

MEDIATION AND CONTACT CENTRE CASE STUDY



Mum decided to end her 4-year relationship with Dad after a turbulent period of mental health and financial issues. Mum and Dad had been separated for 3 years, dealing with miscommunications regarding parenting their 6-year old son, who was diagnosed with autism.

After their separation, Dad saw their son a few times a week on a flexible basis. However, Mum felt this pattern of contact did not provide their son with the routine he needed. She proposed contact once a week, which left Dad feeling frustrated at this decline in contact time. Unable to reach a joint agreement, Dad began court proceedings, where mediation and supervised contact was ordered at Family Mediation West. Sessions were held once a week for two hours, with a supervisor closely monitoring to record their observations for a court-ordered report.

At the contact centre, the son was excited to see Dad, always greeting him with a hug. Dad approached their time with enthusiasm, and activities like table football brought lots of joy to both. When their son felt overstimulated, Dad was able to gently soothe him. As Dad spent more time with their son, he was able to understand his needs better and rebuild their bond. The supervisor reported these observations to the court, which facilitated a transition to supported contact. Still taking place in the structured, neutral setting of the centre with practitioners present to offer support, supervision was relaxed and reports were no longer required.

Both parties voluntarily agreed to mediation to improve their co-parenting. Dad wanted to spend more time with their son and eventually move out of the contact centre. However, Mum wanted to highlight the importance of routine for their son first. Although both parties felt apprehensive as they had not spoken directly in years, they committed to the process for their son.

In initial sessions, Mum voiced her frustrations, and Dad apologised for his past behaviour, which helped to address unresolved past hurts from their relationship. With the mediator's support, they were able to progress to focusing on their future co-parenting relationship. They began rebuilding trust through agreeing on small changes, then coming together to discuss them. Mum also emphasised their son's routine to Dad, who acknowledged he has a lot to learn. Gradually, changes to contact were made, beginning with Dad and son spending one hour together weekly outside the contact centre.



To make further progress with contact, Mum and Dad agreed to exchange phone numbers after establishing boundaries around this arrangement. This way, Dad could receive updates about their son's wellbeing, and feel more included in his life. This communication pattern also indicated to their son that Mum and Dad's relationship was moving in a healthy direction. From this point, contact moved from supported to pick up and drop off sessions, allowing Dad to have four-hour contact periods with their son outside, with handovers taking place at the contact centre. Dad and son greatly enjoyed their time together watching movies, bowling, and swimming.

However, there were challenges along the way. Mum was concerned that her messages were not reliably replied to, which reignited worries that Dad was not able to stick to routine. When their conversations became difficult, the mediator spoke to them separately to assure them of her commitment to support them. This made Mum and Dad feel comfortable in working through their needs with the mediator. Through this teamwork, they were able to overcome obstacles and prioritise their son's wellbeing in their conversations.

Having learned healthy communication skills, Mum and Dad felt able to arrange more frequent contact on an ad hoc basis. Being given their own space in mediation to effectively resolve their issues was instrumental in supporting their co-parenting relationship. Empowered with techniques to maintain trust and healthy boundaries, they could continue co-parenting effectively outside of the centre. Contact has now moved out of the centre entirely, and their son enjoys a stable and loving relationship with both parents.

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