

BIFF Response®

How to Respond to High-Conflict Persons

A BIFF Response® is designed to calm a hostile conversation, particularly with a high-conflict person (HCP). It can be written or spoken.



B

Brief

Responses should be very short, usually 2-5 sentences, regardless of how long the original communication was. This leaves less for the other person to react to.



I

Informative

Make sure what you convey is straight, useful and factual rather than emotions and opinions. You don't need to defend yourself. It's not about you. It's about their inability to manage their emotions and responses.



F

Friendly

Start and/or end with a friendly comment. I.e. "Thank you for your email..." or "I hope you have a nice weekend." This avoids feeding hostility and may calm the situation.



F

Firm

The goal is to end the conversation and disengage. If needed, give clear and limited choices or set a firm reply by date.

A BIFF Response® should avoid:



Advice

Advising the other person on how to handle a situation can trigger defensiveness.

Admonishments

Your response should not be condescending. Speaking down to the other person can trigger defensiveness.

Apologies

In general apologies are a good thing. However, a HCP will use apologies against you.



The goal of a BIFF Response® is to deescalate and end the hostile interaction. Making it brief, informative, friendly and firm, and avoiding advice, admonishments and apologies help you achieve those goals.

Remember, it is not about you! It is about the other person's inability to manage their own emotions.

Example

Email from Dad: Sue, I can't believe how selfish you are being, asking to have the kids for your friend's birthday party on my parenting time. Do you not remember the last six conflicts we've had about my time with the kids? Are you having an affair with this guy or something? You have no right to introduce him to our kids without talking with me first. And I'm certainly not going to let you flaunt your relationship on my time.....

BIFF Response

Email from Mom: Thank you for responding to my request to take the kids to my friend's party. Just to clarify, the party will be from 3-5 on Friday and will be a family-oriented event with many other families, including some of the kids' friends. I think it will be a good experience for them. Since you do not agree, then of course I will respect that and withdraw my request, as I recognize it is your parenting time.

Example

Email from Mom: Jack. you have not been helping our son enough with his homework on school nights. If you don't start spending at least 2 hours each night on his homework with him, I will end your weekday overnights. You need to start showing me how much time you spend on your nights. I knew this schedule wouldn't work. All you do is play and leave me be the bad guy and do all the hard work!

Practice

Response: