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TIPS FOR LAWYERS DEALING WITH A CLIENT WITH BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

The lawyer who accepts as a client an individual with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) must be prepared for a difficult lawyer-client relationship. Specifically the lawyer should:

1. Carefully maintain boundaries—in other words, keep the relationship strictly professional and reasonably structured. Be specific about when it is all right to call and when it is not. Discourage calls to your home. Have all meetings at the lawyer’s office (no lunch or dinner meetings at restaurants; no meetings at the client’s home or office).
2. Be prepared for the client to berate the lawyer for real or imagined wrongs, personal or professional. People with BPD generally have great difficulty with trust and react strongly to perceived breaches of trust.
3. Expect a client with BPD to accuse the lawyer of abandoning the client or the case at any point at which things are not going extremely well or even if the lawyer is unable to return a phone call within minutes, due to the client’s fear of abandonment.
4. Expect to be called “the best lawyer ever” one day but called “the worst lawyer in history” the next. Individuals with BPD tend to see the people involved in their lives as either wonderful or terrible.
5. Expect suicide threats and possibly gestures, since people with BPD tend to see suicide as a way to end their psychological pain.
6. Expect to have the client show a wide range of strong emotions, from great happiness to rage—sometimes within the same hour.
7. Expect the client to be very suspicious of the lawyer’s motives and behavior.

The final task for the lawyer and the lawyer’s staff is to keep from being “sucked in”. In other words, they should not take it personally when the client either gets angry and yells at them or tells them how fantastic they are. If the client tries to make the relationship personal rather than strictly professional, maintain professional boundaries. Do not overreact to suicide threats. And do not lose your cool just because the client has temporarily lost his or hers.

If the lawyer has reason to believe that a client has a Borderline Personality Disorder, it would be a very good idea to have an evaluation by a psychologist or psychiatrist to establish this diagnosis. If it is established, the lawyer will need the professional to help identify which of the client’s characteristics are probably due to the pre-existing personality disorder and which are the result of events leading up to the divorce or caused by the stress of the divorce process. Lawyers may also want to require that such a client be in psychotherapy during the entire lawsuit to try to ensure that a psychologist or psychiatrist is helping the person deal with issues related to the personality disorder—and helping the lawyer deal with the difficult task of having someone with a Borderline Personality Disorder as a client.

Kim Bartholomew, Marilyn J. Kwong & Stephen D. Hart. *Attachment*, in Handbook of Personality Disorders.

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TOP TEN TIPS FOR FOSTERING CHILDREN'S RESILIENCE AFTER DIVORCE

How children fare during and after a divorce depends largely on how parents handle changes and create quality of life for their children over time. Many factors influence their resilience; research and clinical practice have shown these to be among the most important.

1. Tell and show them you love them. Repeat very often. Reassure children that the love you have for them will never end—and then back it up with your behavior. Children crave parents' physical expressions of affection along with words of love, encouragement and reassurance.

2. Prepare children for changes. Begin by telling them what *will* and *will not* change for them as a result of the divorce. "Telling" is not a one time event. Continue the conversation over time, as family changes continue to occur.

3. Strengthen your relationship with your children. Do not allow your divorce from your former partner to become a divorce from your children or your role as their parent. Create frequent, regular, one-on-one time with each child. Use play and other enjoyable activities to build closer emotional bonds and express your love and reassurance. Noticing and expressing appreciation for your children's positive behaviors and acts of kindness creates good will that fuels hope, optimism, and loving relationships.

4. Help your children identify their emotions, and respond with empathy. Children often hide their real feelings about divorce, but by listening carefully, you can help them to explore, understand, and label their emotions. Research has shown that labeling emotions has powerful therapeutic effects in the brain. Your empathy for what they are experiencing also helps children cope with powerful feelings.

5. Contain conflict. Ongoing conflict is poisonous for children, emotionally, socially and physically, and it erodes positive parenting. Never let your children witness violent or hostile behavior or hear you denigrate your former partner. Avoid putting children in the middle of your problems or creating situations where they feel they must choose between their parent.

6. Share parenting, if it is safe to do so. Your children benefit from two responsible parents. Reframe your relationship with your former spouse as a "business" partnership whose sole focus is your children's well being. Use legal options and experienced therapists to help you and your former spouse keep your children's needs a top priority and create effective parenting plans.

7. Support and encourage your child's safe and healthy relationship with both parents. Nurture your children's healthy relationship with their other parent. When problems arise between them, help your children discuss it respectfully and help them find ways to ease their distress and learn to problem solve. Do not burden children with adult problems that contribute to loyalty conflicts and alliances with one parent at the expense of a healthy relationship with the other.

8. Focus on what is in your control and strive for consistent, quality parenting. Research shows that warmth, nurturing and empathy along with effective and consistent discipline, rules and limits is related to better adjustment for children. Children need and want consistent limits in both of their homes. Knowing how they are expected to behave gives children a sense of control over their own behavior and their lives. They feel a basic sense of trust and security, even as they learn new skills within a loving structure.

9. Teach and model resilience skills. The skills that influence resilience are well defined. Explain and practice: age appropriate understanding and acceptance of family changes, problem solving, coping skills, understanding and managing emotions, differentiating between what can and cannot be controlled, expressing empathy, and fostering hope, competence and confidence. A supportive relationship with caring adults is an essential contributor to resilience. Reach out for support and get help when needed. Resilient children are connected through faith, friends, family, nurturing communities and supportive resources. Support your child's healthy relationships with other caring adults and mentors.

