

MEDIATION AND CONTACT CENTRE CASE STUDY



Mums Tara and Felicia (not their real names) had a contentious separation after their daughter was born. Tara made the decision to end their 7-year relationship, as she did not have confidence in Felicia's ability to meet their daughter's needs. Family Mediation West was able to help them build trust in their co-parenting abilities, making a positive impact in their daughter's life.

The mums were arguing extensively after the birth of their daughter, and their relationship began to deteriorate. Furthermore, Tara was concerned that Felicia's long-term health issues would impact her parenting abilities. After their separation, contact was mutually set up between Felicia and her daughter, but Tara felt that Felicia was not reliably attending these. As a result, Tara stopped contact altogether. In response to the breakdown in communication, Felicia initiated court proceedings, where the court ordered supervised contact between Felicia and their daughter at the Family Mediation West Child Contact Centre.

At the contact centre, their daughter was initially hesitant. However, with Felicia's efforts to make her daughter feel comfortable in this new setting, she began to warm up to Felicia. Over their sessions, their daughter would take the lead in choosing a fun activity for them, like playing with the kitchen set or playdoh. After some sessions, the daughter would try to make Felicia laugh and lovingly reciprocated her hugs. Contact eventually moved out of the contact centre, where the two would go to the park together and enjoy themselves.

While the relationship between Felicia and her daughter had improved, the mums still felt unsure about their co-parenting relationship. The court ordered mediation at FMW, which both mums voluntarily agreed to.

Tara remained concerned about Felicia's health issues affecting her as a parent. She hoped to see Felicia take a greater interest in their daughter's development moving forward. She also felt uncomfortable with Felicia posting pictures of their daughter on social media. Felicia had been getting support for her health issues, and wanted to make an effort to be a part of their daughter's life. She wanted to understand their daughter's needs better and spend more time with her.

Shuttle mediation was used in the beginning, where each parent met with the mediator separately. During their initial sessions, the mums agreed that they needed to slowly rebuild direct communication, instead of relying on solicitors. As the first step, Tara would regularly share information about their daughter with Felicia, such as about her health and her activities in nursery. They agreed that Felicia would not post photos of their daughter. Additionally, they affirmed that they would be civil with each other so that their daughter does not pick up on a negative atmosphere. Importantly, the mums decided that their child's best interests would guide their joint decision-making moving forward.

By their last session, the pair were able to progress to joint mediation in the same room. They shared that Felicia's weekly contact with their daughter outside of the centre had been going well. Felicia had been communicating smoothly with Tara and her new partner regarding handovers. Both mums were feeling more relaxed in this session, and now felt confident to continue their co-parenting journey outside of mediation.

Prior to mediation, both mums had been full of doubt as to whether co-parenting would even be possible. Through mediation, they were able to rebuild trust, agree on the best interests of their child and build a strong parenting alliance moving forward. Most importantly, the positive impact on their child was significant – she was overjoyed to have her mum back in her life.



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