

OCTOBER NEWSLETTER

Conflict Resolution Month

(A LETTER FROM OUR MEDIATION DIRECTOR)



People make sense of conflict by referring to shared norms. For example, children in conflict over a toy inevitably talk about who is at fault: "I had the right of ownership over the toy (mine!)." Or, "You were using the toy improperly and for too long." Or, "Even if you had a right to borrow the toy, the way you took the toy was wrong – you didn't ask me and you snatched it away." Such norms come from participating in a social group and, when communicated well and built on consensus, these norms set expectations for behavior. They are important for communication too, sometimes an individual may want to break a norm on purpose to send a message to others in the group. If parties understand conflict with reference to norms, then it is hard to see how a resolution will last unless it also touches on norms.

This raises the question, can mediation be both non judgmental and engaged with norms? I think the answer is yes, but it is not easy. In an ideal scenario, the mediation is an intervention that takes place against a backdrop of shared norms. The mediator does very little normative work but piggy-backs on other norm-generating institutions; like the law, the workplace, or the family. When parties talk about their underlying needs, such as respect or better communication, the assumption is that respect is valuable and communication is good. If a party identifies a need that is not acceptable, like a need to commit violence, the mediator might look to anchor the discussion in a different need that fits with shared norms, like the need to be heard and to have an impact on decision-making. (Or the mediator might end the mediation!)

Even without a strong backdrop of shared norms, mediators can invoke the higher norm of peaceful and harmonious living. In many traditional forms of conflict resolution, the goal is restorative – restore the individual back into the group and the group back to coherence and peace. Sometimes magic happens in mediation, and finger pointing about past events shifts to a discussion about specific things that can be done by each party into the future. Mediators might think of this as being "future focused" and "addressing both parties' needs," but it is also about the higher norm of restoring the community to a state of peace with itself and belonging for all of its members.

(written by James Krueger)



UPCOMING EVENTS

OCTOBER 13-15 | ADVANCED MEDIATION TRAINING

OCTOBER 17 | MOCKTALES

OCTOBER 19 | NMC OPEN HOUSE !!!

OCTOBER 2, 19, 21 & 24TH | SHARING THE CHILDREN



Our mission is to foster, provide, and teach peaceful problem solving.