

## Clear Contracts:

Working Ethically with SAPCR  
(Suit Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship)  
Clients

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October 30 of **That Year!**

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## Conceptualizing this Client

Families who...  
before, during, or after restructuring  
malfunction in a way that results in clinical potential.

The presenting problem/client may be an individual or multiples, adult  
or child, but...

the malfunction is usually related to a failure to co-parent adequately.

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## Co-Parenting Malfunctions

Co-parenting malfunction(s) can be:

1. Adjustment challenges (minor bumps in the road)
2. Acute (sudden and painful)
3. Chronic Infections

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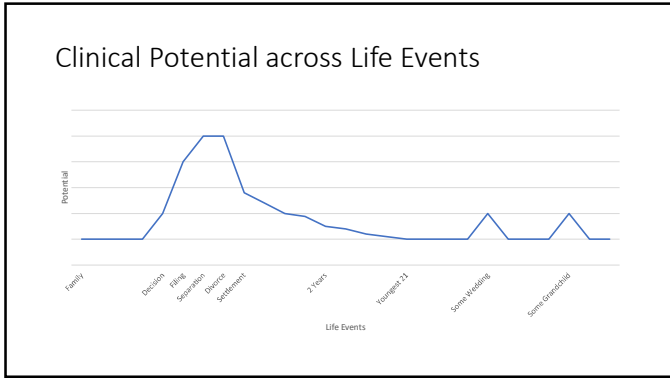
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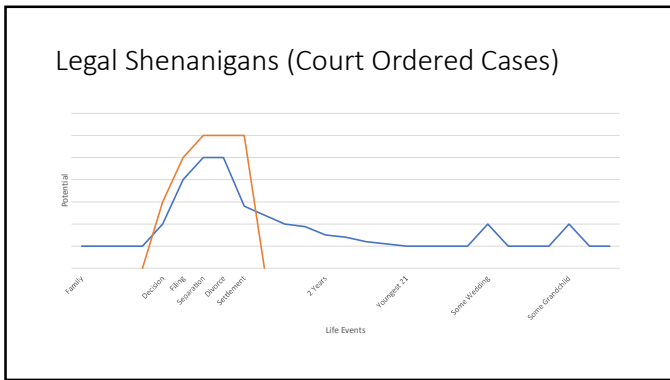
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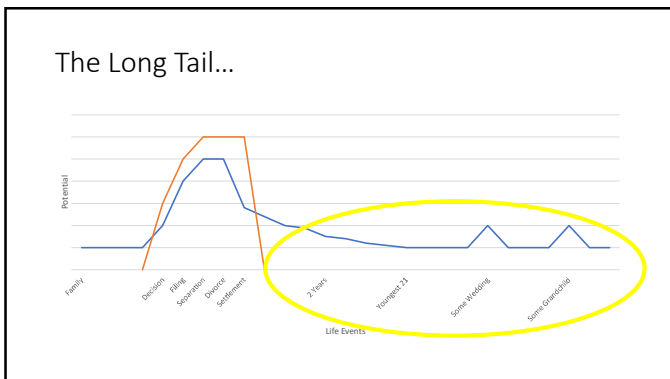
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# Therapist Preparation

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# Therapist Preparation

1. Get lots of education on how families restructure:  
Legally, Developmentally, and Psychologically.

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# Therapist Preparation

2. Know your co-parenting skills - attend the required Co-Parenting class. [Texas Family Code Sec. 105.009. PARENT EDUCATION AND FAMILY STABILIZATION COURSE.]

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### Therapist Preparation

Course contents

- (1) the emotional effects of divorce on parents;
- (2) the emotional and behavioral reactions to divorce by young children and adolescents;
- (3) parenting issues relating to the concerns and needs of children at different development stages;
- (4) stress indicators in young children and adolescents;
- (5) conflict management;
- (6) family stabilization through development of a coparenting relationship;
- (7) the financial responsibilities of parenting;
- (8) family violence, spousal abuse, and child abuse and neglect; and
- (9) the availability of community services and resources.

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### Therapist Preparation

3. Join AFCC and go to state and international conferences.
4. Attend NTXFIT workshops
5. Find or create a cohort of other professionals who also serve this population.
6. Learn local resources

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### Therapist Preparation

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# Court Ordered Clients

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How to read and respond to Court Orders

- 1. Don't adopt their urgency - when someone presents with urgency, I refer them back to their attorney.
- 2. Read the court order - find out what it seems to be ordering
- 3. Does it have your name on it? You can't be ordered to play a role in a case. Litigants can be ordered to get a service. You're appointed. Being appointed by name, however, provides you some protection from liability and from a finding in a board complaint.

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How to read and respond to Court Orders

4. Is the thing that is ordered a thing? Are you allowed to do it under your license? Are you allowed to do it with these particular people? Do you have the training and experience to do it? Judges don't know this stuff.

