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## Mediator offers neutral opinion during divorce

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A news release crossed my desk last week saying that many couples separate at the end of the school year.

Well, that got my attention so I read on and soon found myself immersed in an e-book on mediation.

Divorce is a lengthy, complex and challenging process. From the time that one of the partners announces that he or she wants out of the marriage there are a myriad of decisions. At the same time each of the partners is dealing with the emotional impact of the situation.

Typically, no two spouses reach the decision to separate at the same time. However, our laws permit one person to unilaterally end the marriage. Each spouse is likely to have a different emotional response and need varying amount of time to process the experience.

But, there are an overwhelming number of considerations. Fairly quickly you will have to develop interim parenting plans and financial and living arrangements. Then you can take some time to adjust and prepare for a more permanent arrangement.

The first question is how. The e-book is titled *Divorce Mediation, What You Need to Know*, and right off the top has a checklist to help you determine if mediation is the appropriate way to go.

According to author Deborah Lynn Zutter, mediation is a process that involves one or more meetings with a mediator. It may focus on the relationships, on the settlement or planning the outcome for the new living arrangements.

Mediation is a voluntary process. The mediator is a facilitator, guiding the process. The mediator is unbiased and neutral and her role is to help you reach the best solution for all family members.

If you are going through a separation or divorce and are overwhelmed by the considerations, this book is a good place to start. In plain language Zutter covers all the tasks facing you and makes sense of it all. Even if you don't choose mediation, the book is still a great resource for laying out the process.

It doesn't happen overnight. Zutter makes it clear that readiness is the big issue and varies from person to person. Bottom-line, separation and divorce are difficult and you can't make good decisions without some help.

Interestingly, as I mentioned at the start of this article, many separations happen at

the end of the school year. The goal is to deal with all the considerations over the summer and be organized in September, when the kids go back to school. However, Zutter is clear that reaching a permanent solution that quickly is not realistic.

When I saw that, I thought of the research that shows the important role that schools play for children during the divorce process. As I have pointed out to educators at professional development sessions, the school often plays a primary role for children during this process.

Things at home are in flux as the parents adjust to their new reality but school stays stable and predictable. So, for the sake of the children it is easier to make changes during the school year.

When I asked Zutter about the role of children in mediation, she told me that they don't join their parents and the mediator at their meetings because the power imbalance between the adults and children is too large. Also, children will often say what they believe their parents want to hear because they want to please them.

However, a mediator or a mental health professional may be called in to interview them. This is confidential and only what the child wants the parents to hear will be brought to the mediation table.

Zutter noted that the children are often the source of the best solutions to the challenges facing the family, and their input is valuable.

For more information on this e-book go to [www.debzutter.com](http://www.debzutter.com).

Kathy Lynn is a professional speaker, broadcaster, columnist and author of *Who's In Charge Anyway? How Parents Can Teach Children to Do the Right Thing*. For information, go to her website at [www.ParentingToday.ca](http://www.ParentingToday.ca).

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