

# Children's participation in the family mediation process

A Guide for Parents





## The family mediator has asked to meet with your child... Why would this be helpful?


When parents separate, children are, of course, affected. Mediation can provide them with a reassuring, safe and neutral setting where, in the strictest confidence, they can talk about how they feel and are reacting to the situation.

Children will often hesitate to clearly articulate to a mother or father what they are feeling or what they need because they want above all to avoid hurting or fueling anger in the very people they love most in the world – you, their parents.

Because it helps you to more aware of your child's needs and feelings around your family situation.

Because it helps you to better understand your child's viewpoint about different aspects of the changes in your family structure that affect her or him.

Because it can give parents a reason to work together to act in their child's best interests when difficult decisions need to be made.



## How can you best ready your child for family mediation?

What's the best way for parents to prepare children for the family mediation process?

- Make every effort to reassure your child by explaining that you have begun a process of family mediation and that you know the person who will be acting as the family mediator. Be calm and confident in the message you convey.
- Be straightforward and clear in talking about the mediator and make sure your message is appropriate to your child's age. You might want explain that mediators are there to try to help children and parents who have separated find solutions that are in everybody's best interest.
- Stress the fact that both you and the other parent have agreed together that the child should be invited to participate in the family mediation process.
- Make sure your child understands that what she/he says to the mediator will remain confidential and that final decisions about the family situation will be made by both parents and will not be for the child to make.
- Explain to your child that by participating in the family mediation process, children can help a mediator better understand how the separation affects them and the feelings it creates.
- If your child seems unsure or apprehensive about participating, show that you are prepared to listen to what she/he has to say and try to be reassuring about the mediation process.
- If your child refuses to meet with the mediator, this is a decision to be respected.







## How can you best ready yourself?

### What's the best way to prepare myself for my child's participation in the mediation process?

- Your child's participation in the family mediation process is a voluntary act, in that it requires the consent of the child (if old enough to make that choice), both parents and mediator. You have the right, at any time, to propose that the mediator meet with your child. However, the decision to invite your child to participate in the family mediation process requires the agreement of between both parents and the mediator.
- Remember that your child's point of view will not be binding in the process and the parents are still responsible for decisions taken in family mediation.
- Avoid telling your child what he or she should say to the family mediator. This can be potentially harmful to the child in question and can hinder the mediation process.
- If you have any doubts or questions, feel free to discuss them with your family mediator.

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**To further explore this issue :** Richard, V. (2014). L'implication des enfants en médiation familiale: Le point de vue et l'expérience des parents dans un contexte de partage des responsabilités parentales, Mémoire de maîtrise, Montréal : Université de Montréal. [Involving children in the family mediation process: Points of view and experiences of parents in joint custody situations, Master's thesis, Montreal, University of Montreal] (**available in French only**).

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