



CAPE FEAR FAMILY LAW

WHAT TO BRING TO MEDIATION

The North Carolina Mediation Day Checklist

You have a date on the calendar and a knot in your stomach. That is normal, and it is not a reason to walk in unprepared.

Mediation is not a hearing. Nobody is going to cross-examine you. But it is the day a great many North Carolina families actually decide how the rest of this is going to go — and the people who walk out with an agreement they can live with are almost always the people who did the work the week before.

Use this like a working document.

This checklist covers three things: what to bring, what to decide before you get there, and what to do about your kids that day. Print it. Check the boxes. Bring it with you.

Two Kinds of Mediation, One Checklist

Custody mediation

Custody mediation is about your children — the schedule, the holidays, the exchanges, the decisions.

Financial mediation

Financial mediation is about property, debt, and support.

Some families do both, sometimes on the same day. Work through every section that applies to you. If your mediation involves money, also download our Financial Mediation Preparation Worksheet — it is built to be completed with your attorney and it goes deeper than this checklist does.

Financial Mediation Preparation Worksheet

Start Two Weeks Out

- ☐ Confirm the date, the start time, the address, and the parking situation. Confirm whether it is in person or remote.
- ☐ Confirm who will be in the room: you, the mediator, the other party, and — depending on the type of mediation — the attorneys.
- ☐ Ask how long to plan for, then plan for longer. Block the entire day.
- ☐ Arrange childcare, and arrange a backup for the childcare. See the Kid Kit section.
- ☐ Tell your employer you are unavailable. Do not schedule a call at noon "just in case."
- ☐ Start gathering documents now, not the night before.
- ☐ If you have an attorney, schedule your prep meeting for the week before — not the morning of.

What to Bring: Documents

BRING THESE TO ANY MEDIATION

- ☐ Photo ID
- ☐ Your case number and the county your case is filed in
- ☐ Any existing court order, consent order, or signed agreement
- ☐ Any pending motions or filings
- ☐ Your attorney's name and direct cell number, written down somewhere that is not your phone
- ☐ A notepad and two pens
- ☐ This checklist, filled in

IF YOUR MEDIATION INVOLVES CUSTODY

- ☐ The current schedule as it actually happens — not as the order says it happens. Write down the real one.
- ☐ The school calendar for the full year, including teacher workdays, early release days, and any tracked-out or year-round calendar
- ☐ The activity calendar: practices, games, lessons, recitals, therapy, standing appointments
- ☐ Both parents' work schedules for the next twelve months, including shift changes, on-call weeks, travel, and deployment
- ☐ A one-paragraph summary of each child's medical needs, medications, allergies, and providers
- ☐ A one-paragraph summary of each child's school situation, including any IEP, 504 plan, evaluation, or services
- ☐ Your holiday priorities, ranked. Actually rank them — first, second, third — do not walk in saying "all of them."
- ☐ The transportation reality: who drives, how far, how long, and what happens when someone works late
- ☐ Childcare arrangements and who currently pays for them
- ☐ Anything already agreed to in writing, even by text — bring it

IF YOUR MEDIATION INVOLVES MONEY

Use the Financial Mediation Preparation Worksheet for the full document list and the valuation and authority worksheets. At minimum, bring:

- ☐ Recent pay statements for both parties, if you have them
- ☐ Your most recent tax return with all schedules
- ☐ A current list of accounts, debts, and real property
- ☐ Any appraisal, valuation, or account statement you are relying on
- ☐ Your monthly budget — what actually goes out, not what you wish went out

Bring the Statement, Not the Story

The single most common preparation mistake is arriving with a narrative and no paper. "He never picks them up on time" is a story. Six months of exchange messages with timestamps is a document. Stories get argued with. Documents get worked around.

What to Decide Before You Walk In

Write your answers down. In the room, under pressure, with the other parent forty feet away, you will not think as clearly as you are thinking right now. Your written answers are there to protect you from your worst ten minutes of the day.

THE FOUR QUESTIONS

1. What does a good day look like for my child a year from now?

2. What am I asking for that is actually about the other parent, and not about my child?

Everyone has one. Naming it in advance is what keeps it from costing you something you actually wanted.

3. What are my three non-negotiables?

4. What am I genuinely willing to trade?

Before You Sign Anything

- ☐ Know who you are calling before you agree to something outside what you planned — and have that person's number and their availability that day
- ☐ Know what happens to whatever gets signed. Ask the mediator, and ask your own attorney, what becomes binding and when
- ☐ If you do not understand a term, say so out loud. Every time. Nobody in that room will think less of you and it is far cheaper than finding out in six months

What to Leave at Home

- ☐ New evidence you are planning to spring on them. Mediation is not an ambush and it does not reward one
- ☐ Your new partner, unless the mediator has specifically approved it in advance
- ☐ Your mother, your best friend, and anyone else who has been told the whole story and has opinions about it
- ☐ Screenshots you have not read in six months. Read them first
- ☐ The expectation of an apology. You are not going to get one, and organizing your day around it will cost you

What to Wear

Clean, comfortable, and something you can sit in for six hours. You are not performing for a jury. You are also not making a point — leave the message T-shirt at home. Bring a sweater; these rooms are always freezing.

