



HARRINGTON MEDIATION

Learning Library

Understanding Precedes Resolution.

robertharringtonjr.com

Publication Information

Article: Creating a Comfortable Environment in Mediation	HM-Article #002
Originally Published: 6/7/26	

Creating a Comfortable Environment in Mediation

When people think about participant safety in mediation, domestic violence screening is often the first topic that comes to mind—and rightly so. Screening for safety is an essential part of determining whether mediation is appropriate.

However, creating a comfortable environment extends far beyond physical safety.

A participant may feel overwhelmed by the presence of the other person. They may struggle with emotional intimidation, anxiety, communication barriers, or a history of conflict that makes open conversation difficult. Others may simply communicate more effectively in a different setting.

One of a mediator's responsibilities is to create a process that supports self-determination. Sometimes that means reminding participants that they have options.

Depending on the circumstances, those options may include:

- Caucus (meeting separately)
- Virtual mediation
- Scheduled breaks
- Adjustments to the mediation process that help participants participate more comfortably

These accommodations are not about changing the outcome of the mediation.

They are about creating an environment where each participant has the opportunity to communicate openly, make informed decisions, and participate voluntarily.

Conflict is often uncomfortable.

The mediator's role is not to eliminate that discomfort, but to facilitate a process where participants feel comfortable enough to engage honestly and exercise their own self-determination.

Understanding precedes resolution.

— Robert Harrington Jr.
Harrington Mediation



In Practice

Creating a comfortable mediation environment begins with recognizing that participants may experience the process differently. At the outset of mediation, explain the available process options—including private caucuses, virtual participation when appropriate, scheduled breaks, and other reasonable procedural adjustments. Throughout the session, remain attentive to whether the environment continues to support each participant's ability to communicate openly, make informed decisions, and participate voluntarily. Thoughtful process design can help remove unnecessary barriers while preserving mediator neutrality and participant self-determination.

Reflection Questions

- What conditions help me communicate most openly and honestly during a difficult conversation?
- How might another person experience the same conversation differently because of their own history, emotions, or communication style?
- What adjustments could make a challenging conversation feel more constructive without changing its purpose or outcome?
- How does creating a comfortable process support meaningful participation and informed decision-making?

Key Takeaway

A comfortable mediation environment does not remove the challenges of conflict—it creates the conditions for participants to engage with those challenges more effectively. By thoughtfully shaping the mediation process while maintaining neutrality, mediators help ensure that each participant has the opportunity to communicate openly, make informed decisions, and fully exercise their right to self-determination.

Understanding Precedes Resolution.

Robert Harrington Jr.

Transformative Mediator
Founder, Harrington Mediation

Disclaimer

This article is provided for educational purposes only and is intended to encourage thoughtful reflection about communication, conflict, and mediation. It is not legal advice, psychological counseling, or mental health treatment.

Harrington Mediation

robertharringtonjr.com

© 2026 Harrington Mediation. All Rights Reserved.

HM-Article #001