of the separation process to after the divorce. While this method was developed for family court cases, it can also be used in out-of-court settings, such as Collaborative Divorce, Divorce Mediation, and in negotiated divorce settlements with or without lawyers. After basic parenting decisions have been made, this method can also be used in conjunction with a Parenting Coordinator.

While the counselors who have been trained in New Ways charge their own rates, they have been asked to keep their fees reasonable and to charge a reduced rate in one out of three cases. Using this structured approach, it is more likely that a potentially high conflict case could be completely resolved without ever going back to court. They are encouraged to use parenting classes and Parenting Coordinators for future assistance in their cases.

Where are there trained counselors to use this approach? We have trained counselors, lawyers, mediators and/or judges in approximately 25 cities. Does this approach work? We are now getting research results from two family court systems in Alberta, Canada, with good success. We also have an Online Class, which is accessible by any parent anywhere. For more information about New Ways for Families, see the website: www.NewWays4Families.com. Professional Guidebooks and Parent Workbooks are also available through the website.

Bill Eddy is a lawyer, therapist, mediator, and the Training Director of the High Conflict Institute, a training and consulting company focused on dealing with difficult people in high-conflict disputes. For more, www.HighConflictInstitute.com.