

Upcoming Judicial Evaluation



Attention Members:

The Snohomish County Bar Association Judicial Evaluation shall commence in early November; please ensure receipt by updating your email with us.

Every four years, the SCBA holds Judicial Evaluations for Snohomish County Superior Court, District Court, and Municipal Court judges and commissioners, for the purpose of providing information and feedback to the bench.

Upcoming Tribal Warrants Act CLE

Title: Tribal Warrants Act (TWA) RCW 10.32

Presented by: Chelsea Sayles JD LLM (Tribal Attorney –

Quileute)

Date: November 12, 2025 Time: 12:00pm – 1:30pm Method: Zoom (link to follow)

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Bar Calendar

SCBA Board Meetings, 5:00 PM

November Board Meeting Date: 11/20

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Ads, articles, announcements and changes of address all go to service@snobar.org. Submissions are due by the 15th of the month.

Join Me in Leaving a **Legacy of Justice**

As a fifty plus year member of WSBA, there was no question in my mind about joining the Justice Society and naming the Endowment for Equal Justice in my will. I want to make sure that people who



need legal representation at critical times in their lives can access it, no matter how meager their resources. The Endowment is working to take some of the stress out of their lives with civil legal aid. The Endowment provides support in perpetuity for the Legal Foundation of Washington in making our communities more equitable places to live, work and raise a family. Please join me.

> DICK MANNING, EEJ Justice Society Member since 2003



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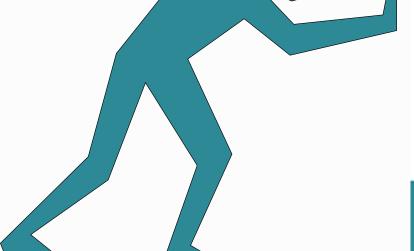












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Conflict Resolution within Complex Family Systems
An Initial Guide for Family Law Professionals

By Tio Jorge, Founder & Director of "Successful Co-Parenting" Program

The Power of De-escalation

As family law attorneys, you are masters of navigating the legal complexities of dissolution. You draft motions, negotiate settlements, and advocate fiercely for your clients' rights within a structured, often adversarial, system. However, the most durable legal agreements are often those built on a foundation of manageable, rather than explosive, client conflict. The emotional volatility of the family system you are working with can be the single greatest variable determining whether a case settles efficiently or devolves into a costly, protracted battle.

This article explores conflict resolution from a systemic perspective, offering strategies for how you, as legal counsel, can guide your clients toward de-escalation. We will discuss why a client who is equipped with basic conflict resolution skills is a client whose legal case is more likely to succeed. Furthermore, we will outline techniques and resources beyond the courtroom that can empower your clients, reduce your own professional stress, and ultimately lead to more feasible and lasting outcomes for the families you serve. The goal is not to turn attorneys into therapists, but to position you as strategic connectors—the first and most trusted professional to guide a family toward the tools they desperately need to make their post-divorce life manageable.

When Client Conflict Undermines Legal Strategy

You have likely experienced this scenario: you craft a brilliant and fair settlement proposal, only to have your client reject it based on an emotional reaction to a minor point or a recent inflammatory email from their exspouse. You spend hours preparing for mediation, only to have it derailed by years of unresolved personal grievances that have nothing to do with the legal matters at hand.

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Tyler Beck

★★★★ 20 weeks ago

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Cynthia's Favorite Thanksgiving Pumpkin Pie

I have been baking pumpkin pie for over 30 years and have tried numerous recipes. This recipe is one of my favorites.

The pie crust with vodka is very easy to roll out and you don't have to worry about how much you handle it. I have never had it turn out dry. Makes a beautiful flaky crust.

Vanilla-Bourbon Pumpkin Pie

My favorite pie crust recipe from America's Test Kitchen:

Single Crust

- 1 1/4 c unbleached all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp table salt
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 6 tbsp cold unsalted butter
- 1/4 c chilled solid vegetable shortening
- 2 tbsp cold vodka
- 2 tbsp cold water (ice water)

Process $\frac{3}{4}$ c flour, salt, and sugar together in food processor until combined, about 2 – one-second pulses. Add butter and shortening and process until homogenous dough just starts to collect in uneven clumps, about 10 seconds (dough will resemble cottage cheese curds with some very small pieces of butter remaining, but there should be no uncoated flour). Scrape down sides and bottom of bowl with rubber spatula and redistribute dough evenly around processor blade. Add remaining $\frac{1}{2}$ c flour and pulse until mixture is evenly distributed around bowl and mass of dough has been broken up, $\frac{1}{2}$ of pulses. Empty mixture into medium bowl.