10. Provide household structure, routine and traditions that children enjoy—including family time together. Reducing the number of major changes in a child's life and having consistent structure at home helps children to feel safer and more secure when their lives have changed dramatically. Regular bedtimes, meals together, limits on "screen time", and plenty of quality time as a family are all factors that have proven to positively influence better social and emotional adjustment..

JoAnne Pedro-Carroll, Ph.D. www.afccnet.org. Ask the Experts.

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FALLING IN LINE The Power of Birth Order

Since 1874, When Francis Galton declared that firstborn sons were overrepresented among scientists, researchers have demonstrated that birth order plays a role in everything from career choices to whom we marry. Here's a guide to perpetual family ties.



Firstborn

- ◆ **Brains:** Parents tend to pour their resources into the firstborn, ensuring that they have the best in life. Thus their IQ is typically 3 points higher than their siblings.
- ◆ **Family Ties:** As the oldest, firstborns tend to act as surrogate parents to their siblings, taking on the role of family guardian. That makes them more likely to maintain family relations in adulthood.
- ◆ **Competitive:** Firstborns can be affected by the change of going from only child to older. The switch awakens the desire to maintain the position of favorite, causing them to be less trustful and more competitive throughout life.
- ◆ **Conventional:** Firstborns tend to be more conservative than their rebellious younger siblings. Radical political activists are 18 times more likely to be a later born than a firstborn.



Middleborn

- ◆ **Careers:** Literally being in the middle of things, middleborns tend to be unbiased and level headed, leading them to careers that involve negotiating. They are well suited for positions in management and politics.
- ◆ **Perfectionists:** Having no defined role in the family, a middleborn plays the part of both older and younger sibling. They're less likely to be seen as a favorite child. In one study, mothers defined their middleborns as low in competence and achievement. Such a perception can reduce a child's self esteem. Thus, middleborns tend to be maladaptive perfectionists.
- ◆ **Comrades:** Middleborns are less likely to be involved with their families, reaching out to their peers and forming stronger relationships with individuals outside their kinship.



Lastborn

- ◆ **Religion:** Religious observance is stronger in first and lastborns than middleborns. Religiosity is highest in lastborns.
- ◆ **Warmth:** In families with three children, the lastborn is especially tender and altruistic, perhaps because he gets babied.
- ◆ **Relationships:** Research has shown that individuals are more likely to form romantic bonds with those who share their birth order. This may be because of similar personalities and life goals. Thus, lastborns are attracted to the babies of other families.

Laura Janecka. Falling in Line—The Power of Birth Order. *Psychology Today*. June 2010. p. 24.

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BORN LUCKY

Some Birthdays Are Better Bets Than Others

Scientists don't tend to buy into astrology, yet they've established that certain conditions such as schizophrenia, and even personality traits such as novelty seeking, are linked to birth months. It's not the planets at work per se, but rather subtle influences on fetal brain development due to factors including sleep and wake cycles and the prevalence of viruses that differ from season to season.

Knowing that some temperaments are linked to self-proclaimed luckiness, a study

was conducted to find out if fortune really is dependent on your grand entrance into the world. They asked a group of study participants if they considered themselves lucky, and assessed key personality traits. Across genders and ages, people born between March and August believe themselves to be luckier, on average, than those born in the colder months of September through February. (Relatedly, summer babies grow up to be more open-minded and less neurotic than winter tots.) May

is the luckiest month of all, so if you want a fortunate child, try to get lucky in August.



Rebecca Webber. Make Your Own Luck. *Psychology Today*. June 2010. p. 67.

THINK LUCKY

The best opportunities arise when you approach life with a flexible mind-set. See how you can get out of the unlucky column.

| Domain | If you think this way... | Try this approach instead |
|-------------------------------|--|--|
| Romantic Relationships | "Here's my checklist. He has to be smart, attractive, financially secure, subscribe to <i>The New York Times</i> , love to cook, and love dogs." | "I don't really have a type. I'm open to anyone as long as he's a good person. I'll know it when I see it." |
| Work | "I need to finish this project by 11, team meeting at 12, lunch at 1, finish that report this afternoon, and I'm home free by 6." | "I want to try to accomplish two major things today, but in my downtime, I'm going to explore a few other ideas that could help the company or my career." |
| Friendships | "I already have a handful of really wonderful friends. I don't need or have time for any more." | "I love to make new friends, even if it never goes further than a conversation and becoming Facebook friends." |
| Errands | "I need to hit the dry cleaner, the bank, and the grocery store. I should be home in time for the game." | "I have to get these things done, but I'm not going to rush because I don't really know what to expect or whom I'll meet. It will be interesting to see how it works out." |
| Business Meeting | "I'm meeting up with this person to do a deal, not thinking of them as a friend or a potential partner." | "I'll accept a meeting with anyone, because you never know where it might lead – even if it's five years down the road." |

Rebecca Webber. Make Your Own Luck. *Psychology Today*. June 2010. p. 68.

SUGGESTIONS/COMMENTS?

Do you have any suggestions for future articles, or just a comment regarding this newsletter? We welcome your feedback. Please contact Wanda Mueller at 403-266-2017 or wmueller@worldpsych.ca.