Relationships or marital mediation is for people, regardless of gender, in intimate ongoing relationships, whether married or not married, with or without children who want to gain insight into their conflict patterns and enrich their relationships through more constructive communication.

Mieke Brandon NMC19
The Relationships Mediation Process

- **Pre-mediation/intake:** similar to any FDR process for facilitative mediation, no separate sessions, draft agreements, homework, additional session, agreements and review period.

- **In mediation:** Participants address each other how each contributes to the well-being of the relationship.

- **Mediation:** is different from couple counselling or therapy: It is ‘task oriented and time limited’
The purpose is to assist conflicted partners to:

• decide if there is a basis for reconciliation, enrichment, and motivation to participate
• create more satisfaction and achieve a more harmonious relationship
• stay together, stay married and/or keep on living together as a family
• find ways of relating that is nurturing, meaningful, rewarding and respectful.
CONDITIONAL LOVE: is to ‘to love when, if or because’

This is giving love as a result of what the other does rather than giving love for what or who that person is: Eventually creating unrealistic expectations and severe disappointment in each other, resulting in unbalancing the relationship.
The mediation process is solution-focused, as one cannot change the past: Explore the ‘systemic’ interactions of the pair:

• What is going well and how to re-plan their lives: *short term & longer term hopes and goals*

• *Their “We and Me Time”* as a partnership and/or individually

• Expectations due to *their habitual roles within the relationship*

• What they *commonly argue about*

• The *deeper issues of compatibility and differences*

• Their ability *to learn interest based negotiation*
The breaking down of relationships is commonly caused by increased anxiety in the system:

1. Through over and under functioning, and by focusing on the other and/or trying to get the other to change results in criticism, blaming and shaming, creating a spiral of defensive reactions due to emotional reactivity.

2. Instead couples need to try to establish what each needs to do to ‘increase self-soothing, self-management, and personal responsibility.’

MEDIATOR SKILLS & TECHNIQUES: All the usual skills & interventions

• Pay attention to the dynamics between the participants, their verbal, tonal and non-verbal interaction to identify potential communication problems

• Explore what is strong and positive and what is contributing to the wellbeing in their relationship

• How does each person experience happiness and joy? And when together?
Balanced and Unbalanced Partnerships

• In a balanced and thriving relationships, both acknowledge and appreciate each other’s work, or contribution, no matter what form it takes. Each seems to be satisfied with that balance.

• When this changes and either partner sees their contribution as having more value and becomes critical, because they consider the other is not pulling their weight, the relationship becomes unbalanced and can get into trouble.
People in Destructive Partnerships need to:

- Re-focus on listening, being heard and understood, as well as unravelling elements of power and control in the partnership: *power with; power over; implied power; ongoing power; time limited power; or power used to influence, provide incentives or rewards.*

- Make changes to the perceptions of coercive control behaviours and learn to become a ‘team’, accept differences, collaborate rather than compete.
Guidelines for a Good Relationship include:

• ‘Don’t give up’, be your spouse’s partner’,
• ‘Treat your spouse better than you treat anyone else’,
• ‘Always assume the best of your partner’,
• ‘Have separate interest’,
• ‘Compliment each other at least once a day,
• Give each other a break’,
• ‘Don’t’ sweat the little things’ and
• ‘Forgive each other’, see L Israel, "25 Secrets to a Great Marriage" (2008)
Mediation fosters self-determination regarding how they remain together, or why & how they separate

- The consequences of staying or leaving can be negotiated respectfully without fault finding or blame.
- Find out how family and friends react, do they agree or not with the couples decision; these people don’t have to agree because it’s not their relationship or marriage.
- Insight and acceptance helps parents to understand that their coupledom is ending, but not the relationship as co-parents.
Change in a relationship is ideally a collaborative process

• If one decides to separate the question is: can the other talk them out of it? When both decide they must consider:

• the financial consequences of such a decision, how & when to separate and/or make an interim parenting plan and

• Referral to FDR to assist them to complete their long term parenting and financial agreements.
• The ultimate lesson for us all is learning to give unconditional love, which includes not only our love for our partners and others incl. children, but love for ourselves as well.

• See E Kübler-Ross
RESOURCES

- SK Boardman, "Practice Note: Marital Mediation: A Psychological Perspective" (2013) 31(1) Conflict Resolution Quarterly 100-103.
- B Derman and W Gregson, "Are you really ready for divorce? The 8 questions you need to ask" https://www.mediate.com/articles/dermanGregson1.cfm
- J A Fiske in L Israel, "Where Does Marital Mediation Fit In?" (March 2015) http://www.maritalmediation.com/2015/03/marital-mediation-fit/
- AI Green, "What is Mediation to Stay Married?" (August 2009) https://www.mediate.com/articles/greenI1.cfm
- J Gottman, "The Top 7 Ways To Improve Your Marriage" (November 2017) https://www.gottman.com/blog/the-top-7-ways-to-improve-your-marriage/
- P Porter, "Listen to your triggers - How to suspend judgement when you are angry" (February 2018) https://www.mediate.com/articles/porterpl20180202.cfm
- T Lenski, "Can this Key Ingredient Protect Your Marriage from Relationship Conflict?" (February 2018) https://www.mediate.com/articles/lenskitbl20180216.cfm