Superior Court of California, County of Lassen

Family Court Services

Information Packet

Required orientation for parents attending Mediation (Child Custody Recommending Counseling)

www.Lassen.Courts.CA.gov

Revised November 2026

About This Packet

Both parents must review this packet before their Mediation (CCRC) appointment. It explains what Mediation is, how to prepare, the rules that apply, and what happens afterward. When you finish, sign and submit the **Certificate of Completion**, which covers both the orientation video and this packet.



1. Getting Started

What Mediation (CCRC) is and how to prepare



2. Your Mediation Session

What to expect, ground rules, and confidentiality



3. Focusing on Your Children

How separation affects children and how custody is decided



4. Safety and Domestic Violence

Separate sessions, support persons, and the law



5. Agreements and Recommendations

What happens with or without an agreement



6. After Mediation

Co-parenting, changes, complaints, and resources

SECTION 1

Getting Started

What Mediation (CCRC) is and how to prepare for your appointment



What Is Mediation (CCRC)?

When parents cannot agree on custody or a parenting plan, the court refers them to Mediation, also called Child Custody Recommending Counseling (CCRC), before or at the court hearing.



A neutral professional helps you

A Mediator/Child Custody Recommending Counselor helps both parents build a parenting plan that protects the child's health, safety, welfare, and best interest.



A recommendation if you don't agree

If parents don't reach a full agreement, the Mediator makes a recommendation to the judge on the issues still in dispute.



The judge makes the final decision

The Mediator's recommendation is not a court order. The judge decides the parenting plan.

Family Code § 3170; Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(A), (C)

Two Kinds of Mediation

Mandatory Mediation (CCRC)

When there is a pending family law case

- Required when custody or visitation is disputed in a court case.
- Scheduled after a Request for Order is filed and served, or the judge may refer you at your hearing.
- If parents don't reach a full agreement, the Mediator makes a recommendation to the court.

Voluntary Mediation

When there is no pending case

- Offered when the Mediator's calendar allows, once both parents have submitted intake packets and completed orientation.
- **Available once per year.**
- For changes within a year of your voluntary mediation date, you must file paperwork to have your case placed on calendar for judicial review.
- If parents don't reach a complete agreement, the Mediator makes a recommendation to the court on unresolved topics.

Family Code § 3170; Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(A)–(C)

Who Is the Mediator?



Mediator/Child Custody Recommending Counselor

A professional with education and training in child development and family systems

Neutral

The Mediator does not take sides or represent either parent.

Focused on communication

The Mediator creates a setting where parents can talk more effectively about future parenting arrangements.

Focused on your child

The Mediator helps parents work out what is in their child's best interest.

Not counseling or legal advice

Although Mediators are experienced in counseling, Mediation is not counseling, and the Mediator cannot give legal advice.

Scheduling Mandatory Mediation

1

Complete your Request for Order

Fill out item 2 on form FL-300, Request for Order.

2

File and serve

File your Request for Order packet with the Clerk's Office, then have the other party served on time.

3

Provide your Proof of Service

Give the court a copy of your Proof of Service. An appointment cannot be scheduled until the court has it.

4

Contact Family Court Services

Call to schedule your Mediation appointment.



If Mediation is not scheduled before your court date, the judge may refer you to Mediation at your court appearance.

Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(C)

Before Your Appointment: Checklist for Both Parents

Submit the Intake Packet

Each parent completes and submits their own Intake Packet, online (eForm) or by PDF.

Complete the online orientation

Watch the orientation video and review this packet, then submit one Certificate of Completion covering both.

Confirm your attendance

Both parents must confirm with Family Court Services at least two court days before the appointment, or it will be canceled.

Arrive on time

Both parents must arrive on time. If you arrive late, your appointment may be canceled.

No internet access? You can complete the Intake Packet and orientation on the public computers in the Access to Justice Center – Self-Help area of the Hall of Justice.

The Mediation Intake Packet

The Intake Packet gives the Mediator background information about what will be discussed. Each parent must complete and submit their own packet before the appointment. It includes:



Child Custody Recommending Counseling (CCRC)/Mediation Questionnaire



Authorization for Release of Information



Consent to Telephone or Video Conference CCRC



Informed Consent to Use Text and Email Communication That Includes the Other Parent



Where to find it: www.Lassen.Courts.CA.gov → Divisions → Family Law → Family Court Services → Mediation Intake Packet (online eForm or printable PDF)

Attendance, Cancellations, and Sanctions

It's a court date

The court sets your appointment. Both parents are required to attend on time.

