

# ASSISTING SEPARATED COUPLES, PARENTS & FAMILY MEMBERS TO REACH AGREEMENT



When a relationship ends people face practical issues like finding a new home, managing bills and finances, re-entering the workforce and organising child care. Parents are also trying to maintain children's routines in a time of change. Then there is the challenge of working these issues out with a former partner who is also under stress.

## Mediation & Family Dispute Resolution

Family Mediation applies to a range of different family conflicts, particularly after relationship separation. Communicating and making decisions with a former partner can lead to ongoing conflict. This can add to the stress of relationship break up and negative impacts for children.

For a couple with or without children, Family Mediation provides an easier way to work things out. The input of an impartial mediator creates a calmer atmosphere for reaching workable agreements that the parties can live with.

Where parents need to negotiate decisions concerning their children, the process is called Family Dispute Resolution (FDR). It is compulsory in most cases to attempt FDR before you can apply to court for a parenting order.

## Developing Solutions to Challenges

There are many issues that can be addressed in Family Mediation. This includes managing the separation; working out new living arrangements; how and when to communicate; clarifying finances; and the delicate issue of one person starting a new relationship.

Parents will address how children will spend time with each parent and extended family; decision making about the children's lives (e.g. schooling and routines); and child support.

Financial arrangements and property settlements can also be addressed in mediation. Family mediation is also applicable to same sex couples.

## A way forward

The process of conflict resolution, peace making and building goodwill relies on the effort of each person. Our approach is to build on individual strengths and support a respectful approach for future communication and co-operation. This has a number of elements, including:

### Communication

- o Guidelines to make communication easier
- o How to raise issues and give feedback

### Conflict Resolution

- o Self awareness and avoiding conflict escalation
- o Strategies to manage stress and high emotions

### Managing Change

- o Agreeing to practical steps for change
- o Balancing future plans with practical decisions

### Negotiation & Decision making

- o Maintaining focus on the issues & children's needs
- o Promoting solutions & creating clear agreements



## Starting the process

First each person will have an individual appointment with the mediator who prepares them for mediation and also assesses if mediation is suitable. You can talk to the mediator about the best approach for inviting the other person to mediation. If needed, the mediator can send a letter of invitation.

If the parties are not in high conflict there is an option of the first appointment being held jointly, including some individual confidential discussions within this session.

With regard to Family Dispute Resolution, if the other parent chooses not to go ahead we can provide a Family Law Act certificate to verify you have attempted to commence FDR.

## Supporting Co-Parenting

After separation, children will have two homes. While arrangements agreed by parents will vary between families, there are strategies to make different types of co-parenting work. We can help parents to address areas like:

How do we find a balance between structure and flexibility in our arrangements?

How will we respond to changing needs of the children?

How will we address issues? What is the most suitable way of communicating?

## What happens in the sessions?

The mediator's role is to facilitate a discussion of the issues, supporting respectful communication. Mediation has a future focus. There can be a brief discussion about past issues, however these will be linked to future solutions and communication.

The process typically requires two to three joint mediation sessions which are usually of 2 hours duration. Within the joint sessions there will be also time for individual discussion with the mediator. Agreements can be written by the mediator which can be used as the basis for parenting plans, consent orders or settlement agreements.

In cases where clients are not able to comfortably be in the same room, we are able

to mediate with each person in separate rooms (known as "shuttle mediation").

The mediator will provide information, tips and strategies to help with making communication and agreements work. This does not include legal advice.

## Experience

We are experienced practitioners with a specialist focus on relationships. Our experience is drawn from having facilitated hundreds of couples through the challenges and stress of reaching agreement with a former partner after a relationship ends.

Clients will work with a registered FDR practitioner with experience and qualifications that can be drawn from psychology, law, relationship counselling and family therapy.

## ◆ Session fees

Individual sessions	Joint sessions
\$100 (income < \$30K)	\$160/hr
\$135 (income > \$30k)	\$190/hr (Shuttle mediation)

Joint session fees are shared. Follow up work (e.g. writing agreements) is charged at \$160/hr. Normally one mediator is involved, however, if co-mediation (i.e 2 mediators) be determined appropriate or requested, a higher applies.

## ◆ Contact

**Phone:** 03 9529 4114, 0413 844 898

**Email:** [info@commonground.net.au](mailto:info@commonground.net.au)

**Website:** [www.commonground.net.au](http://www.commonground.net.au)

**Address:** Suite 1, 10 Little Chapel Street, Prahran (in "Rechabite Hall"), Victoria, 3181

