



MEDIATION and PARENTING

Mediation is an effective tool for dealing with family issues especially in supporting families that are working to stay together. Mediation focuses on making specific agreements or contracts formulated by all the parties involved. Differences in parenting styles can then be addressed at the same time recognizing parents' shared values. If the conflict is between parents and children, mediation provides a space where all can be heard and all points of view respected.

Being a parent is a role we take on. A function. A job. We commit ourselves to being responsible for another life. No matter how confident we may be in other areas of our lives, most of us are worried we don't have enough of whatever it takes to be a "good" parent. The role of parent is added to other roles we have already taken on. All of us are child, student, citizen and worker; many have been sibling, friend, or relative. Some of us also become spouses, or life-partners. Parenthood often places considerable stress on all the others.

Learning dialogue and negotiation skills in mediation can form the basis for a positive and ongoing parenting relationship—one that allows both criticism and support. Creating an environment of mutual respect for parents and children does not mean that parents of minor children relinquish their job of making the major decisions. It means that those decisions will be made with input from the child, and with greater understanding of the potential repercussions from the child's point of view.

New family structures are being formed that do not necessarily conform to "traditional" notions—children may have two mothers or two fathers or a community that shares parenting responsibilities. Whether a family is intact, going through the upheaval of separation, or in the process of "blending" as a new family, research now gives us clear information about what children need. They need to feel safe and loved by their parents. Identification with the loving adults in their lives is necessary in order to develop healthy relationships of their own. They are harmed by ongoing, unresolved conflict among family members. The good news is, miraculously, children have enough love for everybody.

What parents can do:

- ◆ Separate adult relationship issues from parenting issues, creating a business- like approach to parenting decisions
- ◆ Commit to separating your emotional needs from your child's best interests
- ◆ Continue to reassure your child of your love and your intention to do the best possible job as a parent *who is responsible for making decisions*

What children can do:

- ▲ understand and maintain your right to stay out of the middle of conflicts between your parents; you do not have to choose between them or prove loyalty to either
- ▲ acknowledge your parents' efforts to protect you and the inevitable worrying they do
- ▲ respectfully let your parents know your perspective

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