

Improving Mediation by Parents' Preparation on *UpToParents.org, ProudToParent.org, and WhileWeHeal.org*

Charles and Barbara Asher, March 25, 2011

Most people will 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

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 short video on mediators' use of these websites, click [HERE](#).

In just a couple hours, progressive mediators can learn how to incorporate these unique resources into their work. Without the necessity of changing their mediation style, they can now work with parents who are manifestly better prepared to succeed. Here are some steps to consider.

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.

- 1) Try www.UpToParents.org as a hypothetical parent in divorce and have all colleagues and office staff do the same. Sample completed website work can be accessed [HERE](#).
- 2) Watch our short video on how this child-focused preparation helps mediation: [HERE](#).
- 3) See how the following materials can be adapted to ensure that all family mediation clients arrive with 3-8 hours of child-focused learning and information-gathering supporting their success.
 - Our [Sample Opening Email to Clients](#)
 - An [Electronic Intake Form](#)
 - Our [Quick Help for Families in Transition](#).
- 4) Look over parents' work both to assess their current level of cooperation and to develop strategies for their mediation success.
- 5) *Use parents' website work to powerful ends at the mediation.*

"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

*"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*

We tend to make three specific (and quite 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 almost invariably have a restorative effect on the parents, their trust, and their interaction.
 - 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 focus on their children.
 - Unless parents are relating unusually and consistently well, we briefly go over their Agreed Commitments from their website work.
- 6) Consider using parents' website preparation for one additional powerful purpose: giving the mediator the opportunity to specifically honor and compliment parents' devotion and work on behalf of their children.

*"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*

We think mediators will find these websites enlightening for clients and beneficial in branding and expanding a mediation practice. Not only can this child- and preparation-focused approach to mediation improve outcomes for families, but it can provide a compelling reason for parents and professionals to choose the services of a mediator using it.

Mediators are also encouraged to consider one additional free resource that can help many parents and families. NoDivorceToday.org is an opportunity to mediate with parents interested in stepping back from divorce in favor of a peaceful and constructive separation.