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Humanistic Mediation: Peacemaking Grounded in Core Social Work Values

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The presence of conflict between clients and practitioners and between colleagues in agencies is widespread and inevitable in the field of social work. Conflict between individuals and groups can be highly toxic and destructive, leading to increased stress, illness, less productive work, and even unethical behavior. Whether among friends, in one's community, or within agencies, when conflict is not addressed effectively it can be painful and cause a great deal of harm. When addressed effectively, however, intense conflict can also be the engine that drives interpersonal and organizational growth and renewal.

Conflicts can often be addressed effectively through face-to-face interpersonal communication and negotiation. At times, however, an impartial third party or mediator may be required. As a result, social workers skilled in mediation are increasingly called on to provide this service in a variety of settings, and for good reason. The practice of mediation in families, communities, workplaces and justice systems is well matched with social work theory and practice. Recognizing this, the National Association of Social Workers developed the Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators in 1993.

Contemporary mediation practice, however, has also been heavily influenced by the legal profession with its strong emphasis upon procedural fairness and the need to develop settlement agreements in the quickest and most efficient manner possible. With this kind of approach, many opportunities for promoting a stronger sense of client empowerment, recognition of each other's humanity despite the conflict, and even building a deeper mutually respectful relationship, are frequently lost.

This article presents an approach to mediation that is uniquely grounded in social work theory and practice. It will highlight the important connections between the practice of humanistic mediation and the humanistic tradition within social work as it relates to the contributions of social work theorists and practitioners like Schwartz, Saleebey, Satir and Gold. Humanistic mediation—with its emphasis on client-centered, dialogue-driven practice—shares much in common with the mediator model as well as the strengths perspective and what is coming to be known as the transformative or healing aspect of social work practice. Commonalities within these practices can be found in their theoretical groundwork, their practice techniques, and in the role of the worker or mediator as one who embodies those principles, is capable of demonstrating skillful use of technique, and who is aware of the powerful notion of positive “use of self” which emphasizes the qualities of centeredness and congruence in working with clients.

Within Western culture, the transformative dimensions of mediation have been eloquently described by Bush and Folger (1994) in their widely acclaimed book *The Promise of Mediation*. They emphasize the importance of genuine empowerment and mutual recognition of each party's humanity in addition to the value of compassionate strength among parties in conflict. Bush and Folger emphasize that, through empowerment, parties grow calmer, clearer, more confident, more organized, and more decisive. They regain a sense of strength, of being able to act and handle life's problems. Through this mutual recognition, the parties in conflict voluntarily choose to become more open, attentive, and responsive to the situation of another, thereby expanding their perspective to include an appreciation for the circumstances that the other person is faced with.

In fact, the elements of a humanistic model are grounded in the experience of many mediators over the years and have been applied in areas ranging from family conflict to criminal conflict involving such offenses as burglary, theft and minor assaults. Instead of the highly directive settlement-driven model practiced widely in civil court settings, a humanistic mediation model is very nondirective and dialogue-driven. It prepares the parties, through separate pre-mediation sessions with the mediator, so that they feel safe enough to have an opportunity to engage in a genuine conversation about the conflict, to experience their own sense of empowerment, and to express what Bush and Folger call “compassionate strength,” including empathy for the other party in the conflict (1994). The emphasis is upon the mediator facilitating a dialogue that allows the parties to discuss the full impact of the conflict, to assist each other in determining the most suitable resolution, and to recognize each other’s common humanity, despite the conflict.

Conceptual Framework of Humanistic Mediation

In *Humanistic Mediation: A Transformative Journey of Peacemaking*, (Umbreit,1997) a model is presented that taps into the full potential of mediation, offering a genuine transformative journey of peacemaking that is grounded in compassion, strength and our common humanity. This model recognizes that most conflicts develop within a larger emotional and relational context characterized by powerful feelings of disrespect, betrayal, and abuse. When these feelings about the past and current state of the relationship are suppressed or not aired in a healthy manner, an agreement might be reached but the underlying emotional conflict remains. Little healing of the emotional wound is likely to occur without an opening of the heart through genuine dialogue, empowerment, and recognition of each other’s humanity despite the conflict. This requires moving far beyond the well-known techniques of active listening or reflective listening with their emphasis on paraphrasing, summarizing, and related skills.

