

Top tips for a constructive meeting

Here's what we've learned works best in a session

- Come with an open mind.
- Don't book an appointment at a time when you might be hungry or tired.
- Leave plenty of time to get to the meeting so that you're not in a rush.
- Be honest with each other, but be respectful. You might need to discuss the finances, so be prepared to provide paperwork to support what you are saying. Remember that you both have a duty to each other to provide full and frank financial disclosure – we will send you a list of things to bring with you for a financial session.
- Take turns to speak and do not interrupt each other.
- Call each other by first names, not "he" or "she", "Mr/s X" or indeed ruder labels.
- Try to describe what you do want, rather than what you don't want, for example, what you would like other people to do differently in future, rather than what you don't want them to do, or to stop doing.
- Think about the language you are using. Explaining how you feel about something is more likely to get a positive result than making accusations, for example 'you always do ...' is not as helpful as 'I feel very hurt when you do'.
- Try to avoid blaming or attacking others, or engage in put-downs and instead, ask questions of each other for to clarifying what they are saying. Try not to think the worst every time the other person speaks.
- Try to avoid making rigid demands or taking fixed positions and instead, express your personal needs and interests and the outcomes that you wish to achieve.
- Listen carefully when any one person is speaking and with the intention of trying to understand what the other person's needs and interests are. If necessary, repeat it back to them so that you can both be sure that you have heard the same thing.
- Recognise that, even if they do not agree with you, everyone is entitled to their own views and perspective.
- Try to avoid dwelling on things that didn't work in the past, or what people did wrongly, but instead try to focus on how you would like things to be done differently in the future. We can't change the past, but we can try a shape a better future.

- Take it slowly. When you feel under pressure the brain tends to freeze, and you might feel that you can't think straight. This is normal. You could try some deep breathing or other calming techniques or consider taking notes, or asking the mediator to recap from time to time.
- Ask for a break if you need to.
- If you feel it's difficult to speak up, try writing a list of things you would like to discuss making sure you allow for the things the other person might want to talk about as well.
- Don't be afraid to ask to ask if you're feeling unsure, there is no such thing as a silly question. Chances are that the other person has things they're not sure about either, and it might make the difference between reaching a resolution and not.
- If necessary, take some time to get some professional legal advice. Don't make decisions under pressure, these tend not to work, or they get undone at the last minute.
- Think about and inform the facilitator about what, if any, more specific and personal principles not listed above that you may want added to this list.
- Keep going. It is probably not going to be easy, but it is usually a cost effective and quicker way of resolving things. Hopefully you will end the process having a better understanding of each other, and if applicable will be better able to co-parent any children that you have.