

Louisiana State Bar Association
Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Section
School Outreach Program for National Mediation Week

A “mediator” is someone who tries to help others who are arguing or fighting to resolve their problem without taking sides.

Why would it be important to be a mediator?

God calls us to do all we can to “live at peace with everyone” (Rom. 12:18), and to obey the 2nd Commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39). Remember that, in the Bible, God is frequently referred to as “the God of peace” (Rom. 15:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; Heb. 13:20) and Jesus is called “the Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). In fact, Jesus is the supreme “peacemaker” because he sacrificed his life so that we could experience peace with God and with each other. {from The Peacemaker by Ken Sande}.

OLD LADY/YOUNG LADY PICTURE

- Is it possible that two people could see different things in the picture, and they might both be “right”?
- Why do you think we shared the picture with you?
- Why would it be important for you, when you want to solve a problem, to remember the “Old Lady/Young Lady” picture?

Two people can look at a situation and see completely different things. This is how a lot of conflicts start. As mediators, we work especially hard to make sure that each side understands the other. What do you think is the best way to do this? We have to be really good listeners – and it is not always as easy as it sounds.

SPACE INVADER

- Even the best listeners don’t always remember everything what was said.
- We should never take listening for granted.
- It is important to be sure we understand the details of what we hear and that we obtain correct information.

The importance of this exercise is that when you want to solve a problem with another person, you need to listen very carefully so that you can understand their point of view, and you can work out a fair agreement.

ACTIVE LISTENING

- BAD Listening is exhibited by the following behaviors:
 - Making no eye contact, showing no interest, yawning, and interrupting.
 - Texting someone while they are talking to you.
 - Asking “yes/no” questions - usually start with “do”, “does”, “did”, “was”. (i.e. Did you like the movie? Was the star good? Do you like to eat popcorn at the movies?).

- GOOD “ACTIVE” Listening is exhibited by the following behaviors:
 - Making eye contact, nodding, looking interested, restating (paraphrasing the speaker’s comments) and not interrupting.
 - Asking “open-ended” questions (Questions that cannot be answered with “yes” or “no” answers. For example, “What did you like best about the move?”, “Tell me more about . . .”, and beginning with the “Report’s Question”: who, what, when, why, where, and how . . .
 - Why are “open-ended” questions important? Because they give you more information.
 - Understanding people and problem-solving depends on “active listening”.

- ACTIVE LISTENING:
 - Validates the speaker and encourages open communication.
 - Creates an atmosphere in which people feel comfortable speaking.
 - Builds trust.
 - Helps encourage the speaker to be more open and to more fully discuss a topic.
 - Helps build a positive relationship between people who need to work together.

THE PLANET GAME

- When people are different from each other, there may be obstacles to communication that you might not realize.
- When we become aware of how our own culture shapes our expectations, we can begin to be more accepting of others who are different. As long as we think that the way we do things is the “right” way, it is hard to accept others who are different from ourselves.
- When we encounter people who are different from us, some people make judgments (positive and negative) which may interfere with communication.
- If people from other cultures do things differently from us, it doesn’t mean they are weird or strange. It simply means that their culture is different from ours and that people behave differently.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:

So the things we talked about today (trying to understand the point of view of all sides, exercising active listening, and being aware of cultural differences) are the foundation for resolving any dispute, and may keep you out of an argument to begin with. Share these teaching points and your experience with your family as well, and become a “Peacemaker”.

Remember Jesus’ words in his Sermon on the Mount:

“Blessed be the Peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons (and daughters) of God!”