Sprinkle vodka and water over mixture. With rubber spatula, use folding motion to mis, pressing down on dough until dough is slightly tacky and sticks together. Flatten dough into a 4-inch disk. Wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 45 minutes or up to 2 days.

Put a baking sheet on the middle oven rack and preheat to 425 degrees for 30 minutes

Line the crust with foil, then fill with pie weights or dried beans and rice. Transfer to the hot baking sheet in the oven and bake until slightly golden around the edge, about 15 minutes. Remove the foil and weights and continue baking until the crust is dry and golden all over, about 5 more minutes. Transfer to a rack and let cool completely; leave the baking sheet in the over. Reduce the temperature to 375 degrees.

Filling

- 1.5 c heavy cream
- 2 tbs. bourbon
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 15 oz can pumpkin puree
- 3 large eggs
- ½ c granulated sugar
- ½ c packed light brown sugar
- 1.5 tsp pumpkin pie spice

Directions

Make the filling: Combine the heavy cream, bourbon, and cinnamon stick in a small saucepan over medium-low heat; bring to a simmer. Transfer the mixture to a large bowl and let cool slightly. Whisk in the pumpkin, eggs granulated sugar, brown sugar, and pumpkin pie spice. Set aside.

Discard the cinnamon stick from the filling; pour into the cooled crust and return the pie to the hot baking sheet. Bake until the crust is golden brown and the filling is set, 1 hour to 1 hour and 10 minutes. (Tent the crust with foil if it browns too quickly.) Transfer to a rack and let cool completely.

Serve with heavy whipped cream. I like to put a little bourbon in my whipped cream.

Enjoy!



Mr. Pellegrini is an experienced family law attorney whose practice began in Scattle and has expanded to include continuous case actions in Snohomish, Whatcom, King County, Skagit and Island counties

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This is the core dilemma: unmanaged client conflict makes sound legal advice infeasible.

A client operating from a constant state of "fight-or-flight" is physiologically incapable of the clear, forward-thinking judgment required for successful negotiation. Their decisions are driven by past hurts and present fears, not by a rational assessment of their long-term best interests.

How De-escalating Conflict Benefits Your Practice:

- Creates a Feasible Environment for Negotiation: A calmer client is a more rational client. They are better able to hear your advice, weigh options objectively, and make strategic concessions.
- •Reduces Unproductive Communication: You spend less billable time reading vitriolic email chains and listening to complaints about the other party's behavior, and more time focused on legal strategy.
- •Increases the Durability of Agreements: Settlements reached by clients who have some foundational conflict resolution skills are less likely to be challenged or relitigated. The parents have a basic capacity to solve minor issues on their own, rather than running back to court.
- •Enhances Your Professional Reputation: An attorney known for achieving efficient, stable resolutions for families builds a powerful reputation in the community and with the judiciary.

Helping your client learn to de-escalate is not a distraction from the legal case; it is a direct and powerful strategy for improving its outcome.

Practical Techniques Lawyers Can Share with Clients

You can empower your clients by providing them with simple, actionable techniques to manage conflict between legal sessions. These are not therapy; they are practical communication tactics that can lower the temperature of interactions.

