

MEDIATION AND DIRECT CHILD CONSULTATION CASE STUDY



Mum and Dad, who had been together for over 15 years, separated after a prolonged period of escalating conflict. They shared the care of their 10-year-old child, who was deeply affected by the separation. Mum became the primary caregiver, and Dad's contact with the child became increasingly limited. The child, feeling torn between the parents, started to express a strong preference for Mum and resisted spending time with Dad. This led to further strain, as Dad felt alienated from the child and increasingly frustrated with the lack of communication with Mum.

Over time, Dad became concerned that the emotional distance between him and the child was growing, and he approached Family Mediation West for assistance. Dad was eager to rebuild his relationship with the child but felt that Mum was unwilling to facilitate contact. Both parents had stopped communicating directly, and the child was caught in the middle of their unresolved issues.

Dad's initial contact with FMW led to an invitation for Mum to participate in mediation. Mum, recognising the need to address the situation for their child's sake, agreed to attend. During the early sessions, it became clear that communication breakdown and unresolved emotions between Mum and Dad were significant barriers to their child's relationship with Dad. The child, caught in the conflict, felt loyal to Mum and expressed discomfort about spending time with Dad.

Given the complex dynamics, the mediator suggested involving the child directly through a process known as Direct Child Consultation. With both parents' agreement, this would involve a session with the mediator and their child to ask the child how they are experiencing their family situation, so that their views may contribute to any decisions reached. Both parents agreed, understanding that their child's feelings and wishes were central to resolving the conflict.

In a separate session, the mediator met with the child alone to explore their feelings about the situation. The child revealed that they felt pressured to take sides and feared that spending time with Dad would upset Mum. They also expressed frustration that their parents didn't communicate, leaving them confused and unsure about what was happening. Importantly, they mentioned that they missed the bond they once had with Dad but were unsure how to reconnect.

The mediator carefully relayed the child's feelings back to Mum and Dad, emphasising the need for them to put aside their differences and focus on their child's well-being. This feedback became the foundation for the next phase of mediation.

Through a series of mediation sessions, Mum and Dad began to communicate more effectively, addressing unresolved issues that had fuelled their conflict. This reduction in tension allowed them to adopt a more cooperative approach to parenting, recognising that their child's well-being depended on their ability to work together. With the mediator's guidance, Dad learned to approach the child with greater sensitivity, allowing them to express their feelings without pressure. This helped the child feel more secure and less conflicted about spending time with Dad. As a result, the relationship between Dad and the child began to rebuild at a comfortable pace.

Contact arrangements, which initially involved brief visits in public settings, gradually evolved as the child became more comfortable. The move to longer contact, where the child could visit Dad's home, allowed for more natural interactions and further strengthened their bond. Overall, the child's emotional health improved as the conflict between Mum and Dad subsided, with Mum and Dad noting at the end of their mediation that their child seemed substantially less anxious. With a more balanced relationship with both parents, the child no longer felt the need to choose sides.

The involvement of Family Mediation West, particularly the Direct Child Consultation, was instrumental in transforming this family's situation. By prioritizing the child's voice and fostering improved communication between Mum and Dad, the mediation process facilitated the healing of the parent-child relationship and improved the overall family dynamic.



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