



# 3 Understanding the Level of Conflict in the Relationship



Conflict is a part of everyday life. Normal conflict can be a way to work out differences and solve problems. In all relationships including parental ones, conflict arises from time to time either during the relationship or when it ends. In many cases, the parents are able to work it out and life goes on.

In some separations there is intense ongoing conflict over unresolved issues. The level of conflict covers a range of behaviors from less serious to very serious. By studying the graph below you can identify the level of conflict in your relationship with your former partner:



## Dealing with High Levels of Conflict

As parents move through the emotional stages of separation, the degree of conflict tends to go down. For some parents, however, the conflict continues and can escalate over time.

Ongoing conflict drains all those involved emotionally, physically, spiritually and often financially as well. If you find yourself experiencing the high level of conflict, you need to learn specific steps that will make things go more smoothly, and give you and your children relief from stress and pain.

Here are some of the steps you can take to reduce or to manage the high level of conflict:

### **1. Identify the triggers**

There are common triggers that tend to increase conflict during separation, for example disagreements on how best to parent the children, or if one of the partners is unable to accept that the relationship has ended. Your goal is to identify the issues triggering conflict in your relationship, and to carefully work through them using your communication skills.

### **2. Be aware of the situations and behaviors that increase conflict**

- New partners
- One parent moving
- Making court application without telling the other parent
- Fighting over custody and access in order to “win” against the other parent
- Turning minor disagreements into major battles
- Failing to live up to agreements
- Turning the children against the other parent

### **3. Remember that the only parent you can change is YOU**

### **4. Don't tolerate violence**

If the other parent is abusive towards you or your children, make sure you and your children are safe by limiting contact, and notifying one of the agencies on your 'Contact Card'.

### **5. Seek help**

You need extra support when dealing with mental health problems, drug or alcohol abuse on either your or the other parent's side. Look for support among your friends and family, the Elders, wider community and professionals.