

Active Neutrality in Child Support:

What does it look like to take an “active neutrality” approach to working with abusers?

Collusion	Active Neutrality	Confrontational
Alliance forms – You take their side “I get it. Your partner really pushes your buttons. No wonder you reacted the way you did.”	Alliance with their positive traits and strengths “I respect that you want to share your perspective. We’ll go over expectations clearly so you can be successful with making all your child support payments.”	Oppositional – You’re adversaries “You’re just a violent person who doesn’t deserve to see your child.”
You join them in blaming others “I understand. It’s really your ex making things hard. The system is unfair to you.”	Point out how their actions affect others “It sounds like things have been difficult for you. At the same time, violence is not acceptable, and it impacts your child’s safety and stability.”	You openly judge and criticize their actions “I don’t care what you say. You’re nothing but a liar and an abuser.”
No accountability or consequences for their actions/behaviors – you feel sorry for them “You’ve had a rough life, so I can see why you lash out sometimes.”	Respectfully and clearly convey consequences of their actions “I hear your frustration, and I need to be clear: abusive behavior has serious consequences, both legally and for your child.”	You only focus on their harmful actions “I don’t want to hear your excuses. You’ll never change.”
You validate and affirm their side of the story “I’ll note that you were provoked and maybe the court will take that into consideration.”	Allow them to express their perspective and share their side of the story “I want to make sure you have a chance to explain your side, and I also need to be clear about what the law requires.”	You cut them off and won’t listen to their side of the story “I don’t want to hear your story. You should have paid on time, end of discussion.”
Result: Conflict is reduced between you and the abuser	Result: Conversations stay focused but may feel strained	Result: Conflict increases, and they get angry and disengage

