

REDUCING TENSIONS IN A STAND-OFF BETWEEN WARRING GROUPS

“Tensions immediately reduced and a situation that could have had fatal consequences was alleviated.”

BACKGROUND

Tensions had escalated between two groups with a history of hostility and violence. A caller who knew both parties was worried that one of the parties was on the verge of violence and contacted Peaceful Solutions.

LISTENING AND LEARNING

Both parties agreed to speak with the Dialogue Road Map Facilitator independently as a first step.

The first party was extremely angry and spent the first part of the meeting threatening violence. It took time to understand the problem but using compassionate and empathic responses the Dialogue Road Map Facilitator established that he was the father of a baby and the baby's mother was now in a relationship with the other party.

He had been told by a friend of the mother that her new boyfriend was not going to allow him (the father) to see his baby. He had taken this up with the mother in a discussion which became heated and ended badly. The mother's boyfriend had jumped to her defence and threatened the father for verbally attacking his girlfriend.

The second party had been in a relationship with his girlfriend for six months. During this time he had heard her complain that her baby's father had provided no financial support and became hostile when she asked him for money. On one occasion he came home to find her in a distressed state. She said the father had been there, shouting and telling her that no one was going to stop him seeing his child. The second party decided to defend his girlfriend and went to the first party demanding he stop his aggression.

Each of the parties consulted their respective friends who fuelled the dispute by supporting their side as being right. Threats were passed by proxy and tensions were spreading. The caller felt the problem had grown disproportionately.

ASSESSMENT

It was clear that although both parties were defending something precious (the first party his relationship with his baby and the second his girlfriend), the actual dispute was based on gossip and misinterpretation. The mother's friend had meddled, with potentially fatal consequences.

REMEDY

Working with the parties prior to a face-to-face meeting the Dialogue Road Map Facilitator was able to establish that the second party did not want to stop the father from seeing his baby, nor to pass comment on the issue of financial support for the baby. He was simply asking that he treat the baby's mother with respect. The first party wanted to be sure that he could see his baby.

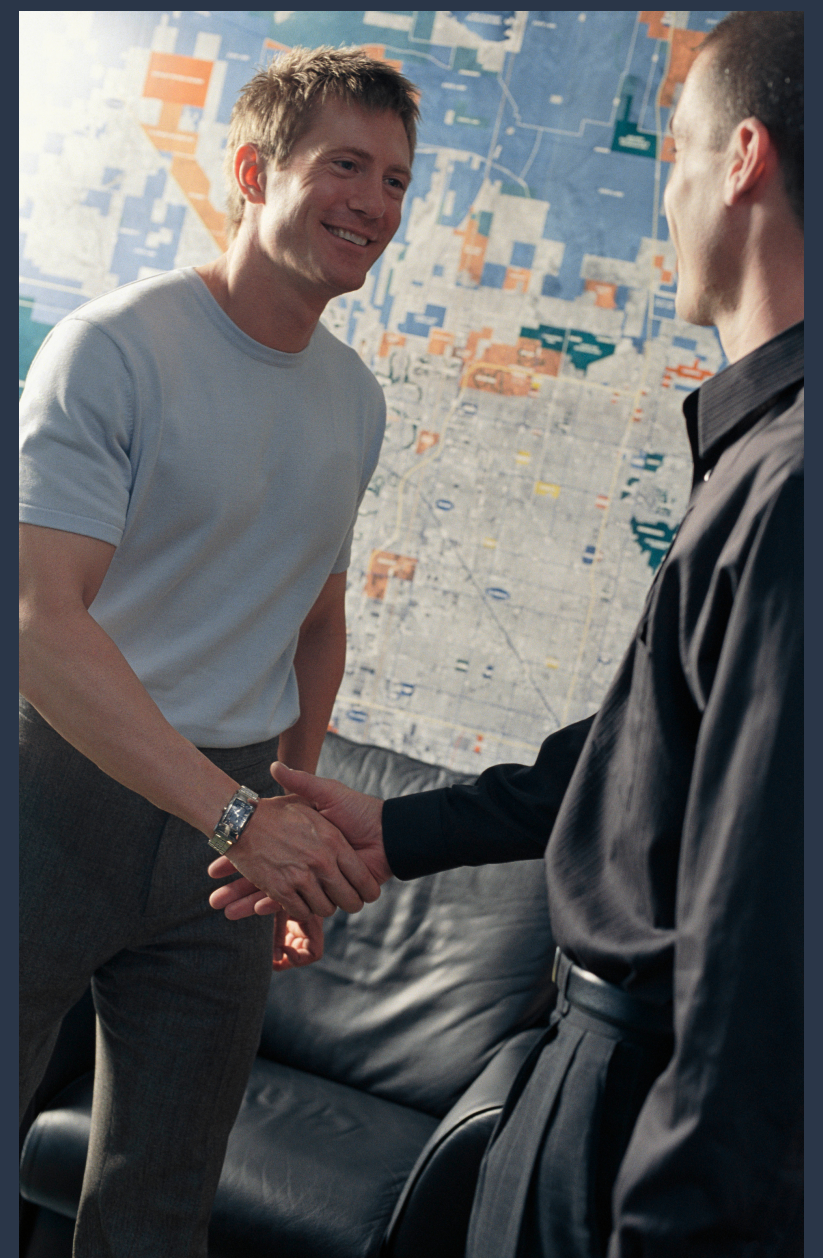
He felt shame and embarrassment that he could not provide financially, and constantly felt the mother was holding this as a threat. It was this sense and their inability to communicate with each other that triggered the angry reactions.