THE MEDIATION DAY

KID KIT

Plan for your child to be somewhere else that day. Custody mediation is a conversation between the adults, and it is not a place a child should spend an afternoon.

And then plan for the day to go sideways anyway. The sitter cancels at 7 a.m. School calls at eleven. A session that was supposed to run two hours runs six. Real families end up in real hallways with real seven-year-olds, and the parents who thought about it in advance handle it better than the ones who did not.

The go-bag: quiet, no mess, nothing that beeps

Pack items that can keep a child occupied without adding noise or cleanup to an already long day.

THE GO-BAG

- ☐ Word search and crossword books
- ☐ Activity books with mazes, dot-to-dots, and hidden pictures
- ☐ Sticker books and reusable sticker scenes
- ☐ Mad Libs for older kids
- ☐ Colored pencils in a zip pouch — never markers
- ☐ A small blank notebook
- ☐ Wikki Stix or pipe cleaners
- ☐ A magnetic drawing board
- ☐ A deck of cards and a travel-size card game
- ☐ A beading kit or rubber-band bracelet loom
- ☐ A small LEGO or magnetic-tile set, in a sealed bag so nothing hits the floor
- ☐ Fidget putty or a fidget cube
- ☐ One comfort item — the blanket, the stuffed animal, the specific one, not a substitute
- ☐ Over-ear headphones, plus a splitter if there are two kids
- ☐ A tablet, fully charged, with everything downloaded in advance — courthouse and office wifi will fail you — plus the charger and a battery pack
- ☐ A paperback or a graphic novel
- ☐ An audiobook, downloaded for offline listening

SNACKS AND LOGISTICS

- ☐ Water bottle, already filled
- ☐ Quiet snacks — nothing crunchy, nothing that crumbles, nothing that stains
- ☐ Wipes
- ☐ A full change of clothes for anyone under six
- ☐ Any medication, with the dosing written down
- ☐ Insurance card

Pack for Yourself, Too

A regulated parent negotiates better than a rattled one. This is not indulgence, it is strategy.

- ☐ Water and actual food — not just coffee
- ☐ A sweater
- ☐ Printed copies of your notes and this checklist
- ☐ Cash for parking
- ☐ Your phone on silent. Not vibrate — silent
- ☐ Someone to call afterward who is not going to ask you to relive all of it

Caregiver Handoff Sheet

Fill this in and hand it to whoever is keeping your child. Most parents never think to do this, and it is the single most useful page in this document.

Child's name(s) _____
Date of care _____
Drop-off time _____
Expected pickup _____
My cell _____
Second number that reaches me _____
My attorney's name and cell _____
Mediator's office / courthouse main number _____
Other parent's cell (if appropriate) _____
Allergies _____
Medications and dosing times _____
Pediatrician name and number _____
Insurance information _____
Authorized to pick up my child today _____
NOT authorized to pick up my child today _____

Note: mediation regularly runs long.

Tell your caregiver that up front.

Give Your Caregiver a Script

Children ask where you are. Decide now what you want the answer to be, write it here, and tell your caregiver to use those words.

If my child asks where I am, please say _____

A suggestion, if you need one: "Your mom is at a meeting about grown-up things. She'll be back this afternoon and she'll call you at lunch." Short, true, and it does not hand a child anything to carry.

Anything else the caregiver should know: _____

Before You Go

IF THERE HAS BEEN ABUSE OR YOU ARE AFRAID

Immediate danger

If you or your child are in immediate danger, call 911.

National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233, available 24 hours a day.

You do not have to sit across a table from someone who has hurt you and pretend it is fine. Tell your attorney before mediation day, not during it. There are protections available — separate rooms, remote participation, staggered arrival and departure, and in some circumstances a request that mediation not go forward at all. Those protections work best when they are arranged in advance.

If you do not have an attorney, tell the mediator's office when you confirm the date. Say the words out loud. It is their job to hear them.

One Last Thing

Mediation is not surrender, and agreeing to something is not losing. The parents who do best in that room are not the ones who fight hardest — they are the ones who know exactly what matters to them, brought the paper to prove it, and decided in advance what they were willing to trade to get it.

You have that list now. Go use it.

How Cape Fear Family Law Can Help

There are two different ways we work in mediation, and they are not the same thing.

BOOK US AS YOUR MEDIATOR

We serve as the neutral. We do not represent either side and we do not take a position on the outcome. Both parties book together.

BRING US WITH YOU

If someone else is the mediator, we are in the room on your side — preparing the file, running the numbers, setting your walk-away line, and reading anything before you sign it.

SCHEDULE A CONFIDENTIAL CONSULTATION

Not sure which one you need? Schedule a confidential consultation and we will tell you straight.

LEGAL DISCLAIMER

No Attorney-Client Relationship: Downloading or reading this checklist does not create an attorney-client relationship with Cape Fear Family Law. That relationship is formed only when both parties sign a written engagement agreement.

Information, Not Advice: This checklist is provided for general informational purposes only and is not legal advice. Mediation procedure in North Carolina varies by case type and by county, and the right preparation depends on the specific facts of your matter.

No Guarantee of Results: Past results do not guarantee future outcomes.

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