

## GOALS

New Ways for Families® is an innovative new method for dealing with high-conflict families. It is specifically designed to:

- make the family court process less adversarial
- reduce the number of court hearings
- teach specific decision-making and emotional self-management skills
- immunize *potentially* high-conflict families from becoming high-conflict
- prevent children from being caught in the middle
- serve as a Level Two educational program when the standard parent education program did not result in behavior change

## SKILLS

- **Flexible Thinking:** recognizing that there is more than one solution to every problem; learning a 3-step method for making proposals and responding to proposals with the other parent in a way that is likely to elicit a positive response and long-term cooperation
- **Managed Emotions:** learning to manage your emotions (sadness, anger, fear, anxiety) so as to not escalate the conflict with your co-parent, and to avoid passing on those feelings to your children
- **Moderate Behaviors:** avoiding extreme actions that are likely to lead to extreme emotions or behaviors by the other parent, including a simple method for calming parent communication, known as the BIFF Response® method (keeping communications Brief, Informative, Friendly & Firm)
- **Checking Yourself:** reminding yourself to use these skills during times of stress

## BASIS

Bill Eddy, attorney, mediator, therapist and author, developed this curriculum in order to teach parents the basic communication and decision –making skills that high conflict people lack.

People with high conflict patterns of behavior need:

- lots of structure
- small skills taught in small steps
- focus on future behavior
- reinforcement of the skills by all professionals involved in the case

## MAIN POINTS OF THIS INNOVATIVE METHOD

- **New Skills.** Program focuses on *learning new skills*, rather than focusing vaguely past bad behavior. They need new skills first, before they can heal the divorce or address past bad behavior productively.
- **Both Parents.** When *both* parents participate at the beginning of the case, they *both* learn the same skills – before the conflict escalates and before parents have “won” or “lost” a court hearing, which only makes a high conflict person *more* defensive. This also avoids the parenting contest and labeling one parent as the “bad” parent needing treatment, and the other parent as the “good” parent. Temporary protective orders and temporary restricted parenting schedules could still be ordered, without prejudice.
- **At the Beginning.** Engaging parents in behavior change when they are *most motivated*, rather than after big decisions are made when they are most defensive, non-compliant, and preoccupied with reversing negative court decisions.
- **Level Two.** When parents return to court or continue to be difficult after participating in a parent education course, it is a sign that the parent struggles with self-reflection and behavior change. In these cases, a skills-based course is necessary. Difficult people struggle with self-reflection and instead focus on blaming others. A skills-based course addresses these issues by focusing the parent on small skills, in small steps, with a lot of repetition. Research has shown that this approach can lead to behavior change.
- **Self-Management.** Strengthening both parents’ abilities to make parenting decisions, while relying less on experts and the courts to make their decisions for them.

## HOLDING PARENTS ACCOUNTABLE

*If* the parties return to court, the judge or mediator can quiz them on what they have learned and how they would handle future parenting situations. This gives the judge more information about the person’s ability to identify positive parenting behaviors, in the case that a judge must make decisions for the parties.

High conflict people do not voluntarily comply with court orders and tend to shift the focus to the other party’s bad behavior or to a different subject in order to distract from the fact that they did not do what they were asked to do.

The court should require parents to submit their certificates of completion and provide a consequence if a parent refuses to do so. The inability to follow a court order and the inability to learn and demonstrate new skills for successful co-parenting gives the court an idea of that parent’s abilities, thereby giving the court more information on which to base its decisions.