Clearly, these techniques when used by disputants or mediators can be very helpful in the resolution of conflict. Preoccupation with the “techniques” of listening skills, however, can get in the way of genuine dialogue, particularly when their use leads to the inability to honor and feel comfortable with silence, to deeply reflect upon what is being said, or to reflect upon what is being felt and experienced in the present moment. For this reason, it is important to distinguish between ‘canned’ technique and skillful use of the basic humanistic principles that guide practice. These values address the nature of human existence, conflict, and the search for healing, and can be summarized as follows:

- Belief in the connectedness of all things and our common humanity.
- Belief in the importance of the mediator/worker's presence and connectedness with the involved parties in facilitating effective conflict resolution.
- Belief in the healing power of mediation through a process of the involved parties helping each other through the sharing of their feelings (dialogue and mutual aid).
- Belief in the desire of most people to live peacefully.
- Belief in the desire of most people to grow through life experiences.
- Belief in the capacity of all people to draw upon inner reservoirs of strength to overcome adversity, to grow, and to help others in similar circumstances.
- Belief in the inherent dignity and self-determination that arise from embracing conflict directly.

Saleebey (1992) and his colleagues have based their enormously influential work, The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice, on basic humanistic beliefs which posit that humans possess inherent power to transform their lives, that experts or professional knowledge, while useful, cannot replace or improve on this inherent capacity, and that social work interventions are successful to the degree that a worker is capable of tapping, supporting and enhancing these basic strengths in the client. In describing his colleagues’ approaches to implementing a strengths perspective in their practice, Saleebey observes, “It seems apparent that their approach to helping consumers occurs through a kind of dialogue; a give-and-take that begins with the demystification of the professional as expert, an operating sense of humility on the part of the helper, the establishment of an egalitarian transaction, the desire to engage clients on their own terms, and a willingness to disclose and share.” (1992, p.42) The strengths perspective and the humanistic mediation model share important perspectives in their approach to social work practice.

Humanistic Mediation and the Mediator Model

Significant parallels can be drawn between the humanistic mediation model and the work of Shulman and Schwartz, related to their use of the mediator model in social work practice. Through their work in the late 1960’s and into the seventies, Shulman and Schwartz developed the concept and practice of social worker as mediator. The mediator model

emphasizes the importance of “mobilizing the healing powers of human association and mutual aid” when mediating between client and social service agency. Schwartz (1971) emphasizes the worker/mediator must “not only help people talk but help them talk to each other... purposeful talk that is related to [what] brings them together...it must have feeling in it...and be about real things.” Schwartz also points out that the mediator/worker’s role is not to “fix” but to bring their skills to the task of supporting clients in doing the work they came to do.

Likewise, humanistic mediation employs techniques similar to those described in the mediator model, grounded as they are on these humanistic values. For example, Schwartz (1971) outlines the “phases of work” which include the following: the *tuning-in phase*, in which the mediator/worker prepares him or herself for the process; the *beginnings phase*, when worker and client get started on the work they have chosen to do together; the *work phase*, when the agreed upon, shared task is accomplished; and the final phase of *transitions and endings*, where the mediator/worker helps the client transition from engagement to termination of the work which they had begun together.

The *tuning-in* process is described as one in which the worker prepares him or herself to be sensitive to special needs and subtle communications of the client. Schwartz proposes that this quality of “preliminary empathy” should inform the mediator/worker’s frame of mind and approach to working with the client. The primary aim being to set aside one’s own biases or work habits in order to be sensitive to the expressed needs of the client and adapt the helping process to meet these needs.

Similarly, a humanistic mediation model emphasizes the importance of clearing away the clutter in the mediator’s own life so that he or she can focus intensely on the needs of the involved parties. Prior to initiating contact between people in conflict, the mediator is encouraged to take a few moments of silence, through reflection, meditation or prayer, to reflect on the deeper meaning of his or her peacemaking work and the needs of the people in conflict. The centering of the mediator throughout the entire process of preparation and mediation also helps the parties in conflict to experience it as a safe, if not sacred, journey toward genuine dialogue and healing. Through the practice of being centered, the humanistic mediator is more likely to stay grounded in a deeper sense of spirituality that recognizes the interconnectedness of all people (regardless of our many differences), as well as the sacred gift of human existence.

The humanistic model also calls for separate pre-mediation sessions with the involved parties in which the first and most important task is that of establishing trust and rapport with the involved parties. The development of trust and rapport enhances any dialogue process, but is particularly beneficial in intense interpersonal conflicts. For this reason, the mediator needs to get into a listening mode as quickly as possible during the initial meeting, inviting the involved parties to tell their stories of the conflict and how it affects them.

