



What is Mediation?- Mediation is a dynamic, structured, interactive process where a neutral third party assists disputing parties in resolving conflict through the use of specialized communication and negotiation techniques. Mediation is primarily focused upon the needs, rights, and interests of the parties. The main goal of mediation is to open and improve communication between parties so they can come to an agreement and put an end to the conflict.

Mediation can help you make important decisions for your family in a safe space. You will have autonomy, be able to express your perspective, articulate your feelings, obtain information, explore options, and formulate a proposal while being treated with respect. Mediation involves:

- Hearing, not just talking
- Responding vs. reacting
- Exchanging ideas vs. conceding
- Respecting vs. encroaching

Mediation Does Not Involve: Criticism, blame, judgment, accusation, or assumptions.

What is the role of a Family Financial Mediator? *Divorce mediation* is an excellent alternative to litigation. It can also be used in conjunction with litigation. If you are pro se (meaning you represent yourself), or you appear without an attorney, you can save thousands of dollars in a setting that allows you to control the outcome. Even if you have representation with you, reaching an agreement in this setting means....

- There are no decision makers in mediation except for you.
- If you don't reach a resolution, it cannot be used against you in court.
- It is completely confidential.
- You are a voluntary participant; you can take a break, or decide you need to stop for the day; there is no penalty for not participating.

How mediation can be used in divorce negotiations:

- Mediators aid parents in clarifying issues, evaluating options, and writing mediation agreements, which promote peace in the relationship.
- Mediation can address concerns regarding parenting schedules, holiday schedules, custody, educational issues, medical decisions, religious up-bringing, communication, transportation, and discipline.
- Mediation can enable the parents to focus on the needs and best interests of their children.

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- Mediation enables divorcing parties to choose how to structure their futures, rather than having judicial determinations of their separation terms.
- Mediation provides the participants the ability to decide issues collaboratively with the goal of enabling each participant to move forward with life.

Is mediation ever inappropriate? Mediation can actually provide more opportunity for resolution when there is sensitive information that needs to be addressed, such as mental health concerns, substance use, or domestic violence. Domestic violence is often not properly acknowledged or dealt with, within the family court system. Courts may view allegations as a nasty litigation tactic rather than an issue to be taken seriously. Courts may also be reluctant to restrict access even to an abusive parent. However, if someone is impaired due to active mental health symptoms, substance use, or there are immediate threats of violence, mediation cannot continue.

How are you qualified? Aren't mediators attorneys? You can be assured that I am qualified as a Family Financial Mediator. I have completed a 40 hour course in family financial mediation; a 6-hour course on Introduction to NC Courts, Civil Procedures, and Legal terminology; a 16 hour Family Law Certification Training; and I've completed five observations of other certified mediators.

Why use a psychologist as a mediator? As an oft-used court ordered evaluator and Parenting Coordinator, I have seen first-hand the damage that litigation can cause families. I also have knowledge about how and why judges tend to rule as they do in custody cases. I have the background to help you understand all that needs to be considered to make sure the best needs of your children are met by your agreement. I'm trained in areas often noted as a concern in cases such as substance use, mental health, domestic violence, and child abuse. I also care about the outcome of your case. I'm doing this to help keep you out of court, and help you meet the needs of your child, not to engage you in expensive, long-drawn out litigation.

What does it cover/cost? My area of expertise is child custody. I'm also able to discuss issues related to child support, equitable distribution of property, and post separation support and alimony. The cost for mediation is \$200 per hour due at end of mediation. In order to make the best use of your time, contact me about what homework you might want to complete before our sessions.

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