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Borderline Personality Disorder and Divorce: How To Create Stability For Kids - Weinberger Divorce & Family Law Group

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If you need to [co-parent](#) with a former spouse who has [Borderline Personality Disorder](#) (BPD), it can be challenging – and exhausting. If you know or strongly suspect your ex or STBX struggles with BPD, read on to learn how you can create post-divorce stability for you and your children.

Coping with a BPD Co-Parent

Borderline personality disorder is a serious mental health disorder. Classic symptoms of BPD include:

- Instability in moods, behavior, self-image, and functioning;
- Impulsive actions and unstable relationships; and
- Intense episodes of anger, depression, and anxiety that may last from only a few hours to days.

When someone has borderline personality disorder, they often don't see shades of gray, nor can they acknowledge that others are entitled to different points-of-view. As a co-parent, someone with BPD may see themselves as The Good Parent and anyone who agrees with them is great. Their ex is The Bad Parent and anyone who is even remotely friendly with their former spouse is terrible and not to be trusted. Setting limits with a BPD is an art form because even reasonable boundaries can become a trigger for unstable, combative moods.

So how do you maintain your boundaries with your co-parent in the least threatening way possible?

Empathize, listen, and acknowledge how they feel. BPDs, like all of us, want to feel heard. Although it's tempting to return insults and anger with more anger and insults, try to see through the histrionics to their concern: "I realize Thanksgiving is an important holiday for you and you're sad that the kids will be with me this year," or "It sounds like you're concerned about the amount of TV time at my house," or "What I'm hearing is that you worry about their well-being when they're with me and that's really stressful." If you can validate the feelings and needs driving the drama (that doesn't mean you agree!), the BPD may calm down and be more open to a reasonable conversation.

Manage your own emotional reactivity. BPDs may try to ratchet up intensity in any interaction, even a benign conversation about who picks the kids up from school on Friday. Be aware of your triggers and prepare for any kind

of exchange. Calm yourself before you or talk to your ex. Use coping skills when you feel upset instead of lashing out or otherwise indicating that they've rattled you. If you resort to anger, they will just up their game and – because they thrive on drama – wear you down.

Don't take things personally. Remember: BPDs blame others for their problems. The divorce has created a deep sense of shame and abandonment (even if they initiated it) and because they have limited self-awareness or healthy coping skills, they bolster themselves by tearing you down and blaming you for just about anything. People who do this are not psychologically healthy so you can't take what they say as an accurate assessment of yourself or the situation.

Beware of splitting. BPDs divide and conquer. They can be utterly charming and persuasive so they often fool relatives, friends, family law professionals, and, sadly, children. They love to get school and mental health personnel on their side! It's imperative that you don't let their shenanigans unravel you and respond in ways that make you look unreasonable and combative. If you need to address the BPD's lies about you, or the situation, concentrate on explaining the facts – not what a nightmare your ex is.

Tell your kids the truth – in age-appropriate doses. A common question from people attempting to co-parent with a BPD ex is something along the lines of: "how do I explain all this craziness to my kids?" While you don't want to overshare, you also don't want to gaslight your kids by denying the obvious: there's a restraining order against your ex, or they're going to be interviewed by a custody evaluator. Young kids don't need to know and can't process a lot of details while older kids can understand more. Focus on explaining that your goal is not to hurt the other parent but to keep everyone safe. Explain that you and your ex are trying to work out ways to co-parent better and acknowledge that there are difficulties. Keep the emotional charge out of your voice and body language, tell only what needs to be told, and don't share your feelings about your ex.

Be consistent with limit setting. BPDs have poor boundaries; they often don't recognize that there's a line between themselves and others. Therefore, you will need to set clear limits, repeat them often, and adhere to them. Employ empathy as much as possible; if you begin interactions by validating your ex's feelings (as unreasonable as they may be), you will have a better chance of cooperation.

Practice self-care. Managing a BPD is draining and can feel like a full-time, thankless job. Check in with yourself daily to monitor your own stress level. Do you feel unusually tired? Have headaches or stomachaches? Feel anxious, irritable, near the end of your rope? Take a time-out from your divorce and do something to make yourself feel better – schedule a doctor's appointment, get therapy, take a yoga class, write in your journal, watch a movie, hang out with friends (but don't talk too much about your ex!). If your emotional and physical cylinders are running smoothly, you will be better able to handle your ex.

Your ex is not a bad person; they just have bad strategies for getting their needs met. While you can't expect that they will change, changing how you relate to them may improve your dynamic, which will in turn create a more stable environment for you and your children.

We understand the sensitive issues in play when getting divorced from someone dealing with a serious mental health issue like borderline personality disorder. We are here for you, and pledged to safeguard your children and protect your future — and your here and now. For help with divorce and custody issues, including parenting time plans and custody options, please [contact us](#) today to schedule a free confidential consultation with one of our compassionate family law attorneys.

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