Missing your appointment

Failing to attend may result in a $100 sanction on the absent parent.

Agreed before the appointment?

Both parents must contact Family Court Services at least 48 hours ahead to cancel, or each may be sanctioned $100.

Emergencies

Contact Family Court Services and the other parent by 4:00 PM the day before, explain, and ask to reschedule.

Confirm two court days ahead

If both parents have not confirmed at least two court days before, the appointment will be canceled.

Running late

Arrive on time. If you arrive late, your appointment may be canceled. The judge is notified in writing of cancellations, no-shows, and late arrivals.

Sanctions must be paid before another appointment is scheduled. Fee waivers do not apply to sanctions.

Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(M); Family Court Services policy

SECTION 2

Your Mediation Session

What to expect, how to prepare, and the ground rules



What to Expect

1½–2½

hours

A typical session, depending on how complex the case is

1+

sessions

Mediation may take more than one session

Remote

with the Mediator

Mediation is currently being conducted remotely



Parents may be given the option to attend remotely or from the Hall of Justice, where you will meet with your Mediator remotely. The consent form for telephone or video sessions is part of the Intake Packet.



Do not bring your children unless the Mediator asks you to or the judge orders it. If children need to be interviewed, that is scheduled separately. Childcare is not provided at the Hall of Justice.



Write down any questions you have about this packet and bring them to your appointment.

Benefits of Mediation



Healthier communication

Mediation encourages healthy communication between parents.



You stay in control

Parents shape a parenting plan that keeps both actively involved in their children's lives.



Shared goals

Parents identify shared goals and work together to resolve conflicts for their children's benefit.



A fresh start

Parents find new ways to work together in the present instead of rehashing the past.

Preparing for Your Session

Before your appointment, think about:

- Your child's needs
- Your child's schedule
- Holidays and birthdays
- Vacations and travel
- Transportation
- Exchange locations
- Being realistic and flexible
- More than one possible solution
- What you might change for your child's benefit

Ground Rules for Mediation



Respect

Each parent is treated with respect and has an equal chance to explain their viewpoint and concerns.



Listen

Each parent listens to the other without interrupting and does their best to find realistic solutions.



Safety

Hitting, pushing, shoving, name-calling, and threats of any kind are not allowed. Mediation must be a safe place for both parents.



Focus on your children

Keep your focus on what your children need for healthy development, now and in the future.

Who Attends Mediation



Both parents

Both parents should attend. In domestic violence cases, separate sessions can be arranged (see Section 4).



Children

Do not bring your children unless the Mediator asks you to or the judge orders it.



Attorneys

Attorneys are not usually permitted in Mediation. If you have an attorney, documents prepared by Family Court Services will be sent to your attorney.



Relatives and others

Relatives and other people are not usually permitted. A support person may attend in some domestic violence cases (see Section 4).



Interpreters

If you need an interpreter, bring a neutral adult fluent in English and your language. A family member may interpret only if no other interpreter is available. A child of the parties may never interpret.

Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(F), (G)

Communicating with the Mediator



Generally, no private contact

The Mediator cannot discuss the substance of your case with one parent without the knowledge, presence, or consent of the other (called "ex parte" communication).

Sharing documents: Anything you give the Mediator must also be given to the other parent, with a Family Court Services Proof of Service, before the Mediator will review it.

Exceptions include contact to:

- Schedule appointments
- Address domestic violence, including telling the court a restraining order is needed to prevent imminent risk to a child or party
- Meet mandated reporting duties or the duty to warn
- Provide an interview to a child's court-appointed attorney
- Look into or disclose a conflict of interest
- Address complaints
- Anything else the court authorizes

California Rules of Court, rule 5.235; Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(J)

Is Mediation Confidential?

Yes. Mediation sessions are private and confidential, with some important limits (see next slide).



Your sessions

Mediation is held in private. What you say to the Mediator, verbally or in writing, is confidential official information under the law, and the Mediation file is confidential.



The recommendation

A written recommendation is confidential. Only the court, the parties, their attorneys, expert witnesses, and people the court specifically allows may see it.



Sharing it is prohibited

If a party shares a confidential report without permission, the court may impose a monetary sanction.



