

FREE GUIDE · FIRST MEDIATION SESSION

Preparing for Your First Mediation Session

What to expect, how to stay calm, and how to make the most of your first joint meeting.

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

- What happens in your first session
- How to prepare mentally and practically
- Staying calm when emotions run high
- What if we cannot agree on anything

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What to Expect in Your First Session

Your first joint mediation session can feel daunting — especially if communication has been difficult. Knowing what to expect can ease anxiety and help you feel more prepared.

Structure of the Session

- **Welcome and ground rules (10-15 mins):** The mediator introduces the process, sets expectations, and confirms confidentiality.
- **Setting the agenda (15-20 mins):** Both parties identify the issues to discuss (e.g., child arrangements, finances, property).
- **Discussion and negotiation (60-90 mins):** The mediator helps you explore options, understand each other's perspectives, and work toward solutions.
- **Summary and next steps (10-15 mins):** The mediator summarises what has been discussed and agreed, and schedules the next session if needed.

"You do not need to agree on everything in the first session. Progress, not perfection, is the goal."

Who Will Be There?

Just you, the other party, and your mediator. Solicitors do not usually attend mediation sessions, but you can consult them between sessions for legal advice.

How Long Does It Last?

First sessions typically last 90 minutes to 2 hours. Subsequent sessions may be shorter or longer depending on the complexity of your issues.

How to Prepare Practically

✓ Gather Your Documents

- Financial disclosure (if discussing finances): bank statements, payslips, pension valuations
- Current arrangements (if discussing children): existing contact schedule, school details
- Any previous agreements or court orders
- A list of issues you want to discuss
- Your goals and priorities written down

✓ Think About Your Priorities

Before the session, ask yourself:

- What matters most to me (e.g., stability for children, keeping the family home)?
- What am I willing to compromise on?
- What is my bottom line — what I absolutely cannot accept?
- What does a fair outcome look like from my perspective?

✓ Practical Logistics

- Arrive on time (or a few minutes early to settle yourself)
- Arrange childcare so you can focus without distractions
- Bring a notepad and pen (the mediator will also take notes)
- Bring water and have a light meal beforehand (low blood sugar affects mood)
- Turn off your phone or put it on silent

Staying Calm When Emotions Run High

Mediation can bring up difficult emotions — anger, sadness, frustration, fear. These are normal. The key is managing them so they do not derail the session.

Before the Session

- Talk to a friend, therapist, or support person about your worries beforehand
- Do something calming the night before (walk, bath, early night)
- Practice deep breathing or grounding techniques
- Remind yourself why you are doing this (for your children, for closure, for a fair outcome)

During the Session

- **Pause if you need to.** You can ask the mediator for a break at any time.
- **Focus on listening.** Even if you disagree, understanding their perspective helps find solutions.
- **Speak in "I" statements.** Say "I feel concerned about..." not "You always..."
- **Keep it child-focused.** Return to what is best for your children, not what is fair between adults.
- **Do not react immediately.** Take a breath. Count to three. Then respond calmly.

"The mediator is there to keep the conversation on track and ensure both voices are heard. You are not alone in the room."

If It Gets Too Much

If the session becomes overwhelming, tell the mediator. They can pause, take a break, or even end the session and reschedule. Mediation is voluntary — you are never trapped.

What If We Cannot Agree on Anything?

Not reaching full agreement in your first session is completely normal. Mediation is a process, not a single event. Here is what happens if you do not agree immediately.

Partial Agreements Are Still Progress

You might agree on some issues but not others. For example, you might agree on a contact schedule but need more time to discuss finances. Any agreement is valuable and narrows the issues if court becomes necessary.

The Mediator Will Summarise

At the end of the session, the mediator will summarise what was discussed, any areas of agreement, and outstanding issues. This clarity helps both parties know where you stand.

You Can Schedule Another Session

Most people need 2-4 sessions to reach full agreement. You can book another session to continue discussions, give yourselves time to think, or gather more information.

You Can Seek Legal Advice Between Sessions

If something discussed in mediation concerns you, consult your solicitor before the next session. Mediation and legal advice work well together.

You Can Stop Mediation

Mediation is voluntary. If it is not working, you can stop and pursue other options (solicitor negotiation, court proceedings). The mediator will provide a certificate confirming mediation was attempted.

"Mediation gives you control over the outcome. Even if it takes several sessions, the result is yours — not a judge's."

Ready for Your First Session?

You have got this. Preparation, honesty, and a willingness to listen will get you through. Book a free call if you have questions or concerns.