



MEDIATION and PARENTING

Mediation is gaining recognition as an effective tool for dealing with family issues. Mediation can be used to support families that are working to stay together, often in addition to counseling. Mediation focuses on making specific agreements or contracts formulated by all the parties involved. Mediation can reinforce shared beliefs and at the same time address differences in parenting styles. Recognizing shared values builds a foundation for addressing the areas of conflict. Where the conflict is between parents and children, mediation provides a safe space where all can be heard and all points of view are respected.

Creating an environment of mutual respect for parents and children does not mean that parents relinquish their job of making the major decisions. It means that those decisions will be made with input from the child, and with greater understanding of the potential repercussions from the child's point of view.

Whether a family is intact, going through the upheaval of separation, or in the process of "blending" as a new family, research now gives us clear information about what children need. They need to feel safe and loved by both parents. They identify with and need both parents in order to develop healthy relationships of their own. They are harmed by ongoing, unresolved conflict between their parents. The good news is, miraculously, children have enough love for everybody.

What parents can do:

- ◆ Separate adult relationship issues from parenting issues, creating a business- like approach to parenting decisions
- ◆ make a commitment to separate your emotional needs from your child's best interests
- ◆ continue to reassure your child of your love and your intention to do the best possible job as a parent

What children can do:

- ◆ understand and maintain your right to stay out of the middle of conflicts between your parents
- ◆ acknowledge your parents' efforts to protect you and the inevitable worrying that goes along with it
- ◆ remember it is your right to love both your parents