- **1.** Introduce the "24-Hour Rule" for Emails and Texts: Advise your client to never respond to a provocative or non-urgent message from their co-parent immediately. The "24-Hour Rule" creates a mandatory cooling-off period. This simple delay prevents impulsive, emotional reactions from escalating a minor issue into a major conflict. It allows the logical brain to re-engage.
- **2. Teach the "Signal vs. Noise" Concept:** Explain to your client that in high-conflict communication, most of the message is emotional "noise" (blame, sarcasm, history). Their job is to learn to ignore the noise and listen only for the "signal" (the one piece of logistical, child-related information that requires a response).
- •Example: Noise: "I can't believe you forgot to pack the soccer cleats again, you are always so disorganized and it's not fair to our son!" Signal: "The soccer cleats were forgotten."
- •Your Advice to the Client: "Respond only to the signal. 'I'll drop the cleats off on the porch this afternoon.' Do not engage with the noise."
- 3. Provide the BIFF Response Model: For written communication, recommend the BIFF model (Brief, Informative, Friendly, Firm) from the High Conflict Institute. This provides a memorable script for safe and effective communication.
- Brief: A few sentences at most.
- •Informative: Factual, objective information.
- Friendly: A respectful tone (e.g., "Thanks for the update").
- •Firm: End the conversation clearly.





In the boxing ring that is the court of law, a victory is only the beginning of the fight. Oftentimes, opposing counsel will do whatever it takes to steal the win back, whether that means filing motions post-judgment or taking the case to the appellate level.

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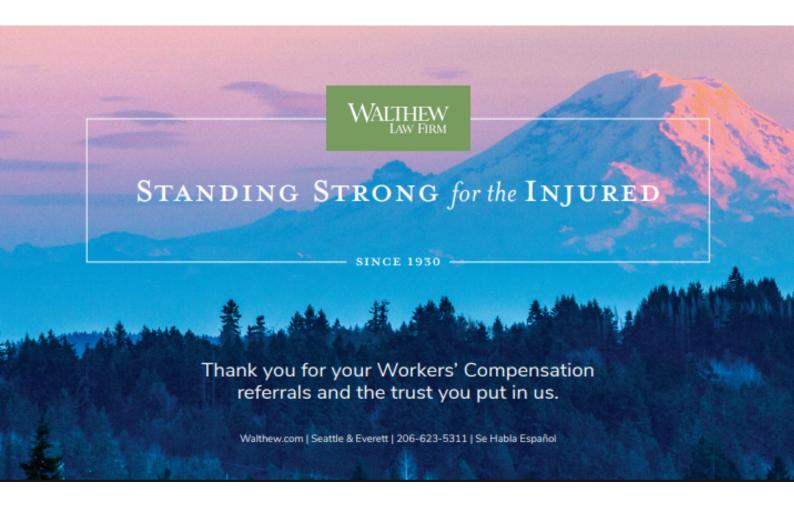
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4. Encourage Scheduled, Business-Like Communication: Advise clients to move away from sporadic, reactive communication. Suggest they propose a single, weekly "check-in" email to handle all non-urgent logistical matters. This contains the conflict to a specific time and format, preventing the "death by a thousand texts" that fuels constant anxiety and reactivity.

Resources Beyond the Law Office: Your Role as a Connector

The most powerful step you can take is to recognize the limits of your role and connect your clients with professionals specifically trained in these skills. This is not a sign of weakness, but a mark of a savvy and holistic legal professional.

Why Refer to External Resources?

- •Specialized Expertise: Parenting coaches and counselors have dedicated training in family systems, communication, and child development.
- •Safe Practice Space: These programs provide a neutral ground for parents to practice difficult conversations and skills without legal jeopardy.
- •Cost-Effectiveness: An hour of co-parenting coaching can often resolve an issue that would take many hours (and thousands of dollars) to litigate.
- •Focus on the Future: While you manage the legal dissolution of the past, these resources equip the family for a more functional future.

How to Frame the Referral to Your Client:

Frame it as a strategic move to strengthen their case and their well-being.

- •"I strongly recommend you attend a co-parenting workshop. It will give you tools to stay calm and focused on the goals we've set."
- •"The communication patterns between you and your ex-spouse are creating a lot of stress and are not helping us move forward. I suggest you get some training in the complex domain of Parenting and Co-Parenting. This will help you feel more in control and allow us to focus on the legal work."

Trusted, Court-Approved Local Resources:

It is essential to refer clients to credible, court-approved programs. As the approved provider for the required parenting seminar in Snohomish Superior Court since 2017, our Successful Co-Parenting Program is designed to be that trusted resource.

