

Family mediation: the solution for a separation on good terms.

A separation/divorce often plunges the couple and the family unit into an unstable period, and even times, a crisis. Communication may become arduous or deficient and negative feelings can make the separation process very difficult for all family members.

Children often feel torn between their parents and may experience negative emotions or display problematic behaviours at home, daycare or at school. Oftentimes, these are short lived and can be managed when both parents remain sensitive to their children's needs during this uncertain time..

When the couple has decided to separate or divorce, it is beneficial to call on a third party, who is trained, neutral and can help to ease tensions: **a family mediator.**

A trained and accredited family mediator offers parents the opportunity to meet in a neutral environment where they both will be able to address their concerns. The family mediator has a duty of impartiality and accompanies the parents through the mediation process, keeping in mind the needs of the children. The family mediation process consists of three stages:

- 1) The evaluation phase
- 2) The negotiation phase
- 3) The final stage when the mediator produces a Summary Agreements.

This Summary of Agreements is negotiated and discussed openly and always in the presence of the mediator. It may cover up to four essential elements:

- 1) Child custody, right of access
- 2) Parental obligations and child pension
- 3) Sharing of family patrimony or settlement of the common interests of ex-spouses
- 4) Financial obligation towards other spouse (in certain cases)

The continuity of the relationship with the children by both parents is at the heart of family mediation. Even though the couple relationship ends, each person remains a parent and the main objective is to collaborate in the well-being and development of the children. Parents will have to make common decisions about children for years to come. It is therefore essential to invest time and energy in this new co-parenting relationship.

Family mediation is a confidential process that is done in an informed manner. Who gets to win? If the parents engage actively in the process, the family comes out a winner!

Family mediation offers separating couples an alternative to a process before the courts. Statistics speak for themselves. According to the Department of Justice, 82% of couples that engage in a family mediation process reach an agreement (2016).

Separation and divorce is never an easy situation to experience. But if you have the right tools and are accompanied, you can separate on good terms.

For more information on family mediation and its subsidized program for parents with dependant children, visit the Department of Justice website (www.justice.gouv.qc.ca)

Note that family mediation is also available for couples that do not have dependant children. The only difference is that the government does not offer a subsidy.

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