

Mediators' Introduction to

UpToParents.org, ProudToParent.org, and WhileWeHeal.org

Charlie and Barb Asher, August 4, 2009

Most people spend more time planning for a beer and pizza party than for the mediation where they will chart their course through their greatest personal crisis. This failure of preparation is particularly disturbing, as most parents require some pre-mediation education in some core paradigm shifts to make lasting changes in the way they relate.¹ By offering this child-focused preparation as a cornerstone of your mediation practice, you not only serve families well but give a compelling reason to choose your services.

When mediators help parents to focus on their children's losses, fragility, and needs, they give them the strongest incentive and clearest light for resolving all the issues they face. For these reasons, almost all parents can be helped by preparing for mediation via the work on:

- www.UpToParents.org (in divorce cases),
- www.ProudToParent.org (in paternity cases), or
- www.WhileWeHeal.org (in cases of parents working through marital problems).

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The power of this opportunity is reflected not only in the superior results parents achieve when assisted by this preparation, but also in overwhelmingly positive [parent feedback](#).

For a 40-minute video on mediators' use of these websites, click [HERE](#).

¹ The breadth of these shifts is evident from just this partial list:

1. Maybe this isn't a competition between us, but instead the ultimate call to cooperation for our children's sake.
2. Maybe our issues aren't so much legal as personal, emotional, and parental.
3. Maybe our love for our children will be a better guide for us than our legal rights or litigation.
4. Maybe we have been so consumed with our own hurt and fear that our children's real needs have been largely invisible to us.
5. Maybe our children are suffering as a result of our conflict—and in ways that we haven't noticed.
6. Regardless of what they say to appease each of us, maybe what our children really want and need is a restrained, predictable, and cooperative relationship between their parents.
7. Instead of being threatened by my children's good relationships with their other parent, maybe I actually have a vital interest in supporting those relationships.
8. Maybe my failure to acknowledge and deal with my grief has helped drive our conflict.
9. Maybe we can succeed only by partnering to protect our children.
10. Maybe our children require us to have even better communication and cooperation now that we're separated.
11. Maybe there are a few specific skills I can master to protect my children and myself.
12. Maybe my co-parent's slips are reason for me to be heroically restrained, not to add to conflict.
13. Maybe activities as basic as admiring and enjoying my children can help me succeed.
14. Maybe there are specific things I can do, regardless of what my co-parent does.
15. Maybe the failure of our intimate/marital relationship is no reason for us to fail in a co-parenting relationship.

In just a couple hours of study, you can incorporate these free resources into your work. Without changing your mediation style, you can now work with parents who are manifestly better prepared to succeed. Here are some steps we hope you'll consider.

- 1) Try www.UpToParents.org yourself as a hypothetical parent in divorce, and have everyone in your office (support staff included) do so as well. For a sample of the completed website work, click [HERE](#).
- 2) If you have not already done so, watch our short video on how this child-focused preparation helps mediation. Just click [HERE](#).
- 3) Visit www.PrepareToMediate.org to see how it easily refers parents to this opportunity. PrepareToMediate.org offers parents easy-to-follow directions to:
 - (a) the website fitting their circumstances,
 - (b) video and written "Handy Resources" that will aid them as they prepare, and
 - (c) a unique electronic Mediation Intake you can use.

"If parents will agree on one thing, they'll agree on everything, if that one thing is, 'What do we want our children to look like when they're 25?'"--Patrick Brown, Indiana attorney and counselor

You're also welcome to use (and adapt as necessary) both our [Telephone Intake Form](#) and our [Opening Client Letter](#).

- 4) Once you start using this approach, look over parents' work in advance of mediation. Simply log on with the usernames and passwords that parents supply in their Intakes. You'll be able to assess parents' current level of functioning, and you'll also be able to prompt parents about any parts of their work that are incomplete.

"Few things can help an individual more than to place responsibility on him, and to let him know that you trust him."
--Booker T. Washington

For a quick gauge of the state of parents' thinking and cooperation, we first check Exercise C to see what compliments and positive memories they've written about each other for sharing with their children. If the list isn't complete, we call those parents to tell them the truth: (a) that these compliments and good memories are for the benefit of the children, not one's co-parent, and (b) that parents virtually never succeed until they make these lists.

- 5) *Use parents' website work at the mediation.* We tend to make three specific (and relatively quick) uses of this work in mediation.
 - We always ask parents' permission to read aloud their Exercise C compliments and good memories about each other—when shared, these statements virtually invariably have a powerful effect on the parents and their renewing trust.

- Gently and with great respect for the pain that parents feel over having hurt their children, we use parents' website description of their children (including their losses, hurt, and wishes) to build their commitment to focus on their children.
- Unless parents are relating unusually and consistently well, we briefly go over their Agreed Commitments from their website work.

"We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us something is valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our trust, sacred to our touch."

--E.E. Cummings

- 6) Finally, we use parents' website preparation for one additional powerful purpose: it gives us the chance to honor and compliment parents' work and devotion on behalf of their children.

Please feel free to be in touch with us with any questions or thoughts on use of these free resources. We are confident that when you try them, you will understand why we use them in all our mediation work.

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