From a humanistic mediation perspective, deep compassionate listening is preferred over the more common “active listening” in which ongoing verbal feedback is provided. Deep listening requires a level of comfort with moments of silence in the mediation session as the other party reflects on what they want to express next. It requires being very centered and still. Periodic verbal feedback through paraphrasing or summarizing may be offered, but typically the mediator says as little as possible and remains very much in the background as the parties themselves engage in a dialogue with each other.

Next, in the *beginnings phase* (Schwartz, 1971) of the mediator model, the worker is encouraged to complete a number of basic tasks. These include: provide a clear, uncomplicated statement of purpose for their work together; to describe the worker’s own role in the process; to elicit feedback from the client in shaping the work, and to help them do whatever is needed to get the work done. Similarly, a number of steps in the humanistic mediation model (Umbreit, 1997) enhance the preparation phase with the client. Parallel elements include framing the mediator’s role as that of facilitator in the process of dialogue and mutual aid. This role allows for connecting with the parties, identifying and tapping into parties’ strengths, and the open expression of feelings.

In a humanistic model (Umbreit, 1997), tapping into the full power of mediation to resolve interpersonal conflict reframes the mediator’s role. Instead of actively and efficiently guiding the parties toward a settlement, the mediator helps the parties to enter a dialogue with each other, in order to experience each other as fellow human beings despite their conflict, to understand and respect their differences, and to arrive at a mutually acceptable way to deal with those differences. Once the parties are engaged in a face-to-face conversation, the mediator intentionally gets out of the way. For example, the mediator might sit back in the chair or lean away from the table and adopt a more informal posture. The mediator is never completely removed from the process, however. At times it may be necessary to intervene or redirect

communication. During the later stages of mediation especially, parties in conflict often need a mediator's assistance to construct a formal settlement agreement if one is needed.

Humanistic mediation also places great emphasis on the mediator establishing a connection with the parties in the conflict (Umbreit, 1997). Instead of viewing mediators as "neutral third parties" who are emotionally distant and have no prior contact with the involved parties, mediators work to connect with the parties by establishing trust and rapport in separate pre-mediation sessions before ever bringing them to a joint session. A mediator does not need to lose his or her impartiality in order to effectively connect with the involved parties before bringing them together. The art of mediation, as well as teaching, nursing, therapy and social work, is found in connecting with people at a human level through the expression of empathy, warmth and authenticity.

When people become engaged in conflict, it is common for them to communicate and interact in highly dysfunctional ways. The careless expression of intense anger and bitterness, along with the inability to listen to the other party or effectively communicate their own needs, can mask the many strengths they may have. It is the mediator's task, during separate pre-mediation sessions, to learn the communication style of each party and identify specific strengths that may directly assist in the mediation-dialogue process and to encourage the expression of those strengths in mediation. Tapping into the strengths of individuals and coaching them in how to effectively communicate their feelings can contribute greatly to the mediator's ability to use a nondirective style of mediation.

The open expression of feelings related to the conflict is central to a humanistic mediation model (Umbreit, 1997). Because of the extreme intensity of those feelings, it may become necessary for the mediator to coach the disputant on helpful ways of communicating those feelings so that they can be heard by the other party. This is best addressed in the context of a separate pre-mediation session. This coaching focuses on how to own one's feelings rather than projecting them upon the other party. Projecting intense feelings through aggressive communications often will trigger defensiveness in one or both parties and shut down honest dialogue. To avoid this, the speaker is encouraged to own his or her feelings and communicate them as an "I" statement, rather than attacking the other party, although the mediator is careful not to suggest what specifically should be said. Furthermore, through coaching, the mediator works to help identify and tap into the strengths of each of the parties in conflict, despite any emotional baggage that is present.

During the *work phase* of the mediator model, notes Schwartz (1971), a mediator/worker should be ready to offer basic input and support while allowing the client to do the work they came to do. For instance, a worker's role is to identify when the clients are off track, when obstacles arise and how they might be overcome, know where clients are in the process and how to assist them. This phase calls for worker involvement in a variety of tasks including: finding common ground; detecting obstacles; defining the requirements and limits of the work; contributing information, perspective, values; and bringing feelings and visions to the process.

