

Wonder what a mediator does?

Here's a small sample invented dialogue that shows how the mediator manages the conversation to focus on practical problem solving and prevent arguing.

Silvia (S) and Bob (B) are with the Mediator (M) to deal with their separation. They are working on a parenting plan for their child.

B: I want joint custody of my daughter.

S: You just want to reduce your child support!

M: Silvia, please, remember the ground rules we set. You'll get a chance to respond.
Bob, so we're clear, what do you mean by joint custody, and why is that important to you?

B: I mean half the time with her, and equal rights to make decisions about her. I'm her father
too. It's my right.

M: Ok. And Silvia, you think this is about child support. Is there more you'd like to say about
this?

S: He's not even around to take care of her half the time. He'll be paying for babysitters when
she could be with her mother.

M: So if he's not available, you'd want to be the caregiver. What if he somehow were to be
available? Some mothers welcome having the assistance. How would you feel?

S: I don't mind him helping, of course, but he won't be willing or able to do half the parenting.

M: Ok, you don't object to getting some help. Let me say a few things before we go on. First, "custody"
and "joint custody" are confusing labels. I prefer not to use them here. Let's talk about parenting
responsibilities and how to share them practically. We can also have a separate conversation about
parental decision-making rights, and that right can exist without a shared parenting arrangement.

Let's remember that you both remain parents after separation, and equal in that sense even if one person is the "residential parent" and the other is helping financially. I also like to keep the issue of financial support separate, and come to that after we sort out the parenting issues. For now I'll say that shared parenting does not equal no child support. Finally, I want us to always think of your daughter's interests. How does all that sound? Anything I can clarify?

Nods and affirmations.

M: So one place to start is to ask about your current and expected schedule for work and other obligations. Silvia, why don't you start?

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