

# Family Breakdown – Is Mediation the Solution?

**D**ealing with separation and family breakdown is one of the most challenging life events a family can face. In answer to the pressing need for a more positive approach, a group of Irish solicitors have joined together to form Family Lawyer Mediation, the first Irish solicitors to be trained as specialist Family Law Mediators.

Brid Manifold, Family Lawyer Mediation member, and a family law solicitor in Galway city, says “We know from experience that the Family Law system is not structured to address the emotional complexity of issues which can arise in family cases. We realised we had to offer couples an alternative, which led us to this form of mediation”

Family Law Mediation consists of a couple working together in face to face meetings, guided by a mediator, who does not take sides and ensures that the discussions are balanced. More and more couples are finding that Mediation creates a climate in which neither party dominates, and where the future well being of the whole family and most especially the childrens’ needs, are placed to the fore of all discussions.

Fear of legal costs can be a barrier to couples resolving their legal situation. In the Mediation process, cost is greatly reduced. The couple share the cost of the Solicitor Mediator. All of the work is done in face to face meetings, so couples directly control the pace and cost of the process. The elimination of correspondence, time lost in court, and the simplification of the financial disclosure process, all save families money.

Mary Emer Larkin, family law solicitor, who practices in Gort and is also a member of Family Lawyer Mediation, says that, as Family Law mediators are well-versed in both law and mediation, they are perfectly positioned to guide couples through this transition. For Mediation to be recognised as a comparable alternative to the traditional court case, the mediator should ideally be experienced in family law.

“People have enormous difficulties at this time of their lives – disappointment, anger, resentment. It helps to have a strict structure when mediating, as you get with Family Law Mediation. We help people to think outside the box, encouraging couples to express what they want and to manage their conflict. Family Law Mediation is not a soft approach. It deals comprehensively with all the issues, including financial, that a family break-up presents” says Mary.

Brid continues, “For us, it is more rewarding work than traditional family law negotiation. In mediation, we encourage couples to negotiate directly with each other. In the less formal



Brid Manifold & Mary Emer Larkin

and confidential setting of Mediation, couples exchange financial and other information more easily and usually find many flexible solutions to apparently irreconcilable issues.”

The introduction of Family Lawyer Mediation to Ireland is a most progressive development, which produces individually tailored agreements that can stand the test of time, which spares couples the trauma of the court experience, and allows a couple to leave the relationship with their dignity, privacy and finances intact.

To find a Family Lawyer Mediator in your locality log onto [www.familylawyermediation.ie](http://www.familylawyermediation.ie) or contact

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