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PSYCHOTHERAPY, SUPERVISION & CONSULTATION.

Client Regulation Checklist for High-Conflict Proceedings
A Trauma-Informed Grounding Protocol

Developed by Kendra Wagner, RP, Certified Narcissistic Abuse Treatment Clinician (NATC)

High-conflict legal proceedings place the human nervous system under severe, prolonged threat. When navigating litigation, mediation, or contentious communication, your brain naturally shifts out of executive functioning (logic, strategic reasoning, memory recall) and into involuntary survival states: fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. This response is not a sign of weakness or irrationality; it is biology. However, legal systems demand emotional neutrality, factual precision, and steady decision-making.

Use this step-by-step somatic checklist before reading legal correspondence, compiling court disclosure, or attending meetings to help settle your nervous system, protect your energy, and communicate clearly.

Phase 1: Somatic Reset (Do This Before Opening Emails or Documents)
When an email notification from your lawyer or opposing counsel appears, your heart rate often spikes before you read a single word. Stop and complete these physiological resets first:

- **Shift Your Visual Field:** Dysregulation causes tunnel vision. Soften your gaze, lift your chin, and scan the room slowly. Name three neutral physical objects you see (e.g., "bookshelf, plant, window frame"). This signals to the brainstem that you are physically safe in this room right now.
- **Drop the Tongue & Jaw:** Clenched jaws and high tongue posture trigger the sympathetic nervous system. Let your jaw fall slightly open and drop your tongue to the floor of your mouth.
- **Extend the Exhale:** Breathe in gently through your nose for a count of 4, then exhale through your mouth for a count of 7. Complete three cycles. A prolonged exhale directly engages the vagus nerve to slow your heart rate.
- **Physical Anchor:** Place both feet firmly flat on the floor. Feel the support of the chair underneath your legs and back. Remind your system: "This document is ink on paper / pixels on a screen. It cannot physically hurt me in this moment."

Phase 2: Information Intake & Fact-Filtering (While Reviewing Documents)
Opposing communications in high-conflict cases often contain false narratives, personal attacks, or manufactured urgency designed to provoke an emotional counter-reaction.

- **Have a Dedicated "Discharge" Notepad Ready:** Keep a physical notepad next to your screen. As inflammatory statements trigger anger, grief, or fear, write those emotional reactions down on your scratchpad (not in your legal reply).
- **Use the Two-Column Extraction Method:**
  - Column A (The Noise): Insults, accusations, revisionist history, inflammatory tone. Action: Leave this on the page.
  - Column B (The Core Legal Facts): Relevant dates, financial figures, specific schedule requests, court deadlines. Action: Address only these.

- **Enforce the 24-Hour Draft Rule:** Unless your lawyer has explicitly identified an emergency court deadline, never send an immediate response. Write a draft, save it, step away for at least two hours (or overnight), and re-read it only after completing Phase 1 again.

Phase 3: Communication & Response Checklist (Before Submitting Instructions)

Before hitting "send" to your legal counsel, mediator, or through a court-approved parenting portal (e.g., OurFamilyWizard), verify your message against these criteria:

- **Brief:** Does this message contain only the necessary information, or is it trying to convince the other party to admit fault?
- **Informative:** Does it clearly provide the requested factual information (dates, financial receipts, availability)?
- **Neutral in Tone:** Have all emotional adjectives, rhetorical questions, and exclamation marks been removed?
- **Firm & Non-Fawning:** Check for over-explaining, over-apologizing, or justifying reasonable boundaries. State your position directly without pleading or justifying your basic rights.
- **Financial & Strategic Efficiency:** Will responding to this point advance your legal case, or will it simply cost billable legal fees to argue over subjective opinions?

Phase 4: Post-Process Decompression (After the Legal Task is Done)

High-conflict stress accumulates somatically. Closing your laptop is not enough; your body must register that the task has ended.

- **Physical Discharge:** Shake out your hands, stretch your arms overhead, or take a brief 5-minute walk outside. Physical movement processes residual cortisol and adrenaline out of your muscular system.
- **Change the Sensory Environment:** Wash your hands with cold water, sip a warm beverage, or turn on grounding music.
- **Reclaim the Present:** Step intentionally back into your day. Remind yourself: "I handled the legal task. I am safe in my present life right now."

Professional Support & Resources

- **Clinical Psychotherapy:** Kendra Wagner is a Registered Psychotherapist and Certified Narcissistic Abuse Treatment Clinician specializing in IFS, EMDR, and relational trauma recovery. In-person therapy is provided in Hillsdale, Ontario (minutes from Barrie, Orillia, and Midland), with secure virtual care available across Ontario.
  - Learn More: www.kendrawagnercounselling.com
- **The Self-Reclamation Project:** A structured, self-paced somatic roadmap developed by Kendra Wagner for individuals untangling the emotional and physiological toll of antagonistic, high-conflict systems. Available at www.kendrawagnercounselling.com
- **Consultations:** Prospective clients are invited to book a complimentary 15-minute consultation:
  - **Call or Text:** 249-877-5950
  - **Email:** hello@kendrawagnercounselling.com

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