

MEDIATION AND CHILD CONTACT CENTRE CASE STUDY



Mum and Dad had a turbulent, year-long relationship fraught with intense conflict. Their relationship ended when their son was just one month old. By the time they arrived at mediation, they had not spoken for two years. Through mediation, they were finally able to communicate openly about what mattered most to both of them – the wellbeing of their son.

Mum and Dad's relationship was characterised by emotionally charged arguments, a pattern that continued into Mum's pregnancy. A month after their son's birth, the two decided to separate. Following the separation, Dad did not see their son as often, and felt that Mum did not allow him to take their son to see his family. Eventually, Dad began dating someone close to Mum, which was distressing to Mum. As a result of this conflict, Mum ceased all contact with Dad. In response, Dad engaged a solicitor, and court-ordered contact commenced at a contact centre. However, the experience did not go to plan due to boundaries being breached and discomfort occurring within the family situation. Both parties went back to court, where contact was moved to the Family Mediation West Child Contact Centre.

At the FMW Contact Centre, Dad was able to make significant progress in his relationship with their son. Initial contact was tentative due to the son being unfamiliar with Dad, but Dad remained patient. Through play, cuddles, and consistent positive encouragement, the bond gradually strengthened. Eventually, their son called him "daddy" – a deeply emotional moment for Dad. Contact eventually moved out of the centre, and the pair spent time together every weekend, enjoying activities like going to the museum and sledging. Their son was also able to reconnect with Dad's side of the family.

Despite these developments, Mum and Dad still had concerns about their co-parenting and communication. They were referred to the FMW mediation service by their solicitors.

Dad expressed that he wanted to spend more time with their son. However, Mum remained concerned about the presence of Dad's new partner during contact. The parents' indirect communication through solicitors and family members had created misunderstandings. Because of this lack of communication, Dad had concerns about their son's development and level of care at Mum's home.



Initially, shuttle mediation was used, where each parent met with the mediator separately. However, with the mediator's support, they eventually felt comfortable to be face-to-face and speak directly.

Over the course of mediation, they were able to agree to gradually increase Dad's contact time with their son. Together, they discussed their son's development and lifestyle, like enrolment in clubs and ensuring a healthy diet. They were also able to set clear boundaries around Dad's new partner being present at handovers. Importantly, they learned key communication skills like pausing before responding. This improved pattern of communication allowed them to be comfortable communicating directly over text messages. This enabled them to arrange contact flexibly, including on special occasions.

When given a space to speak directly, Mum and Dad were able to improve their communication and reach agreements together about what was best for their son. Thanks to the mediator's guidance and their own commitment to mediate, they left FMW feeling more confident as co-parents. What began as a tumultuous relationship was transformed into a healthier, functional co-parenting partnership. Their son now benefits from a loving relationship with both parents.

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