



4. Is mediation only for custody matters?

No, mediation is also permissible for divorce and support matters, with the agreement of both parties.

5. Do I need to bring my attorney to mediation?

Attorney participation in mediation is not required as the goal of mediation is to encourage the parties to resolve their issues themselves in an informal manner.

6. Should I bring anyone to the mediation session?

It is not necessary to bring anyone along with you. Mediation is not a time for taking testimony nor for presenting evidence. It is a time for private discussions.

7. What if we don't reach an agreement in the orientation session?

You may continue in mediation with the assigned mediator. You can make arrangements directly with that mediator for further sessions. If you want to continue mediating, but with a different mediator, you may ask your assigned mediator for the Roster of Court Approved Mediators and you may contact a mediator from the list to arrange for additional sessions. It will be your responsibility to pay the mediator directly, in accordance with his or her hourly rate. The fees you paid at the time of filing do not cover these additional sessions. You can request that your Conciliation

Conference be continued to give you more time to try to mediate an agreement.

8. What if it looks like we won't be able to reach an agreement?

The parties will then attend the Conciliation Conference that has already been scheduled for them. The Custody Master, who is an attorney, will try to conciliate an agreement. If the parties are unable to do this, the Master will submit a recommendation to the assigned judge.

9. Do you have daycare available?

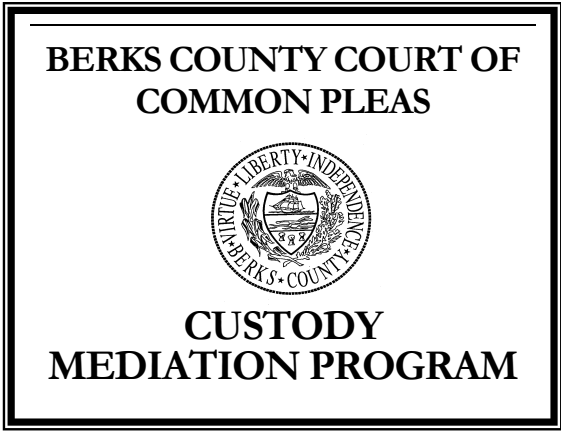
There are no babysitting services available at the Courthouse. You are asked not to bring children with you.

10. Do you have security?

The Mediation Orientation Sessions are held on the first floor of the Courthouse in Hearing Rooms 1A and 1B, to the right of, and directly adjacent to, the security entrance of the Courthouse, where security guards are on duty at all times.

* If you are using the Parking Garage across from the Courthouse, it will only take quarters (8) \$2.00 on Saturdays. (no bills)

Who do I contact if I have any special needs, problems or questions? Call the Family Court Administrator's Office, at (610) 478-6208 ext. 5772 between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. and ask to speak to the Mediation Coordinator. For directions you can also visit the Berks County website @



WHAT ARE THE CUSTODY PROCEDURES?

As of January 3, 2005, the procedures to address custody, partial custody, and custody modification requests have been changed to comply with the revised **Berks County Local Rules**. There is now a three-step process involved:

* It is mandatory for the parents and/or legal caretakers to attend an **Adult Education Seminar** as the first step in understanding co-parenting issues relating to their child(ren). After completing the seminar, make sure you keep your Certificate of Attendance to prove that you completed the program * Upon completion of the education seminar, all parents and/or legal caretakers **MUST ATTEND** one **Mediation Orientation Session**, and may then proceed with voluntary mediation.

* If the parties are unable to resolve their issues in mediation, they will appear for a **Conciliation Conference**.

When you file your complaint for custody, you will be scheduled to attend the **“Children in the Middle”** education seminar followed by a **MANDATORY** Mediation Orientation session and a Conciliation Conference.

- If you need an interpreter, contact the Mediation Coordinator at 610-478-6208 ext. 5772.
- Si necesitas un intérprete, contacte la Coordinadora de Mediación al 610-478-6208 ext. 5772

“CHILDREN IN THE MIDDLE”

This Parenting Class is a 3-hour video based presentation required for all parties participating in a Custody action. Each party must pay the required fee to the Family Guidance Center in advance and attends the Parenting Class separately, held at the Family Guidance Center, 1235 Penn Avenue, Suites 205-206, Wyomissing, PA 19610. Upon completion of the class, you are required to file your certificate of attendance with the Prothonotary’s Office on the 2nd Floor of the Courthouse. If, for any reason, you need to reschedule the class, you must call the Family Guidance Center at 610-374-4963.



ATTORNEYS & MEDIATION

It is recommended that you seek legal advice to understand your legal rights prior to mediation. If you do not have an attorney, contact **THE BERKS COUNTY BAR ASSOCIATION, 544-546 Court Street, Reading PA. 19603 (610) 375-4591**, and advise that this is for a case regarding custody. If an understanding is reached, the parties may consult with an attorney to prepare a parenting plan consistent with an order of court.

MEDIATION ORIENTATION SESSION

MANDATORY Orientation Sessions are held in Hearing Rooms 1A or 1B on the First Floor of the Berks County Courthouse, 633 Court Street, Reading, PA 19601. (Court Street Entrance)

The Orientation Session gives parents and/or caretakers an opportunity to meet with a trained mediator to address issues related to meeting their child(ren)’s needs. Children do not participate in mediation.

The parties will meet with the assigned mediator for one and a half hours to undergo a screening process to determine if mediation is right for them, to learn what mediation has to offer, and to proceed in mediation if the parties agree and time permits. They can then choose to continue in mediation if they have not reached an agreement.

MEDIATION

The goal of mediation is for parents to create their own parenting plan (called a **Memorandum of Understanding**). Mediation is not therapy. The mediator will not offer legal advice. The mediation process encourages adults to work together and to be responsible for their own parenting decisions,

as an alternative to litigation through the court system.

Mediation is confidential. Mediators are often members of the legal or mental health fields with advanced degrees, in addition to having basic and ongoing advanced training in mediation. The discussions during mediation can neither be recorded nor copied. The mediator cannot be required to testify in court. The mediator may not act as your attorney.

Common Questions

1. If I don’t have an attorney, where can I go to find out more about mediation?

The Law Library on the tenth floor of the Courthouse has a Program Instruction Package available that may be copied for a small charge per page. This information will take you step-by-step through the procedures you must follow under the new program.

2. What if I have been a victim of domestic violence and do not want to mediate?

The Program Instruction Package will inform you of what you need to do in this situation. The necessary forms you will need are also available in the Law Library.

3. How do I prepare for mediation?

You may choose to seek legal advice to understand your rights and how the decision you reach in mediation might affect your rights in your divorce and support cases, if any. You may give considerable reflection to the best interests of your child(ren) and how those interests could be met through cooperative co-parenting.