

The Community Mediation Process

The First Call. A person (Party 1) calls the SEEDS office with a complaint, or starts a case online. It could be a problem with a neighbor, family member, or co-worker—SEEDS handles almost any type of conflict. A case manager will assess the situation and determine whether SEEDS can help. If it is not an appropriate case for SEEDS (for example, if it involves illegal behavior, or is a legal issue), the case manager will refer the person to the appropriate agency. If SEEDS can help, the case manager will start by listening to Party 1's account of the problem.

SEEDS Contacts the Other Party. If the case manager finds SEEDS can help, and Party 1 wants to set up a mediation, SEEDS will send a letter and information about mediation to the second party involved (Party 2). If Party 2 is interested in going to mediation, the case manager will listen to their account, and schedule a mediation.

The Mediation Meeting. Mediation usually takes 2 to 3 hours—the meeting will be scheduled for 3 hours. Both parties start out explaining their side of the story to the mediators, one at a time. The mediators will ask questions to make sure they understand. Eventually, the mediators will have the parties speak directly with each other, to get to problem solving and brainstorming. If the parties come up with an agreement, they will write it down into a resolution statement.

The Mediators' Role. Mediators do not make suggestions on how to resolve the conflict, or decide who is right or wrong. Their role is to help the parties communicate by providing neutral ground and a calm environment, asking questions to make sure everyone understands, rephrasing, and modeling effective communication techniques.

The Agreement and Confidentiality. Mediation agreements are not legally binding. The parties will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement at the beginning of their mediation. Confidentiality allows people to express themselves without fear that their words will be used against them later. Nothing said in mediation can be used later as evidence in civil court.

Follow-Up. A second session can be scheduled if the mediation takes longer than 3 hours. One month after the mediation, SEEDS will do a routine follow-up to see how the agreement, if any, is being kept, and to check on how things are going with the conflict.