

What is mediation?

It is above all a different way of approaching conflicts. An attitude that assumes that all people have needs that should be fulfilled so that they perceive their lives as positive and meaningful. The state of need fulfilment is associated with positive feelings, the state of non-fulfilment with negative feelings. This basic idea is inspired by [Marshall Rosenberg](#), the founder of Non-Violent Communication, who put it this way: "Actually, all communication is either the expression of a need or a request." I can make an effort to hear this out in the conversation, to listen differently - and I am already halfway in a mediation.

Mediation is a process that gently unearths needs like peeling away the layers of an onion. The view that there is not enough time, money, justice.... for a workable solution stems from the experience of over-simplistic approaches to solutions, as in the now quite well-known example of two people arguing over an orange. Well, if you give everyone half of it, they might as well swallow down their appetite and be happy with getting at least a bite...? In mediation you dig a little deeper: What do you need the orange for? It could come out that one wants to make juice, the other needs the peel for a cake - and now completely new solutions open up. This is ideally how it works in mediation.

What is special about the method is the combination of a very structured approach that sets limits for the conflict parties and all-partial understanding on all sides that enables them to work through their story. The central prerequisite is the voluntariness and the desire of the parties to change something in order to find a solution and thus take responsibility for their behaviour.

How high can the conflict escalate for mediation to work?

On the [conflict escalation ladder according to Friedrich Glasl](#), most potential for mediation can be seen at the lower conflict levels - here it is still about the matter, but conflicting parties are no longer talking, but presenting each other with faits accomplis. In highly escalated situations, one can still negotiate some kind of spatial, temporal... separation to limit damage - e.g. in divorces where both parents wish to continue seeing their children or with colleagues who for one reason or another need to continue working together. Try to pay attention to the implementation of the agreed solution! Here you should put an agreement in writing or even make it enforceable in court.

What is the greatest challenge in initiating mediation?

Every conflict party's willingness to mediate is not always there - usually the one who suffers most comes forward, but convincing the other side may at times not succeed. In some cases mediation is "prescribed"- for example by the employer, because work place conflicts are too costly. Another option is to begin with shuttle mediation – the mediator talking to the parties individually at first.

Further reading:

You could begin with the [Wikipedia entry on „mediation“](#) which is actually not bad at all :)