Skills related to this work include the ability to recognize and work with ambiguities and underlying feelings, reinforcing the ways people help each other, breaking down problems into manageable parts, generalizing and finding connections between clients' experiences, encouraging talk that is not only purposeful but expressive of feeling, and the ability to stay with the process. Compare the elements of this phase with the techniques used in a humanistic mediation model, which employs a non-directive style of mediation, and recognizes the power of silence.

Humanistic mediation practice employs a nondirective style of mediation in which the mediator assists the involved parties in a process of dialogue and mutual aid, of helping each other through the direct sharing of feelings and information about the conflict with little interruption by the mediator (Umbreit, 1997). The mediator opens the session and sets a tone that will encourage the parties in conflict to feel safe, understand the process, and talk directly to each other. The mediator's ability to fade into the background depends on creating a connection with the parties before the joint session and having secured their trust.

Allowing for moments of silence in the process of dialogue and conflict resolution is part of a nondirective style of mediation. Recognizing, using and feeling comfortable with silence are important to the humanistic mediation process. By honoring silence—patiently resisting the urge to interrupt with guidance or questions—the mediator is more consistently able to assist the involved parties in experiencing mediation as a process of dialogue and mutual aid—a journey of the heart in harmony with the head.

The final phase of the mediator model, *transitions and endings*, brings the worker back to the initial premise offered by the mediator model (Schwartz, 1971): that the worker's role is limited by time, purpose, and the accomplishment of a specific task. The aim is to enable clients to do the work they've contracted to do and, if possible, achieve a sense of accomplishment or closure regarding the task undertaken.

So too, humanistic mediation (Umbreit, 1971) is a finite process with a clear beginning, process model, and ending. And a skillful mediator assists the clients in determining for themselves when the process has been completed. Often, a single meeting is sufficient to meet the needs of conflicting parties. Stories are shared, questions answered, deep emotion expressed, and if needed, an agreement drawn up that assists them in clarifying mutual aims for the future. Because of the nature of conflict and human behavior, however, problems may be too complex to resolve in only one session, particularly when the conflict involves an important relationship. Even in those cases when the conflict is largely resolved in one session, conducting a follow-up session several months later to assess how the agreement is holding up, or to resolve any issues that may have emerged, can be important in the overall process of healing and closure.

The Role of the Mediator and The Paradigm of Healing

A humanistic model of mediation, in some respects, parallels a humanistic style of psychotherapy or teaching which emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the therapist and client or teacher and student and embraces a strong belief in each person's capacity for growth, change, and transformation. Carl Rogers (1961), a pioneer in humanistic psychology, emphasized the importance of empathic understanding, unconditional positive regard, and genuineness. Although his theories were developed in the context of psychotherapy, they have enormous implications for mediation practice and life in general.

The late Virginia Satir (1976), a world-renowned family therapist, teacher and trainer, recognized the supreme importance of the "presence" of the therapist. Satir regarded authentic human connection as being fundamental to change processes (Gold, 1993). She insisted that making contact with people on a basic human level requires "congruence," a condition of being emotionally honest with yourself in which there is consistency in your words, feelings, body and facial expressions and your actions. Authentic connection with others, through therapy or mediation, first requires looking inward. According to Satir (1976), there are four key questions.

1. How do I feel about myself? (self-esteem)
2. How do I get my meaning across to others? (communication)
3. How do I treat my feelings? (rules)
 - Do I own them or put them on someone else?
 - Do I act as though I have feelings that I do not or as though I don't have feelings that I really do?
4. How do I react to doing things that are new and different? (taking risks)

The process of connecting with those involved in mediation takes energy. As Satir (1976) points out, "making real contact means that we make ourselves responsible for what comes out of us." Although Satir developed her concepts of making contact and congruence within the context of family therapy, her material is highly relevant to a humanistic model of mediation. Humanistic mediators can have a powerful presence with their clients, as Virginia Satir did, through a more spiritual understanding of life that embraces the connectedness of all people along with the connectedness of the mediator's actions and belief system with the core of his or her being.

Building upon the earlier work of Virginia Satir, Lois Gold (former chair of the Academy of Family Mediators) identifies four specific elements of presence that can increase the effectiveness of mediators: (1) being centered, (2) being connected to one's governing values and beliefs and highest purpose, (3) making contact with the humanity of the clients, and (4) being congruent (Gold, 1993).

A humanistic dialogue-driven model of mediation is grounded in what Gold (1993) describes as a paradigm of healing. She identifies twelve characteristics that differentiate the paradigm of healing from the more common paradigm of problem-solving with its settlement driven emphasis.