OUTCOME

Having done so much ground work, the face-to-face meeting was relatively straightforward.

The miscommunication was cleared up and an understanding reached about the needs of each party.

Tensions immediately reduced and a situation that could have had fatal consequences was alleviated.



USING MEDIATION INSTEAD OF LITIGATION TO WORK OUT DIVORCE ARRANGEMENTS

“Through mediation we were able to move on from the marriage without hostility and protect the interests of our child as co-parents”.

BACKGROUND

Noel and Sarah* split up when Sarah ended their eight year marriage. The relationship had steadily gone downhill for three years.

They were still living in the same house and the situation had become untenable because Noel was drinking heavily and becoming abusive most evenings. They had a five year old daughter.

LISTENING AND LEARNING

Noel and Sarah met and fell in love when Sarah was travelling in the UK. They married when her visa was about to expire and at first the relationship was idyllic. They bought a house to renovate; the costs mounted and Noel, who was self-employed, felt under enormous financial pressure. After their daughter was born Noel found the responsibility of being a provider, father and husband overwhelming. He felt unable to admit that every day seemed an immense struggle.

Sarah was thrilled when Noel proposed. They married and bought a house. Sarah had a good job. She became a mother, which she loved so much she decided not to return to work. Noel's business was doing well and all seemed fine. Sarah then noticed that Noel was less and less interested in family life. Sex between them became non-existent and communication was reduced to small talk. Sarah felt she was treading on eggshells and eventually ended the marriage.

Neither of them wanted to leave the house; it was more convenient to remain for their child's sake. However, Noel began to drink and Sarah felt threatened by his outbursts. She began to stay at a friend's house taking their daughter with her. This was not a good arrangement for anyone so decisions had to be made about their future.

ASSESSMENT

It was clear this would not get resolved in one session. The facilitator arranged a series of sessions over six months, alternating between one-to-one and joint. Initially the couple tried negotiating over the house and provision for the child, but unfinished business in the relationship prevented them from finding a meeting point. Noel also had an underlying fear that Sarah might return to her home country and take their daughter with her.

REMEDY

The facilitator spent time with them using the Dialogue Road Map (DRM) to unpick the gradual breakdown and miscommunication between them. Noel came to understand that in his efforts to be a 'good' provider he had suppressed his underlying fear of failure. Sarah had never considered that Noel might be worried because he always seemed confident. They were both shocked at the misunderstanding that had arisen between them and able to jointly mourn the mistakes of the marriage. This unblocked the negotiations and arrangements were simple and straightforward. Noel's fear was unfounded.

OUTCOME

Through using the Dialogue Road Map they were able to take written agreements to a lawyer to process through the court at minimum cost. More importantly they were able to move on from the marriage without hostility and protect the interests of the child as co-parents. Both agreed that the six months spent in mediation were more productive and cost effective than fighting a battle through lawyers.

***Names have been changed and do not relate to any person/s of the same name**

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