Support persons

A support person must sign a Statement of Understanding agreeing to keep Mediation confidential.

Family Code §§ 3111(d), 3177; Evidence Code § 1040; Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(F), (K)

Limits on Confidentiality

Information from Mediation may be shared in these situations:

- If parents don't fully agree, information from Mediation may be included in the Mediator's recommendation to the court.
- The Mediator may be called to testify in court.
- Mediators are mandated reporters and must report suspected child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities.
- If someone threatens violence against another person or is likely to harm themselves, the Mediator may need to warn the intended victim or law enforcement.
- If there is an imminent risk to a child or party, the Mediator may contact the judge directly.
- If the court orders a child custody evaluation, the evaluator may review the Mediation file.
- Family Court Services may share that another court case exists to coordinate hearings and services.



Also not confidential

- That Mediation took place
- The time, place, and participants of a joint session
- Whether an agreement was reached
- The contents of a signed agreement or order filed with the court

The date and time of a separate session held because of violence between the parties is confidential.

Penal Code § 11166; Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(J), (K)

SECTION 3

Focusing on Your Children

How separation affects children, their voice in the process, and how custody is decided



How Separation Affects Children



- Expect your children to have changing emotions and to show changes in their behavior during the separation process.
- Children exposed to ongoing conflict have more emotional, behavioral, social, and academic problems.

Keep it a parenting issue

Separation is an issue between the parents. Don't make it your child's problem by:

- **Speaking badly about the other parent**
- **Asking your child where they want to live**
- **Telling your child they can choose where to live**

Do Children Have a Say?

The law: If a child is old enough and mature enough to form an intelligent preference about custody or visitation, the court must consider and give due weight to the child's wishes.



Children 14 and older may address the court about custody or visitation if they wish, unless the court finds it is not in the child's best interest. Younger children may also, if the court finds it appropriate.



The Mediator may interview your child at the Mediator's discretion. If a child wishes to address the court, the Mediator will inform the judge.



Never ask your child to choose between parents. Mediation is for the parents, and children are not required to state a preference.

Family Code § 3042; Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(E)

How Custody Decisions Are Made



The child's best interest

The court considers the child's health, safety, and welfare; any history of abuse; the nature and amount of contact with each parent; and any habitual substance use.

Fam. Code § 3011



Contact with both parents

Children generally benefit from frequent and continuing contact with both parents. When this conflicts with safety, the child's health, safety, and welfare come first.

Fam. Code § 3020



No preference for mothers or fathers

The law does not prefer either parent because of their sex. What matters is each parent's ability to meet the child's needs.

Fam. Code § 3040

SECTION 4

Safety and Domestic Violence

Separate sessions, support persons, and how domestic violence affects custody



Meeting Together or Separately



Joint sessions

- Joint sessions are encouraged when it is safe.
- Parents are usually best able to design a successful parenting plan when they work together and hear each other's concerns.
- Even if it feels awkward or difficult to be in the same room, listening to each other helps both parents focus on their children's best interests.
- If you are afraid to be in the same room with the other parent, you may request a separate session.



Separate sessions

- If there is a history of domestic violence or a protective order is in effect, the Mediator will meet with the parents separately and at separate times when requested by the protected party or by a party who alleges domestic violence in a written declaration under penalty of perjury.
- The date and time of a separate session is confidential. Do not tell the other parent.
- Let Family Court Services know your wishes before your appointment.

Family Code § 3181; Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(K)(2)(c)

Support Persons

If you allege that you are a victim of domestic violence, you may bring a support person to Mediation for emotional support.



A support person must

- Be 18 or older
- Provide emotional support only
- Sign a Family Court Services Statement of Understanding agreeing to keep Mediation confidential



A support person cannot

- Be a child of either parent
- Be an attorney for either party
- Be a service provider, except a mental health provider or domestic violence advocate
- Give legal advice, act as an advocate, or disrupt the session. The Mediator may exclude a support person who does.

Family Code § 6303; Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(F)

Addressing Domestic Violence in Mediation

When domestic violence is part of a case, Mediation addresses issues such as:

1. Safety issues and safety planning
2. The impact of domestic violence on adults and children
3. The history of domestic violence in the relationship
4. The children's exposure to violence
5. Referrals to community resources



Your safety comes first

- If you are concerned about your safety, tell Family Court Services staff before your appointment.
- Discuss a safety plan with your Mediator.
- You will be offered a separate place to wait, and your address, phone number, employer, and children's school will not be shared with the other parent.

