



So what is family mediation and who are family mediators?

By Philippa Johnson

In the middle of what may be the most difficult time in your life, it can be very difficult to know where to go for help. Just at the time when you need more support than you have ever needed before, you don't know who to ask or how you are going to afford to pay for expert professional guidance.

If you have already started looking on the internet you will have seen lots of references to family mediation and family mediators, but lots of people who are caught up in a divorce or separation don't know much about family mediation.

So what is family mediation and who are family mediators?

Family mediation allows separating couples to have important conversations about what should happen about their children and their money, in a safe space, with help and guidance from trained professionals. Family mediators come from all sorts of different professional backgrounds, but all qualified family mediators have lots of experience working to support separating families. Many of them are qualified as therapists or family lawyers; all of them believe that families should have a chance to work things out together. In family mediation, couples are encouraged to co-operate with one another to negotiate and find their own ways to move forward with their lives. Research shows that family mediation can cost a quarter of the price and take a quarter of the time of going to court and, more importantly, it can ensure better results for families too. That is because you are the experts on what is best for your family and if you make arrangements based on what both of you think will work, those arrangements are much more likely to work than something imposed on you by the court, which might not suit either of you.

Going to court is expensive and, even more importantly, emotionally draining. Arguing anywhere, but especially in front of strangers who have the power to make crucial decisions about your lives, is very stressful. This particular argument will impact on everyone in the family.

Parents are the people who are best placed to make decisions about their children but parents often find it difficult to sit down together and have conversations with each other about their children without being side tracked into revisiting the reasons for the breakdown of their relationship with each other. Mediation can help them have these difficult conversations.

Spending money to decide how to divide the money you have always means there is less money to divide. Many couples want to sort out what to do about their finances themselves but would like professional help in doing so. Mediation can also help them do this.

In fact, the government is so convinced that family mediation is best for the families that the law now says that almost everyone who is getting divorced or separated should see a family mediator before being allowed to ask the court to decide.

You might be interested in watching one of the videos showing how mediation works here <https://thefma.co.uk/about-family-mediation/videos-showing-mediation-works/>

Of course, you need to find someone who knows what they are doing – anyone can call themselves a family mediator – you need someone who has been properly trained, with recognised qualifications, with proper supervision. The Family Mediation Council has a list of qualified family mediators, which you can search [here](#); you can search by location, so that you can find someone close to you and you can also look for people offering particular services, for example mediators able to work with your children as well as with you, or family mediators who provide mediation funded by legal aid.

You may also find it useful to look at some leading family mediation and legal websites to find out more about your options. We recommend the [Family Mediators Association](#), [National Family Mediation](#), the [College of Mediators](#), [Resolution](#), The Law Society guide to divorce for the public (<https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/public/for-public-visitors/common-legal-issues/getting-a-divorce/>), [divorce online](#), [Citizens Advice](#)/ and www.gov.uk/separation-divorce

You may be very worried about how to pay for any help. Many people don't know that you can still get legal aid for family mediation, provided you meet the relevant requirements in terms of income and capital. If one of you qualifies for legal aid, that can mean that both of you receive an initial mediation session free. If you don't qualify, you should make sure that you understand how much the family mediator you choose will be charging you and what the charges cover. Some family mediators charge the same sort of hourly rate as specialist solicitors working in the same area, but it is divided between the two of you, so should still be cheaper than going to lawyers.

There will be a family mediator out there who will suit you – good luck!