

Mediation what's it all about?

Mediation is a flexible process that is used in a number of different situations. By giving everyone the opportunity to explain their side of the story, and to talk without being interrupted, mediation can be very helpful when a situation is stuck.

It is not an 'easy option' - when people are honest and are encouraged to say what they feel, the situation can provoke strong emotions - but once people have had a chance to express their feelings, they are more likely to let their hostility go.

In most types of mediation, the following steps take place:

- If one person asks for mediation, all those involved are contacted to check they agree to take part. Anyone can withdraw at any stage if they want to.
- Everyone involved is then visited individually by mediators. The mediators will ask each of them to explain how they see the current situation, and how they would like it to be in the future. They will also ask what suggestions the parties have for sorting out the disagreement.
- Information shared during the mediation is private and confidential (with the exception of disclosure of serious abuse) unless otherwise agreed.

Mediation works because:

- it allows people to be heard. In many cases, a simple apology from either or both sides is all that is required to put the situation right.
- it is an empowering process that encourages people to put forward their own suggestions and ideas.
- it is less intimidating than legal procedures, and people represent themselves rather than having someone speak for them.
- it provides solutions that the parties themselves have decided on, giving them all a sense of ownership of any agreement. As

a result, agreements reached in this way last much better than solutions handed down by courts or an arbitrator.

- it can be organised quickly. When disagreements are not addressed, they can escalate. Mediation is easy to arrange and can be completed within weeks.
- it is usually affordable by all. Most neighbour mediation is free to those who want to use it, and many other forms of community mediation are available at a reasonable rate.

So can mediation benefit me?

Talking through your situation with an independent mediator can help in a number of different ways.

- It gives you a chance to tell your side of the story - being listened to can make you feel supported.
- It allows you to admit how upset you are - many people cope with conflict by pretending they do not care.
- It makes you feel in charge again - ignoring situations or not addressing conflict can become very frightening. Talking to a mediator is the first step on the ladder of dealing with your difficulties.
- It could help you decide on what course of action you want to take next, even if that is not mediation