Our program offers:

- •Live, Interactive Training: We teach skills in real-time via Zoom, allowing for Q&A and engagement that prerecorded videos cannot match.
- •Bilingual Sessions: We offer dedicated class dates in both English and Spanish to serve the entire community.
- •Court-Recognized: Our program is accepted in Snohomish, Skagit, Island, and various other Washington counties, ensuring your clients meet their legal requirements while gaining invaluable skills.

Conclusion: A More Strategic Approach to Family Law

The emotional dynamics of a family system are not separate from the legal case; they are the environment in which the case lives or dies. By embracing your role as a strategic connector and guiding your clients toward deescalation and skill-building, you do more than just manage a legal file. You create the conditions for more efficient negotiations, more durable agreements, and healthier outcomes for the children at the center of it all.

Concluded on Page 15

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Fostering cooperation is not at odds with zealous advocacy; in family law, it is often the most effective path to achieving your client's most important long-term goals.

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A Resource for Your Clients

While you expertly manage the legal framework of a family's transition, we can help your clients build the practical skills needed to thrive in their new reality.

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- •We have been the approved provider for Snohomish Superior Court's mandatory parenting seminar since 2017 and are accepted in numerous other counties.
- •Our program is designed to complement your legal guidance by equipping parents with a better understanding of healthier interactions, communication, and conflict resolution.
- •All our classes are conducted in real-time via interactive Zoom sessions, with dedicated dates for both English and Spanish with Tio Jorge.

References and Sources for "Conflict Resolution within Complex Family Systems"

- 1. For High-Conflict Communication and the BIFF Model:
- •Eddy, B. (2011). BIFF: Quick Responses to High-Conflict People, Their Personal Attacks, Hostile Email, and Social Media Meltdowns. / High Conflict Institute Press.
- ORelevance: This is the direct source for the BIFF (Brief, Informative, Friendly, Firm) model you recommend. Bill Eddy's work is specifically designed for legal and mental health professionals who deal with high-conflict personalities. This reference provides the full methodology behind the practical technique you share, making it an essential resource for any lawyer who wants to go deeper.
- 2. For Principled Negotiation and Mediation:
- •Fisher, R., Ury, W. L., & Patton, B. (1991). Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In. / Penguin Books.

 ORelevance: This is the seminal work on interest-based or principled negotiation. It provides the theoretical foundation for moving clients away from positional, adversarial bargaining ("I want the house") toward focusing on underlying interests ("I need stability for the children"). This directly supports your argument that de-escalation creates a more "feasible environment for negotiation."
- •Emery, R. E. (2006). The Truth About Children and Divorce: Dealing with the Emotions So You and Your Children Can Thrive. Plume. ORelevance: Dr. Emery is a leading expert on divorce mediation. His research powerfully demonstrates how alternative dispute resolution (ADR) processes reduce conflict and lead to better, more durable outcomes for children. This supports your call for lawyers to "Advocate for ADR and Co-Parenting Support."
- 3. For the Neurological & Psychological Basis of Conflict:
- •Goleman, D. (1995). Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ. Bantam Books.
- ORelevance: Goleman's work popularized the concept of the "amygdala hijack," which is the scientific explanation for the "fight-or-flight" response you describe. This source provides the psychological backing for why a client in a highly emotional state is "physiologically incapable of the clear, forward-thinking judgment required for successful negotiation."
- •Siegel, D. J., & Bryson, T. P. (2011). The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind. Delacorte Press.
- ORelevance: While aimed at parenting, the "Upstairs Brain/Downstairs Brain" model is a perfect and simple way to explain to clients what happens when they get emotionally triggered ("flipping their lid"). It supports your point that the "24-Hour Rule" allows the rational, logical "upstairs brain" to come back online.
- 4. For Family Systems Theory:
- •Bowen, M. (1978). Family Therapy in Clinical Practice. Jason Aronson.
- oRelevance: The very title of your article, "Conflict Resolution within Complex Family Systems," points to the work of Dr. Murray Bowen. His theory explains how families operate as interconnected emotional units, where the anxiety and reactivity of one member directly impact all others. This provides the theoretical framework for understanding why individual client conflict affects the entire legal process and why a systemic approach is necessary.



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