In an emergency, call 911. National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233

Family Code Section 3044



If the court finds that a parent seeking custody has committed domestic violence within the previous five years against the other parent, the child, or the child's siblings (among others), the law presumes that giving that parent sole or joint legal or physical custody is not in the child's best interest.

This presumption can be overcome only by a preponderance of the evidence.

To decide whether it has been overcome, the court must find that custody with that parent is in the child's best interest, and must weigh factors such as whether the parent has:

- Completed a batterer's intervention program
- Completed an alcohol or drug abuse program, if required
- Completed a parenting class, if required
- Complied with probation or parole terms
- Complied with any protective order
- Committed any further acts of domestic violence

Family Code § 3044

SECTION 5

Agreements and Recommendations

What happens when you agree, when you don't, and when the court orders more



When You Reach an Agreement



1. Mediator drafts

The Mediator prepares your agreement as a legal document, and each parent receives a copy.



2. Parents sign

Parents without an attorney sign the agreement. Parents with an attorney review it with their attorney before the court date.



3. Judge reviews

At your court date, the judge reviews the agreement and, if it is acceptable, signs it.



4. Court order

The agreement is not binding until it is signed by the parents and the judge.

Agreed before your appointment? Both parents must contact Family Court Services at least 48 hours ahead to cancel.

Reaching an Agreement on Your Own

Parents who agree outside of Mediation can put their agreement in writing using Judicial Council forms. Both parents sign and date form FL-355 and submit it to the court with the attachments that apply, for the judge's signature.

Form	Title
FL-355	Stipulation and Order for Custody and/or Visitation of Children
FL-341	Child Custody and Visitation (Parenting Time) Order Attachment
FL-341(A)	Supervised Visitation Order
FL-341(B)	Child Abduction Prevention Order Attachment
FL-341(C)	Children's Holiday Schedule Attachment
FL-341(D)	Additional Provisions—Physical Custody Attachment
FL-341(E)	Joint Legal Custody Attachment

Forms are available at selfhelp.courts.ca.gov and from the Clerk's Office.

When You Don't Agree: The Recommendation

What it is

- If parents don't reach a full agreement, the Mediator makes recommendations to the court on the disputed issues.
- The Mediator may contact others, such as teachers or daycare providers, for more information.
- It may recommend parenting classes, anger management, batterer's intervention, drug and alcohol treatment, or counseling.
- The Mediator may also recommend a temporary parenting plan until the full recommendation is complete.

What happens next

- Both parents, and their attorneys if any, receive a copy before the hearing. It is marked confidential.
- The recommendation is not a court order.
- The judge considers it along with all other information presented in court, and may adopt it, change it, or not adopt it.
- **If you disagree, you or your attorney should tell the judge which parts you disagree with at the hearing.**

Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(C), (K)

Child Custody Evaluations

If custody or visitation is still disputed after Mediation, the court may appoint a child custody evaluator when it finds this is in the child's best interest.

What it is

An in-depth assessment of the child's health, safety, welfare, and best interest. The court may order a full or partial evaluation.

The report

The evaluator files a written, confidential report with the court.

Cost

Evaluations take time, and the parties may be charged a fee for the evaluation.

Serious abuse allegations

When the court determines there is a serious allegation of child sexual abuse, the law requires an evaluation, investigation, or assessment.

Family Code §§ 3111, 3118; California Rules of Court, rule 5.220; Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(H)

Supervised Visitation

Supervised visitation is contact between a parent and child with a neutral third person present. The court may order it to protect the child's health, safety, and welfare, for example in high-conflict or high-risk situations or when a temporary restraining order is in place.



Nonprofessional provider

Someone who is not paid, such as a family member or friend. Must file form FL-324(NP) before supervising and review the Judicial Council's guide for nonprofessional providers.



Professional provider

Someone paid to supervise visits. Must complete Live Scan, register as a Trustline provider, meet training requirements, and file form FL-324(P).

Please note: The court does not screen, endorse, or monitor providers. Parents are responsible for making sure a provider meets all legal requirements.

