

## 5 Tips to Make Sure Mediation is Working for You & Your Family

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Many separating parents who choose mediation instead of court do so out of concern for their children. Perhaps their own parents had a nasty divorce and their motivation is to protect their children from a similar experience. Or, the reason may be as straightforward as “I want my kids to be OK”.

Unfortunately, children can be harmed despite good intentions. Here are some tips for you and your family as you go through the separation and mediation process.

### Tip #1

**Keep your focus on the children.** Let their well being come first. When you feel angry, fatigued, frightened or resentful, remind yourself that you are the adult and you have a responsibility for your children’s well being.

### Tip #2

**Do not criticize their other parent in front of them or in their hearing. This includes your facial expressions – you can convey a lot of emotion without saying a word.** Keep your children out of the middle. It is not divorce that harms children; it is being exposed to conflict. Remember, you may no longer love your former spouse, however, your children want and need the love of both their parents.

### Tip #3

**Work with your spouse and the mediator, or with a therapist who understands child development, to create a plan to follow when you tell your children about your separation.** When parents tell their children together that they are separating it is tremendously beneficial. Naturally, neither parent is blamed for the separation.

### Tip #4

**Do not allow yourself to be caught up in the role of victim.** This is unhealthy for you and worse for your children. Being a victim may get you attention from your extended family and friends for the short term, however, it delays your healing journey. And, as I said before, children need to give and receive love from both their parents. Leaving the victim role behind is tough. There are some great books and awesome therapists who can help.

## Tip #5

You will be tempted to buy extra things for your children and take them out more. I call this “**sugar daddy behavior**”. It won’t feel genuine to your children. It will create more mistrust between you and your former spouse. It will cost you money at a time when most people need to be careful about spending. Instead, continue with your usual parenting responsibilities. This reassures your children; “Some things are changing but my parents are still my parents”.

## Bonus Tip for Grandparents

Of course, you love your son or daughter and it hurts to watch them go through separation and divorce. You are legitimately angry. **Keep it to yourself!** I can’t stress this enough. Your adult child needs love and support from you so that they can figure out how best to settle all the details around maintenance, parenting and property. Mediation is confidential. They can’t tell you what is happening at mediation, and frankly, it is none of your business. Your grandchildren need to be treated respectfully. The worst thing you can do is to be critical of either of their parents. The best thing you can do is to be loving, open and supportive.

These are a few suggestions that I know help families as they separate and move through the mediation process. It is a stressful and emotional time. Fortunately there are things you can do and choices you can make that minimize these uncomfortable emotions.

*Deb Zutter is a divorce mediator and collaborative lawyer with over 30 years of experience. Her newest book, **Divorce Mediation: What You Need to Know** is an ebook that is available online at:*

<http://www.debzutter.com/index.php?mpage=shop&ptype=book&pid=6>