

Family Mediation

What is mediation?

Mediation helps you and your ex to agree on practical issues, including arrangements for children or financial matters. It is usually better than going to court, as it can help you find your own solution which works for both parents and children, rather than having a court make the decision. It is also usually much less stressful, quicker and cheaper than court proceedings. You have to give mediation a try before you can apply to the family court for child arrangements.

How does it work?

The first meeting will be just you and the mediator; they will also meet your ex on his/her own. Then if your case is suitable, they will meet with both of you together to try and agree a way forward. If you don't feel comfortable being in the same room as your ex, the mediator can 'shuttle' between you. The mediator is a professionally trained, neutral person. They will make sure you both have your say and are listened to, and will help you to come to an agreement. You may have several mediation meetings and you can take legal advice in between. Mediation can be face to face or virtual (by telephone or video).

What will it cost?

If you or your former partner are eligible for Legal Aid, then there is no charge for the the first confidential meeting with a mediator, known as a MIAM (Mediation Information Assessment Meeting), and mediation sessions are **FREE**. Legal Aid is available for people on very low incomes or in receipt of certain benefits. You can be assessed for Legal Aid eligibility at your MIAM, or check at www.gov.uk/check-legal-aid. If you are not eligible for Legal Aid, there may still be government vouchers available for mediation – contact local mediators to ask.

Why mediate?

Arrangements which are agreed by both sides usually work better than orders imposed by the court. They can be more flexible and can be changed by agreement as time goes by. This means less conflict and better communication moving forward, which is good for everyone and particularly for the children. At the end of the process the mediator will give you a formal copy of your agreement in writing.

As well as sorting out child contact issues, mediation can be used to help sort out the finances, including property and pensions.

Most people are able to reach an agreement via mediation. If mediation is not successful in your case, then you can apply to the court – but remember, court is a last resort.

How do I start?

Just pick up the phone and contact a mediator, or enquire online.

The following local firms offer legally aided mediation:

East Mediation, tel 01502 533011

Family Mediation Trust, tel 01603 620588

Mediated Dispute Solutions, tel 01379 773082

Other firms offer private mediation – try the following, or search for an accredited mediator near you at www.familymediationcouncil.org.uk.

BBL Family Law 01603 679050

Lighthouse Mediation 01603 327854

My Family Mediation 01502 575252

See www.familymediationcouncil.org.uk for further information.

NCLS is not responsible for any advice or information you may be given from an individual, company or organisation you might approach as a result of any signposting or referral by NCLS.

Please contact us if you would like this guide in another language.

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