

WHAT IS DEPENDENCY MEDIATION

The Court has ordered that the dependency court case involving you and your children be referred to mediation. This information is provided to assist you in understanding this process.

Mediation is an opportunity for you, the parents, to make some decisions about you and your children instead of the Court.

You will receive an Order from the Court about Mediation. It will tell you who is required to be present at the Mediation. This order will explain in legal terms all the rules and regulations necessary to hold mediation in accordance with Florida law. It will tell you who your mediator will be. The Mediator is a trained and certified, neutral person who helps solve problems. The mediator does not make any decisions. You do. You will then receive a Notice of Mediation telling you the time and place of your mediation.

Mediation is confidential. What you say in mediation is kept confidential. You will be asked to sign a confidentiality statement, which the mediator will explain to you.

Mediation is like an informal conference. All of the people who are most closely connected with this court case will also be present. These could include your attorney, if you are represented; your spouse or significant other, the Department of Children and Families' attorney and counselors; the Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) volunteer, if appointed, and GAL Coordinator or attorney. Others that may be present include the child(ren)'s care takers, and sometimes a representative from the Suncoast Child Protective Team.

Mediation conferences may take as long as three hours so you need to plan on being free for at least that length of time. Because this is so important, you will need to make arrangements with your employer to be absent from work. You will also need to make child care arrangements if necessary, as children are not permitted to attend mediation. There is no childcare provided.

At the mediation conference everyone is given an opportunity to speak. This is not like being in the courtroom with a judge presiding who, because of rules of evidence, may or may not allow you to make a statement. It is expected that you will share all your concerns and ideas about your child(ren). You should feel free to express yourself. The other people at the mediation will be sharing their concerns too. The Mediator will encourage everyone to think about solutions that will solve the problems. The mediator helps to focus the discussion on the future, not the past. The goals of mediation include reaching an agreement that will satisfy everyone's concerns and at the same time be in the child(ren)'s best interests.

The decisions that are made at mediation are written down. Everyone who participates at mediation signs this agreement. It is then presented to the Court. Most often the Court will accept and approve all of the decisions that were made and this agreement now becomes a court order.

If an agreement is reached, or if no agreement can be reached, you should feel very proud that you did your best to make some important decisions for the future of your family. Your honest participation is valued and appreciated.

You will need to read the Order of Referral to Mediation carefully. Should you have any questions about the Mediation that has been scheduled, consult with your attorney or contact the Mediation program. The address and phone number for the Pinellas County Mediation and Arbitration Program is as follows: Pinellas County Mediation and Arbitration, 501 First Avenue North, Room 729, St. Petersburg, FL 33701, 727-582-7246