5. Does it specify dosage and frequency? Is there a clear goal? Does it lay out reporting? Do those all seem appropriate to you?

6. If you don't have a good order: a) get a good order, or b) don't accept the case.

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Sample Court Orders

- <http://www.coparentingtexas.com/links>

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Assessing the SAPCR Client

- SAPCR Assessment should be part of your initial assessment

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Assessing the SAPCR Client

The Legal Shenanigan Period

- What's different about SAPCR clients (During the Legal Shenanigan Period) is that counseling may not be their primary venue. Counseling may just be a sideshow for the main event.
- During this time they may be more likely to have:
  1. a motive for case building,
  2. a need for affirmation of their behaviors or beliefs, or
  3. resistance to attending.

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SAPCR Assessment Checklist

**Assess For:**

1. Developmental Stage of Restructuring:

- Decision
- Separation
- Filed
- Divorced
- Post Divorce < 2years
- Post Divorce > 2years

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SAPCR Assessment Checklist

**Assess For:**

2. Depth of Current Court Involvement:

- None
- First Filing (Normal Time Frame)
- First Filing, but outside of Norms
- Modification filed
- Modification planned
- Frequent Flyers Club - chronic lack of resolution/ unable to move developmentally

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SAPCR Assessment Checklist

**Assess For:**

- 3. Psychopathology or Addiction
- 4. History of Co-Parenting
- 5. Pre-existing Agenda (typically case building)
- 6. Buy in to Court Determined Goals (If applicable)
- 7. Whether or not they completed co-parenting workshop yet.

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SAPCR Treatment Plan

... incorporates findings of your SAPCR Assessment and becomes part of your contract with this client.

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Create a Clear Contract

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Clear Contracts

**Contract for Goals:**

1. Court Determined Goals (If any) – Operationalize vague goals
2. Treatment Goals (if not set by court or in addition to set by court)
3. As usual goals should be SMART  
Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Based

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### Sample Treatment Goals for Child Counseling

<http://www.coparentingtexas.com/links>

- The goals of counseling shall as follows: *[Indicate goals as appropriate to the case]*
- Address emotional and behavioral problems of the child(ren)
- Improve the parent-child/adult-child relationship between the child(ren) and
  - Mother  Father  Both parents  Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- Improve sibling relationships
- Address the following specific issues: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Sample Treatment Goals for Individual Adult Counseling

<http://www.coparentingtexas.com/links>

- The goals of counseling shall as follows: *[Indicate goals as appropriate to the case]*
- Improve communication regarding their child(ren)'s needs
- Reduce conflict regarding parenting time schedules
- Improve the quality of parenting skills
- Increase insight regarding interpersonal issues
- Gain additional healthy coping skills regarding: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- Address the following specific issues: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Sample Treatment Goals for Counseling Multiple Persons

• <http://www.coparentingtexas.com/links>

GOALS OF COUNSELING  
 The court has found it in the child(ren)'s best interests to have ongoing contact and meaningful relationships with both parents. The following goals are intended to help the child(ren) have genuine relationships with both parents while minimizing exposure to adult issues.  
 The primary goals of counseling shall be as follows: *[Indicate goals as appropriate to the case]*  
 PARENT-CHILD/ADULT-CHILD INTERACTION  
 Improve the parent-child/adult-child relationship between the child(ren) and  
 Mother  Father  Both parents  Other:  
 Work with each adult and child to identify and separate each child's needs and views from each adult's needs and views  
 Foster healthy child adjustment

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Sample Treatment Goals  
for Counseling Multiple Persons

• <http://www.coparentingtexas.com/links>

PARENTING FOCUSED ISSUES

- Address emotional and behavioral problems of the adult(s) that impair compliance with, or implementation of, the court-ordered parenting time schedule
- Improve the adults' understanding regarding the negative developmental repercussions for the child(ren) of disrupted or compromised relationships with their parents or other caregivers
- Help each adult to distinguish valid concerns from overly negative, critical, and generalized views relating to other family members
- Improve adult communication regarding their child(ren)'s needs
- Reduce conflict regarding parenting time schedules
- Improve the quality of parenting skills
- Increase adult insight regarding interpersonal issues
- Protecting and removing the child(ren) from adult conflict
- Fostering the child(ren)'s healthy relationship with both parents and other family members

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Sample Treatment Goals  
for Counseling Multiple Persons

• <http://www.coparentingtexas.com/links>

CHILD BEHAVIOR FOCUSED ISSUES

- Address emotional and behavioral problems of the child(ren) that impair compliance with or implementation of the court-ordered parenting time schedule
- Assist the child(ren) to differentiate themselves from others and assist both the child(ren) and adults in understanding age-appropriate autonomy
- Increase child insight regarding interpersonal issues
- Augment the child(ren)'s coping skills and improve appropriate expressions of the child(ren)'s emotional experiences
- Replace distorted impressions with more realistic perceptions that reflect the child(ren)'s actual experience with other family members

