

Zoom Mediation

Family mediation is a voluntary process in which a trained impartial mediator helps family members to communicate more effectively, and to make their own arrangements for the future, particularly for their children. Mediation can benefit families by minimising conflict, improving family life and helping to avoid long, painful and expensive legal battles. Mediators do not take sides or make judgements, but rather support people to make their own decisions about the future. Family mediation supports parents, children and wider family members through changes, particularly where this has occurred as a result of separation, divorce or family restructuring.

The social distancing measures required during the current coronavirus pandemic mean that we are not able to provide joint mediation sessions from our Inverness office at this time. As an alternative we are now able to provide mediation via Zoom. Zoom is a free video conferencing programme. It is free to download from the internet, easy to install and set up and is confidential.

How does the process work?

Each family member is offered an individual, confidential meeting where information is shared and options are discussed. This appointment will take place by telephone. If mediation is appropriate, and clients would like to use Zoom as a way of taking part in joint meetings a Zoom test is arranged. Clients will require:

- access to a private confidential space
- a laptop, PC, tablet or smartphone – most new computers now have built in cameras, microphones and speakers, but for clarity of sound clients may wish to consider the use of headphones
- downloaded the Zoom software or Zoom app

Clients are requested to provide us with their email address and a mutually convenient date and time will be scheduled so that a brief meeting can be arranged with a member of the Relationships Scotland – Family Mediation Highland team. This is to ensure that we are able to connect and check that the picture clarity and sound is of sufficient quality for a joint mediation session. We send parents an invitation to the meeting via email, and they will then just need to click on the link to join the session. Parents will initially see a message that invites them to the ‘waiting room’ and we will then admit them to the meeting. This is to ensure confidentiality.

Confidentiality

Mediation is a confidential process which allows parents to talk freely and frankly in mediation. What occurs in mediation cannot be used in civil proceedings unless both parties want it to be, or if there are issues regarding criminal activities or children’s safety. Mediators maintain confidentiality, unless circumstances suggest that the issues being discussed may pose a risk to clients or the wider community. Care is taken to protect confidentiality and no disclosure will be made without discussing the issues first, unless there is an urgent risk of harm.

Additional measures are implemented for Zoom mediation to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure confidentiality is maintained. Clients who have taken part in their individual appointment by telephone will be emailed their client registration form and asked to read and confirm by email that they have understood and will adhere to the confidentiality statement. In addition, all clients who take part in mediation via Zoom will be asked to read and confirm that they have understood and adhere to the policy in relation to mediation conducted via Zoom - this documentation must be returned to us by email prior to mediation taking place.

At the beginning of each joint mediation session clients will also be asked to make a sweep of the room – ie turn the laptop or other device round the room so that the mediator is able to check that there are no other parties present. They will also be asked to confirm that they will not record (audio, video or otherwise) any part of the session, take any still photographs or attempt to contact the other party via any means of private messaging system during the session.

The Zoom Mediation Session

A mutually convenient date and time will be arranged between the parties and the mediator(s). In order to ensure the safety of clients, parties will be required to enter the session via a 'waiting room'. Once both the mediators and clients have entered the session the meeting will be 'locked'. This prevents any other parties from entering or having access to the session. Zoom has an option for breakout rooms which allows parents to have a break within the session where this is desired or deemed helpful.

Zoom mediation sessions usually last 1 to 1½ hours, and families may take part in several appointments to explore options and agree an acceptable way forward. As Zoom mediation eliminates the need to travel long distances the number and frequency of appointments can be tailored to suit the individual needs of families to ensure that they are able to work through their difficulties at a pace that feels manageable.

As mediation is a neutral and impartial process that supports parents to reach their own decisions great care is taken to ensure that parties are offered an equitable service. If parties choose to mediate via Zoom then both clients will be responsible for ensuring a safe and confidential space.

Equal Opportunities and Ethics

Relationships Scotland – Family Mediation Highland is committed to the promotion of equal opportunities in all its work. All our family mediators abide by the code of professional practice that is in line with the Scottish Mediation Network's code of practice. Zoom mediation was developed in recognition of the barriers which some clients encounter in being able to access appropriate services in a timely fashion, particularly during the coronavirus pandemic. Zoom mediation aims to provide services for families irrespective of their geographic location and their personal and financial circumstances.

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