

Elder Mediation and Conflict Coaching: *Helping Families Reach Decisions and Guiding Individuals to Reach Their Goals*

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Caregivers and their families are rarely prepared for the emotional roller coaster and communication challenges of the caregiving experience. Family mediation and individual conflict coaching can help with planning, conflict resolution, and improved management of the interpersonal issues that arise. I am often contacted by providers asking if a situation is appropriate for mediation or whether coaching is an option for a client. Since both mediation and coaching are voluntary and confidential, my feeling is that if people are open to resolving problems, then a conversation is always appropriate. Below are a few specific examples.

When Can Mediation Be Helpful?

When working with older adults and their families, it can be difficult to know which situations might best be served by mediation. It can seem that counseling and mediation overlap and that can be a source of confusion. Understanding the difference can help providers determine which modality will best serve a family at any given time.

Simply said, the difference is this:

Counseling is to enhance personal growth and understanding.

Mediation is about negotiating a defined dispute or disagreement.

EX: A daughter has been the primary caregiver for her mother for several years. The mother's dementia has progressed to a point where she needs more assistance than the daughter can provide. The daughter has found a memory care unit near her home that can take her mother. The brother (and only son) who has POA is angry about this decision, insists that mom stay with his sister, and refuses to pay the assisted living facility if she moves.

There is no question that counseling might benefit the relationship between this brother and sister and would be useful long term. Mediation, if both agreed to it, would address the immediate problem of the mother's need for a higher level of care.

Mediation is a forum for problem solving. It ensures that each party in the mediation is supported and has a say in the outcome. It is an opportunity for those who come to the mediation with rigid positions, to recognize the values and interests behind those positions, allowing for more creativity and collaboration.

When can Conflict Coaching be helpful?

Conflict coaching can be helpful when clients feel 'stuck'. There are lots of reasons people can feel 'stuck'.

- Difficulty setting boundaries on a sibling, parent or another older relative.
- Feeling overburdened as caregivers and thinking they have tried everything to enlist more help.
- 'All or nothing' thinking when small increments of change might make a significant difference.
- Difficulty making decisions that will not be welcomed by the loved one.
- Difficulty recognizing and addressing their own needs

Can't see alternatives:

Sometimes people have struggled with a situation for so long they can't see options they might have. Coaching helps them expand their thinking, often enabling them to see the problem differently and recognize alternatives they may have overlooked.

A shift in role

I frequently see people who struggle with the shift in role from daughter or son to caregiver. This new role may require them to take on responsibilities and make decisions that feel uncomfortable in the context of their former relationship. The Caregiver Identity Theory explains this as the distress that caregivers feel when the activities required of them are inconsistent with their views of self. Coaching can help them reconcile these feelings.

Caregiving is not a role most people are prepared for. Coaching is an opportunity to explore the complicated feelings it engenders while enabling an individual to find a practical path forward.

Lifespan of Greater Rochester provides both Family Mediation and Conflict Coaching. These services can be offered in person, virtually, or hybrid (some members present and some members virtual). Mediation and Coaching are provided at no charge, but donations are encouraged. Should you want more information, please use the [contact form found here](#).