OTHER ISSUES

- Gain additional healthy coping skills regarding: \_\_\_\_\_
- Address the following specific issues:

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Clear Contracts

Contract for Roles:

4. Therapist role and reporting:  
- including some education about those topics (informed choice)

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Clear Contracts

4. Therapist Role (continued)

- Reject fixer role
- Reject judger role
- Reject emergency actions

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Clear Contracts

4. Therapist Role (continued)

- Embrace your clinical role and/or
- Clarify other hats you might wear: teaching, negotiation coach, etc...  
(Note: Often more directive than other types of counseling)
- Don't wear more hats than you are allowed. Be ready to refer.

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Clear Contracts

5. Client role - the one who makes healthy choices

6. Procedures – Once you have clear goals and a clear contract, how will you proceed? Who will be in sessions? Will that vary? If you are going to meet with co-parents separately, you have to have clear agreements about secrets.

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# Techniques

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Techniques

Co-Parent Education

- Encourage parents to go take a Co-Parenting class if they haven't already.
- Explain that they can learn it from you at \$150 hour OR go take the four-hour workshop for \$50.
- Counseling goals will be much easier to attain when everyone has Co-Parenting 101 knowledge.

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Techniques

Ongoing Co-Parent Education

- When the teachable moment arises, teach negotiation skills, particularly interest-based negotiation.

Book: Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In  
by Roger Fisher, William L. Ury, Bruce Patton

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Techniques  
Ongoing Parent Education

- Teach Brain stuff (and know your own brain stuff) - if client is clearly in their Lizard Brain, don't talk to their Big Brain) Pet the lizard, feed the mouse, hug the monkey credit rick hanson
- <https://www.rickhanson.net/writings/just-one-thing/>

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Techniques  
Ongoing Parent Education

- Transactional Analysis:  
Approaching conflict as an Adult
- "I'm OK-You're OK" by [Thomas Harris](#)

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Techniques  
Ongoing Parent Education

- Teach parents about children and development and reinforce basic Good Parenting when it appears

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**Techniques**  
Ongoing Parent Education

- Reality Testing

Help them understand how the court system works. Help them reality test their fantasies about the courts "When the judge sees how evil my ex is, then..."

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**Techniques**  
Ongoing Parent Education

- Teach parents about generational boundaries.

Help parents set adult - child boundaries. Be explicit when planning session content and attendance mixture

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**Techniques**  
Summon and build parent strengths

Remind your client of their strengths - fill that pool and then draw deeply from it.

Always speak to the BEST parent that may be hidden deep inside. Create high expectations for behavior.

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### Techniques

Summon and build parent strengths

Modeling and Narrating: Have lots of stories of parents who overcome the challenge(s) that this family is facing.

Nudge parents in better directions.

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### Techniques

Redirecting Parents

- Remember family court is good people behaving badly.
- Have compassion for the person. AND create an expectation of good parenting behavior.
- Validate legitimate feelings. You can validate feelings without validating inappropriate behavior.

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### Techniques

Redirecting Parents

- Teach them that not all feelings need to be acted on. Teach them that their thought voice is silent for a reason, but spoken words are heard by others. "Not a good time to use your out loud voice."
- Confront inappropriate feelings not with shame but with an inability to see how that choice would be in their best interest.
- If they already acknowledge they missed, don't twist the knife. Return to validating their new good thinking.

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### Techniques

#### Redirecting Parents

- Remind your client of their goals (e.g. relationship, not winning). Being kind and respectful and listening while the client expresses feelings AND THEN - bringing it back to the goal.
- Use your de-escalation skills.
- Use motivational interviewing: how this will help them with their case. "I'm concerned about what a judge will do if you say you can't support the other parent."

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## Boundaries

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### Boundaries

- Intake Structure Just like couples and family counseling: All adult players must be at first meeting.
- If working with kids, working with both parents or NO parents (by court order)
- Refer out as needed. If substance use is preempting your treatment, ethically you need to help them get to the correct treatment.

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### Stay on Track

- Keep your sessions anchored in Goals.
- Avoid case drift. And be wary of the court's ideas.
- Remember your role and its limitations. Don't do more than your role.

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### Maintaining Sanity: "Bless Their Heart"

Don't let your own feelings of irritation or judgement get involved –

Remember that even the Manic Narcissist is only having a good time some of the time. Most of the time the mis-functioning folks are in a little hell of their own creation. Be compassionate.

"Bless their heart."

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### Maintaining Sanity: Remain Strategic

Play for the long game.

- remember who has the problem
- pay attention to your own body and responses.
- Let go of the rope – avoid power struggles

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Don't Drink the Kool-Aid

- Keep a clear mind set about sources of information and be sure to make those correct assignments in your case notes.

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Questions?

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