1. Demonstrating caring, nonjudgmental acceptance of the person's humanity
2. Building rapport and emotional connection... "being there"
3. Helping people listen to their innate wisdom, their preference for peace
4. Generating hope ... "with support, you can do it"

5. Tapping into the universal desire for wellness
6. Speaking from the heart
7. Thinking of clients in their woundedness, not their defensive posture
8. Being real and congruent
9. Creating safe space for dialogue
10. Creating a sacred space
11. Recognizing that a healing presence does not “fix it”
12. Understanding that a healing presence acknowledges brokenness and shares the journey

Although this conceptual framework has grown out of her extensive experience as a family therapist and mediator, the paradigm of healing presented by Gold (1993) has enormous implications for humanistic mediation practice. This can be particularly helpful in cases where one or both parties are grieving the loss of a relationship, whether among colleagues at work, friends, spouses, partners, parents and children, or neighbors. It is also highly relevant in responding to the needs of many crime victims and offenders who, although most often unknown to each other, are suddenly thrown into a kind of relationship (certainly not by the victim’s choice) because of the nature of the criminal act and its effect on their lives. Crime victims, particularly in more serious offenses, are grieving the loss of a sense of safety that was shattered because of what occurred.

Understanding and practicing humanistic mediation in the context of the paradigm of healing offered by Gold (1993) is ultimately grounded in a profound recognition of the precious gift of human existence, relationships, community, and the deeper spiritual connectedness among all of us in our collective journey through this life, regardless of our many religious, cultural, political, and lifestyle differences. Gold describes the language of healing as the language of the soul, as opposed to the language of problem solving.

Humanistic Mediation and Culturally Sensitive Practice

Humanistic mediation (Umbreit, 1997) also provides an excellent framework for culturally sensitive practice. In their work, *Counseling the Culturally Different*, Sue and Sue (1990) identify several characteristics of the culturally skilled counselor that can be directly integrated into the practice of humanistic mediation. These include being aware of one’s own heritage, biases, and beliefs. A culturally sensitive mediator is also able to recognize and be respectful of the differences that exist between themselves and their clients. Involving trained mediators that share the client’s background or ethnicity is strongly encouraged where possible.

Genuine dialogue, in which people feel safe enough to speak and listen in a non-defensive manner requires skills and a life perspective that seem to be more common among indigenous cultures than in more modern, mainstream cultures. These skills include speaking and listening from the heart, as well as feeling comfortable with and honoring silence. In fact, the potential for effective conflict resolution to promote healing of relationships within communities (rather than just the immediate resolution of problems between individuals) is particularly well grounded in the traditions of many indigenous people throughout the world. The practice of *ho’oponopono* by native Hawaiians (Shook, 1989), family group conferencing by Maori people in Australia (Alder & Wundersitz, 1994), and healing circles and other practices among aboriginal and First Nation people in Canada (Griffiths & Belleau, 1993) and Native Americans (LaResche, 1993) all provide beautiful examples of spiritually grounded forms of resolving conflicts through a journey of healing and peacemaking. As Diane LaResche (1993) points out, “at it’s core, Native American peacemaking is inherently spiritual; it speaks to the connectedness of all things; it focuses on unity, on harmony, on balancing the spiritual, intellectual, emotional and physical dimensions of a community of people” (p. 321). These principles of balance have also been adapted by tribal leadership in Canada (Huber, 1993) for the use of mediation within urban tribal settings, using the traditional symbol of the medicine wheel.

Concluding Remarks

It may be tempting to view humanistic mediation (Umbreit, 1997) as a specialized, if not marginalized practice. In fact, it is a core social work intervention that could be used at the macro and micro level and across a variety of settings. The practice of mediation is becoming increasingly widespread and is being applied in multiple settings within the field of social work. The NASW Standards of Practice for Social Work Mediators (1993) states, “As the use of mediators in a variety of circumstances has increased, a concomitant development has taken place regarding the conceptual framework and skills set within which mediators function. Mediation increasingly is viewed as a powerful intervention tool distinct

from—albeit informed by—other approaches to client services.” These standards emphasize the importance of elements such as mediator accountability, neutrality, and training, as well as confidentiality, voluntariness and appropriateness in the mediation process. In these respects, a humanistic mediation model not only complies with but exceeds the standards set by the NASW, with its emphases on the transformative potential and multicultural applications of the mediation process.

