

## Suggestions for mediating constructively:

- ▶ ***Avoid temptations to blame or attack***  
Casting blame or antagonizing others is most likely to just make them defensive, or push them to fight back, rather than encouraging them to really listen to you or to see your point of view.
- ▶ ***Speak for yourself, and let others speak for themselves***  
Avoid assuming that you know why the other party behaved as they did. Instead, tell them how their behavior looked from your perspective, and how it impacted your behavior. Let *them* tell you what was going on from their perspective.
- ▶ ***Show that you are listening***  
Mediation requires listening. Each side needs to be heard.
- ▶ ***Talk it all through***  
Talk out everything that is important to you, whether or not it's significant to others.
- ▶ ***Work toward a solution***  
Try to focus on interests and solutions, not blame. The goal is to resolve the conflict and prevent similar ones.

*This Mediation Program is managed by the Office of Professional Accountability, Seattle Police Department.*

## Some Reasons Citizens Mediate:

- To be fully heard and understood.
- To hear the officer's perspectives.
- To speak directly with the officer, rather than having the complaint decided by others.
- To give officers feedback.
- To prevent similar incidents.
- To regain confidence in police services, and respect for officers.

## Some Reasons Officers Mediate:

- To be understood – officers can't always explain their actions in the field.
- To hear the citizens' perspectives.
- To speak directly with the citizen, rather than having the complaint decided by others.
- To improve relations with citizens and communities.
- To resolve the complaint outside of the disciplinary process.



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## OFFICE of PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

## CITIZEN-POLICE MEDIATION PROGRAM

*Addressing concerns about police conduct  
through voluntary mediation*



# *Thank you for considering mediation!*

Mediation is a different way of handling citizen complaints about police conduct. The Office of Professional Accountability will identify cases where the parties might benefit from face to face discussion of their different perspectives on the police/citizen encounter that led to a complaint. If both the complainant and officer agree, the case will be taken out of the normal investigation process and set for a mediation session with a professional mediator outside of the department.

The mediator is a neutral third party trained and experienced in helping people talk through and resolve their differences in constructive ways. OPA has an agreement for services with some of the most experienced professional mediators in Seattle to conduct citizen-police mediations.

## *The Mediator will:*

- Explain the process and ground rules and answer any questions.
- Listen to both sides of the story.
- Ask questions to clarify what happened and identify central issues.
- Help keep the discussion focused, productive and non-threatening.
- Not take sides, place blame, or pass judgment.
- Certify the completion of the mediation and the good faith participation of the parties.
- Treat the discussion and information as confidential.

## *What a Mediation Session is:*

- An alternative to the traditional complaint and disciplinary process.
- A voluntary, confidential process where a professional mediator helps citizens and officers talk and listen to each other.
- A chance for officers to hear how their actions affected citizens and vice versa.

## *What a Mediation Session is not:*

- A process to make judgments about who is right or wrong. No evidence or witnesses are needed.
- A session where parties are forced to shake hands and make up.

## *The Benefits of Using Mediation:*

- Mediation allows officers and citizens to resolve complaints themselves, rather than depend on the judgment of others.
- Mediation is more satisfying than the regular complaint process. Nearly all those who have mediated say they would recommend it to others.
- Mediation can make a real difference in the understanding, attitude, and behavior of participants.
- Mediation can improve relationships between community members and police.
- Mediation is cost effective.
- Mediation is much faster than the traditional complaint investigation process.

## *The incident was unpleasant the first time, won't mediation be the same?*

Not necessarily. Mediation can work even with difficult people. Mediators are trained to help people resolve issues in constructive ways.

## *What if the other party just wants to verbally attack me?*

It is part of the mediator's job to prevent a mediation session from deteriorating to verbal attacks. While some venting (on both sides) is common, verbal abuse or threatening conduct are not acceptable in mediation. Mediators may separate the parties and work with them individually, or terminate the mediation if necessary.

## *Could something said in mediation be used against me later?*

Mediation is confidential; all participants sign a confidentiality agreement. The contents of a mediation session are not subject to subpoena or discovery, and courts have upheld the mediator-client privilege. The one exception is where mandatory reporting requirements apply for admissions of criminal acts by any party.

## *What if I am unhappy with how the mediation is progressing?*

Either party can leave mediation at any time. No one is compelled to reach conclusions or agreements.

## *Will I have to apologise or admit wrongdoing?*

No. You may not have done anything wrong. In any case, what you say is up to you. Some participants do apologize to each other – if they *choose* to do so.