

# Information on Child Inclusive Mediation

At Amity Mediation Services, we are vastly experienced in family mediation and in particular where children are involved in the conflict between separating parents. We also know that when seeing the children as part of the mediation process, it benefits everyone involved and where suitable, we actively encourage it.

Ensuring children's voices are heard and their wishes and needs are considered during decision making is very important, but we also emphasise that no pressure is placed upon the children to arrive at decisions, and it is really a place for them to feel heard.

## How does seeing children work?

Different considerations apply depending on the age and maturity of the child. Here in the UK, it is recommended that only children over the age of 10 should be talked to in mediation. Younger children can be seen; however, it would be unusual to see a child under the age of 5. We see children on their own or with their siblings, in a neutral environment to ensure the private meeting is confidential, but comfortable.

The child(ren) and both parents have to agree to us holding the meeting.

We reassure parents of the following:

- Children will not be asked to make choices or decisions, they will be asked how they feel about things in a 'listening meeting' – it is a chance for them to air their views and thoughts on their care, schooling or any other arrangements that are being discussed in the mediation.
- Parental authority is respected, and children are only seen with the agreement of both parents.
- The process for involving the children will always be explained fully beforehand to parents so that they are making an informed decision.
- Meetings with children usually last a maximum of 45 minutes. Siblings will be seen separately or together depending on what the children themselves prefer.

We reassure children of the following:

- If they do not wish to attend they will not be forced to do so.
- They will be offered a confidential session and told that the mediator does not report everything back to the parents unless the child agrees to this.
- It's a chance for them to get things off their chest, ask questions they might not otherwise feel okay about asking and generally be reassured that things will get better.
- They do not have the burden of making the decisions for their arrangements and they will not feel pressurised.

## The Benefits of Seeing Children within the Mediation Process

The children will often be more than aware that their parents are seeking to reach agreement about arrangements for them. It is very stressful for children with parents in conflict and who may even be in and out of court. For a child, seeing the two people at the centre of their world in dispute causes all manner of emotional and behavioural issues for that child. The benefits are:

- Once it is agreed by all that the children will see a mediator – they will know that both parents support them giving their wishes and feelings to a nominated mediator. The alternative court process might mean the Judge may demand a CAFCASS officer speak to the children regarding their wishes and feelings. If parents are unhappy about this they are more than likely to cause the children to feel reluctant to speak, reluctant to give their true feelings or may feel they have to present the wishes and feelings of a parent rather than their own.
- Flexibility – In mediation there can be flexibility as to when, where and on how many occasions the children speak with the mediator (and whether siblings are seen together or separately). In the alternative court process a CAFCASS officer will decide when, where and on how many occasions they will see the children.
- In mediation, the children decide what information is passed back to the parents. This gives them much greater confidence in saying how they really feel and what they really want. In Court process the CAFCASS officer will report back what the children say, and this may mean the children are reluctant to say anything or give their true wishes and feelings.
- In the mediation process children will be speaking to a mediator agreed by the parents. With Court proceedings, the Court will simply ask CAFCASS to report and you will not know and cannot have any input in to who the person is the children will be speaking to.

### Further information

If you would like to know more about Child Inclusive Mediation then please contact Amity Mediation on **01908 317599**, or email [info@amitymediation.co.uk](mailto:info@amitymediation.co.uk)