

# FACILITATED FAMILY MEETINGS

## SHARED DECISION MAKING THROUGH MEDIATION

A private alternative to court proceedings to help meet the needs of aging adults and family caregivers through shared decision making.

### What is mediation?

- A mediator listens to the parties explain their concerns and helps them develop and agree upon a workable and mutually acceptable solution.
- A mediator is not a judge and does not make decisions; the parties make the decisions.

### Why families use mediation?

- It is private and confidential
- It allows parties to hear and discuss each other's side of the story.
- In mediation, participants take responsibility and control over the issues and solutions.
- It encourages creative problem solving within the private family gathering.
- Mediation helps families balance an older person's desire for control over basic life decisions with their need for assistance.
- Mediation improves the likelihood of success because the parties design their own agreement.

### Common issues

- Health/medical care decisions
- Financial decisions
- Living arrangements
- Family relationship and communication issues
- Respite care and support for caregivers
- Personal, household care and maintenance
- Safety/risk-taking/autonomy
- Discharge or transitional plans from hospitals or nursing homes
- Less restrictive alternatives to a guardianship or conservatorship

For more information, contact

The Iowa Association of Mediators, <http://www.iamediators.org/pg1057.cfm>

Or

The Iowa Department on Aging, [www.iowaaging.gov](http://www.iowaaging.gov)

Or

Your local Area Agency on Aging, [www.i4a.org](http://www.i4a.org)

## **A snapshot of mediation (shared decision making)**

Robert Jones is concerned that his sister, Linda Smith, a single working mother, is not giving their mother, Mary Jones, the care she needs and is wasting her assets. Mary Jones has lived in Linda's home for a year.

### **Take One - without Mediation**

Robert and Linda become embattled and more mistrustful of one another. Whenever they try to discuss the situation, their conversations end in anger and accusations. Mary becomes upset when she hears her children talking in raised voices and sounding like they are making decisions about her life. She feels she is a burden and has told her children to stop worrying about her. She does not want to express her concerns for fear the situation will escalate and that Robert will think she's not getting good care and Linda will think she's not grateful for sharing Linda's home. Mary realizes she cannot live on her own and worries that Linda will "give up" if the situation becomes worse and that she will have to move into an adult care home, which she does not want. Robert believes Linda has manipulated their mother to side with Linda. They have reached an impasse and are unable to communicate. Robert has considered filing for guardianship of his mother.

### **Take Two - with Mediation**

The parties meet with a mediator who helps them identify needs and issues. They recognize that Mary enjoys living with Linda and being close to her grandchildren, but she is lonely while Linda is at work. They acknowledge that Mary is confused about her finances and Robert is willing to help. With the mediator's help, they agree that Mary will continue to live with Linda; Robert will help Mary with her bills, and Mary will attend a senior center during the week. They agree to meet in three months to review the situation. The parties end up understanding and respecting each other's concerns, even where they do not agree. Their family relationship stays in tact and they have found solutions that work for them without the expense and loss of privacy of going to court.

