

What is mediation?

Mediation is a cooperative problem-solving process where a neutral professional helps people in conflict clearly define the issues in dispute and reach agreements that are customized to fit their circumstances. Mediation is a confidential process.

Mediators do not make the decisions —they facilitate the process to help the participants come to the best solutions for themselves and their families.

How does it work?

The disputing individuals meet together with the mediator and with assistance work out a variety of options to settle the conflict rather than fighting. The mediator guides the communication process so that everyone has a chance to be heard. Every issue (plans for parenting their children, division of property, and financial arrangements) that needs to be addressed is discussed one at a time coming up with many options and then finally an agreement is made to reach the best possible outcome. The final agreement is always up to the individuals. Mediation varies in length of time but on average it takes seven meetings of two hours in duration. The length of time varies due to types of disputes, the number of issues, and the readiness of the parties to resolve their differences. The result of the mediation is a settlement agreement that can be presented in court or to your lawyer to file at court. A settlement agreement is not legally binding until a judge approves it.

When can mediation occur?

- Before filing for a divorce
- During the divorce process
- For post-divorce issues; time arrangement changes, support, or spousal maintenance issues.
- For resolution of family disputes; child support issues or custody between unmarried parents.

What if we can't work it out – dealing with hostility?

Conflict can be very frightening for many people, but it can be productive in the mediation process. Conflict can bring about a productive airing of differences that may have otherwise been left unsaid. It can be a way to come to a more creative solution to address everyone's needs. One of the goals of the mediation is to take the hostility and use it to guide disputing parties to better solutions. A mediated settlement creates less hostility because communication between the parties is direct, which results in less misunderstandings. The mediation process may not resolve all issues, but even partial agreements can help participants narrow the issues and limit the time and expense of going to court.

How mediation helps the children...

When children are involved, it is necessary that the couple's relationship continue long after the divorce. Mediation helps to establish open lines of communication and set up a framework for making decisions together in the future. Research has also determined that the greatest indicator of how children will do after their parent's divorce is directly related to the amount of conflict during the divorce process. (Further, by mediating issues concerning your child you are maintaining control to make decisions in regard to the most important part of your life – you know your children and their needs much better than any judge or attorney.)

Do I need an attorney?

Mediators are not acting as attorneys or giving legal advice, nor do they represent either party. The decision to seek legal advice from an attorney is up to individual parties. Contacting an attorney could be beneficial in helping a person understand the law, review the final agreement and submitting the final settlement documents to the courts.

How much does it cost?

The initial consultation is free to determine if mediation is right for you and your family. The consultation lasts 30 minutes. After that consultation the cost is determined by a hourly rate. Sliding scale??? Please call for more information about cost?

Benefits of Mediating Your Divorce

- You are in control of the final settlement decisions for you and your family – instead of giving over the biggest decisions of your life to a court system and hoping for a “fair” outcome.
- Mediation is often less expensive and less time consuming than a traditional court settled divorce.
- Often mediated agreements are followed more due to the individuals personal and emotional investment in the decisions they made.
- Mediation can help to establish a cooperative method of parenting after a divorce when there are children involved.
- Mediation minimizes the anger and distrust that is often a part of the traditional court system.

About the mediator

Julie Wiechens is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker in the state of Missouri. She received her Masters of Social Work from Washington University and has been working with troubled children in court and therapeutic settings since her graduation. Julie received her mediation training at St. Louis University and is also a member of the Association for Conflict Resolution.