

High-Conflict Documentation Guide

Protecting Clients and Practice

Overview

High-conflict cases require more thorough documentation than standard work. Good documentation protects both the client (if they need records for legal proceedings) and the practitioner (if professional complaints arise).

When Enhanced Documentation Is Needed

- Custody disputes current or anticipated
- Allegations of abuse or domestic violence
- Client considering legal action against family members
- Risk of professional complaint by client or family member
- Suicidal ideation or self-harm reported

Documentation Best Practices

- Document what client reports, clearly labeled as client report
- Note your observations separately from client statements
- Include specific quotes when significant
- Document your reasoning for recommendations
- Note any safety concerns and actions taken
- Record consultations with other professionals

Language Guidelines

- Use behavioral descriptions: "Client reported that partner threw object" not "Partner is abusive"
- Distinguish fact from interpretation: "Client appeared tearful" vs. "Client was sad"
- Avoid diagnostic labels unless you're qualified and it's appropriate
- Write as if a judge will read it (because they might)

What to Include

- Date, time, duration of session
- Who was present
- Key topics discussed
- Client's stated goals and concerns
- Your observations and assessment
- Plan and any assignments given

- Any safety concerns and response

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