Family Code § 3200.5; Standards of Judicial Administration, std. 5.20; Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.2

SECTION 6

After Mediation

Co-parenting, following court orders, making changes, and where to get help



Co-Parenting Successfully

Co-parenting means continuing to share the responsibility of raising your children after separation or divorce. Success depends on both parents' cooperation and communication.



Follow the order

Follow your custody and visitation order.



Shield your children

Keep your children out of conflict with the other parent.



Reassure them

Tell your children they will keep a relationship with both parents, the separation is not their fault, and both parents love them.



Keep it positive

Don't talk negatively about the other parent to or around your children, including on social media, by text, or by email.

If an Order Isn't Followed, or Needs to Change



If the other parent isn't following the order

- Custody orders are enforced by law enforcement or the court. The Mediator cannot enforce an order or step in when it isn't followed.
- The more detailed the order, the easier it is for law enforcement to enforce.
- Contempt charges may be filed for failing to follow a court order.
- Visitation and child support are separate issues. Keep paying support as ordered.



If your order needs to change

- Family Court Services cannot change a court order. Only the court can.
- To request a change, file the appropriate paperwork, such as a Request for Order (FL-300), to have your case placed on calendar.
- Voluntary Mediation without a pending case is available once per year.
- For help with forms, contact the Self-Help Center or the Family Law Facilitator.

Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(B)

Questions, Concerns, and Complaints

Complaints about Family Court Services, including how you were treated or the procedures used, go to the Court Executive Officer in writing.



Submit in writing

Use the Feedback to the Court eForm at www.Lassen.Courts.CA.gov (General Information → Feedback to the Court), or the printable Feedback Form, also available at the Clerk's Office.



Submit promptly

Please submit complaints about a Mediator, or requests for a different Mediator, as soon as possible, generally within 30 calendar days after your session.



Written response

The Court Executive Officer, or a designee, will review your complaint and respond in writing.

A complaint cannot change a court order. If you disagree with a custody or visitation order made by a judge, you must ask the court to review it through the appropriate filing.

Local Rules of Court, Rule 12.1(L)

Key Terms

Petitioner

The party who filed the first action in the case.

Respondent

The party who was served with the first court papers. These labels never change, even if the respondent later files a Request for Order.

Legal Custody

Who makes major decisions about the child's health, education, and welfare. Joint: parents share decisions. Sole: one parent decides.

Physical Custody

Where the child lives most of the time. Joint: significant time with each parent. Sole: the child lives primarily with one parent.

Parenting Plan

The custody and parenting schedule, including where the child is on given days, holidays, and vacations, and how decisions are made. It may need to change as circumstances change.

Recommendation

The Mediator's confidential written report to the judge on disputed issues when parents don't fully agree. It is not a court order.

Quick Answers

Can Mediation help with financial or property issues?

No. Mediation is for parenting matters only. For support or property issues, contact your attorney, the Family Law Facilitator, or the Self-Help Center.

Can the Mediator make the other parent attend?

No. If you haven't been contacted to schedule, call Family Court Services. If the other parent doesn't respond, you may need to file a motion with the court.

Can I bring my children to the session?

No, unless the Mediator asks you to or the judge orders it. If your children need to be interviewed, that will be scheduled separately.

Are attorneys allowed in Mediation?

Attorneys are not usually permitted. Documents prepared by Family Court Services will be sent to your attorney.

Contacts and Resources

Family Court Services

Hall of Justice
2610 Riverside Drive, Susanville, CA 96130

(530) 251-8205

Mediation@LassenCourt.ca.gov

www.Lassen.Courts.CA.gov

Self-Help Center

Free legal information and help with forms. Leave a voicemail or text (530) 251-3935.

Family Law Facilitator

Help with child support, spousal support, and parentage. Call or text (530) 903-5838.

California Courts Self-Help Guide

selfhelp.courts.ca.gov

Families Change

A guide to separation and divorce for children, teens, and parents: www.familieschange.ca.gov

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-7233. In an emergency, call 911.

Next Step: Your Certificate of Completion



Have questions?

Write them down and ask your Mediator at your appointment.



Sign the certificate

Initial both items (the video and this packet), then sign the Certificate of Completion.



Submit it

Submit it online on the Mediation Orientation page, by email to Mediation@LassenCourt.ca.gov, or at the Hall of Justice.

Thank you for taking the time to prepare. Your preparation helps your Mediation session focus on what matters most: your children.