Saleebey (1992) pointed out that, “for the social worker, a strengths perspective inevitably leads one out into the world of the client and out from behind the desk... it is good basic social work practice. There is nothing here that is not coincidental with the core of social work values that energizes the profession.” Core social work values are built on regard for individual worth and dignity, and are advanced by mutual participation, acceptance, confidentiality, honesty and responsible handling of conflict. (Hepworth, Rooney & Larsen, 1997). Drawing on the rich traditions of humanistic psychology and grounded in core social work values, humanistic mediation provides a powerful tool for healing wherever practitioners serve as mediators or hope to aid in the resolution of conflict.

Appendix

Important principles that can lead to effective conflict management and even resolution include:

1. The more direct and timely the conflict is confronted, the better...usually.
2. Be direct and tough on resolving the problem, but gentle and respectful on the person.
3. If you err, err in the direction of empathy, warmth and being connected with the parties (being genuine) even if you mess up on the techniques.
4. Good conflict resolution skills are not hard to learn...you can do it!
It just takes practice, practice, and more practice.
5. Good skills & technique alone are not the answer.

The essence of good communication skills in resolving conflict is to be found in the presence of integrity...a consistency between that which we are thinking, are saying verbally, our bodies are communicating, how we are feeling, and the deeper values within our heart.

5. Understanding and responding to conflict must be viewed through appropriate and relevant cultural lenses.

PRACTICE IMPLICATIONS: Humanistic Mediation Model

1. CENTERING OF MEDIATOR

(Clearing the mind of clutter and focusing on the important peacemaking task at hand.)

2. RE-FRAMING OF THE MEDIATOR'S ROLE

(From directing a settlement driven process to facilitating a process of dialogue and mutual aid.)

3. PRE-MEDIATION SESSIONS WITH EACH PARTY

(Listening to their story, providing information, obtaining voluntary participation, assessing the case, clarifying expectations, preparing for the mediation)

4. CONNECTING WITH THE PARTIES THROUGH BUILDING OF RAPPORT AND TRUST

(Beginning in pre-mediation phase.)

5. IDENTIFYING & TAPPING INTO PARTIES' STRENGTHS

(Beginning in pre-mediation phase).

6. COACHING ON COMMUNICATION, IF REQUIRED

(During pre-mediation sessions.)

7. NON-DIRECTIVE STYLE OF MEDIATION

8. FACE-TO-FACE SEATING OF VICTIM AND OFFENDER

(Unless inappropriate because of culture of parties or individual request.)

9. RECOGNITION AND USE OF POWER OF SILENCE

10. FOLLOW-UP SESSIONS

COMPARISON OF PROBLEM SOLVING AND HUMANISTIC MEDIATION

	Classic Problem Solving Mediation	Humanistic/Transformative Mediation
Primary focus	Settlement driven and problem focused.	Dialogue driven and relationship focused.
Preparation of parties in conflict	Mediator has no separate contact with involved parties, prior to mediation. Intake staff person collects information.	Mediator conducts at least one face-to-face meeting with each party prior to later bringing them together in joint mediation session. Focus is on listening to their story, building rapport, explaining the process, and clarifying expectations.
Role of mediator	Direct and guide the communication of the involved parties toward a mutually acceptable settlement of the conflict.	Prepare the involved parties prior to bringing them together so that they have realistic expectations and feel safe enough to later engage in a direct conversation/dialogue with each other facilitated by the mediator.
Style of mediation	Active and often very directive, speaking frequently during the mediation session and asking many questions.	Very non-directive during the mediation session. After opening statement by mediator the mediator fades into the background and is reluctant to interrupt direct conversation between parties. Mediator is not, however, passive and will intervene if parties indicate a need.
Dealing with emotional context of conflict	Low tolerance for expression of feelings and the party's "storytelling" related to the history and context of the conflict.	Encouragement of open expression of feelings and discussion of the context and history of the conflict. Recognition of the intrinsic healing quality of "storytelling" when speaking and listening from the heart.
Moments of silence	Few moments of silence. Mediator uncomfortable with silence and feeling the need to speak or ask questions of the parties.	Many prolonged moments of silence. Mediator reluctant to interrupt silence and honors silence as integral to genuine empowerment and healing.
Written agreements	Primary goal and most likely outcome of mediation. Agreements focus on clear tangible elements.	Frequently occur but secondary to the primary goal of dialogue and mutual aid (the parties helping each other through the sharing of information and expression of feelings). Agreements may often focus on symbolic gestures, personal growth tasks, or affirmations of the new relationship between the parties.

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