

# Elder Mediation Resolves Serious Family Conflicts

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Unfortunately, there are times when adult children and their elderly parents do not agree on long term care plans.

“My daughter is insisting I no longer live alone,” Martha tells her neighbor. “She just doesn’t understand and it seems like she wants to control everything,” she continues.

Jenny, Martha’s daughter, worries that her mother keeps falling, and fears one day she will break her hip or hit her head. She loves her mother and just wants to protect her, but does not know how to get her mother to listen to her.

Could an elder care consultant help this family find a solution and avoid the increasing tension in the family? Absolutely. However, what happens if the elderly parent no longer has the capacity to make decisions, and the adult children don’t agree on how to care for their parent, including where she should live or how to handle the money.

It is surprising how quickly formerly cordial relationships between family members will sour when the family has to deal with care of elderly parents, the cost of care or inheritance at their death. Sometimes the consequence of dealing with the final years of elderly parents can break families apart and create long-lasting animosity.

As family members age, family dynamics can become more strained and complicated. Conflicts that may have simmered below the surface can boil up and make family conversations very difficult. Siblings dealing with differences in their own geographic, economic, and immediate family structures, often find working together challenging. Thoughtful decision-making can seem all but impossible.

It is often at this point that a neutral third party can come in and repair the damage that has been done and help correct the problems that have come about because of the disagreement.

**A practitioner experienced in elder mediation is a perfect choice for solving disagreements due to issues with the elderly.**

## WHAT IS ELDER MEDIATION?

Mediation is a non-adversarial approach to solving disputes. Mediation is a process of bringing two or more parties together and helping them mutually negotiate a solution to their disagreement. The mediator is there to make sure that communication flows freely between the disputing parties. Elder Mediators are trained in the art of negotiating resolutions between elderly parents and family members, or more often between adult children if the parent no longer has capacity. Mediation can achieve results that the family by itself may not be capable of realizing or have the expertise of achieving.

Elder mediation is extremely valuable for the following reasons:

- As a trained expert on communication, mediators give the family a perspective it could not gain by meeting together on its own.
- The family members involved meet and prevent problems from arising by anticipating situations that may cause disputes.
- Allows for the mediator to invite experts such as care managers or other care

providers into the meeting to educate the family and give them a new perspective.

- Allows children to come up with and consider options not thought of previously.
- Encourages uninvolved family members to become involved.
- Allows for a neutral third party to challenge family members and make them take responsibility for their actions.
- Promotes consensus of those involved which in turn creates a much higher rate of compliance and success.
- Requires a written plan with specific responsibilities which makes compliance feasible.

Finding an experienced mediator is not always easy. Professionals in the field of law, geriatric care management and/or counseling can be interviewed to see if they will be able to assist in your particular situation. There is typically a need to start with a comprehensive assessment of the older adult by an experienced professional and recommendations based on that assessment for a future care plan. Bringing the family together on what needs to be done and organizing responsibilities is frequently what follows.

In one case, after months of dispute with her parents over their health and safety issues, the daughter enlisted the service of a professional care

manager mediator.

“Bringing a neutral person with a professional and compassionate attitude into our disputes was the best thing for all involved,” Connie recalled. “My parents shared their concerns and listened with acceptance to mine. All of a sudden we could communicate and work out a plan that they could live with and I could relax knowing they were safe.”

Or in the situation of two sons both having hired their own respective attorneys to fight for being guardian of their father, a geriatric care manager was able to diffuse their anger and develop a long- term care plan that they both were ultimately able to accept.

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