

ELDER DECISIONS

Private Mediation for Seniors and
their Families

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What makes planning for seniors one of the biggest hot-button issues facing individuals, families, and professionals today?

Stress around potential housing changes. Concerns about management of finances. Uncomfortable talks with adult children about the family assets. Many families simply avoid decision-making, which can result in significant financial and emotional cost.

Elder Decisions—a Lexington, Massachusetts-based mediation firm—brings families together to address these life changes in a participatory, thoughtful, and forward-looking way. Without mediation, some families resort to court proceedings, which can aggravate problems by shutting down communication and turning family members into adversaries.

The Impact of Elder Care on Our Lives

With the aging of employed baby boomers, elder care is rapidly surpassing child care as the most important family matter facing the workforce. It's a matter of simple math: The average couple has more parents and in-laws than they do children. According to AARP, about 34 million working Americans provide care for parents 50 or older.

None of us can afford to ignore the issue of elder care. In a recent report by MetLife, elder-care needs cost employers at least \$29 billion annually in lost productivity and wages. Fifty-seven percent of working caregivers say they have gone to their jobs late, left early, or taken time off for this purpose. An additional 10 percent have shifted to part-time work, and 15 percent left the workforce or turned down promotions. (Source: *The Boston Globe*, July 11, 2004, "Stresses of Elder Care Hitting the Workplace")

Why Choose Mediation?

As baby boomers age and government resources diminish, many difficult choices must be made concerning elder care. This will require an increasingly sophisticated array of communication and problem-solving skills. Elder mediation is a rational first step for families to help them address their changing needs. It gives them a forum to exchange their unresolved stress for shared decision-making and emotional health.

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Concerns surrounding care-giving issues can easily evolve into complicated and divisive conflicts. Trained mediators can help facilitate family discussions to create arrangements that appropriately address safety and capacity concerns while keeping individual control and dignity intact.

How Does Mediation Work?

Mediation can save time, money and emotional distress. **Elder Decisions** finds that the practice of mediation often provides an efficient and sensitive solution to challenges and complexities brought on by elder life transitions. Mediation isn't simply an alternative to litigation, a "last resort" forum without the lawyers. Elder mediation is just as effective, and often more effective, at the beginning of the decision process—when families are fact finding, struggling with options and discovering feelings about their parents or adult siblings that well up and make clear thinking difficult.

For example, an important form of elder mediation is simply to convene a family meeting where a trained third party neutral is present to create the space for everyone in the family to be heard on an important developing family transition. This type of meeting—before the family is in crisis—can strengthen family ties and enable all family members to deal with the changing nature of their relationships and the realities of their situation. It allows family dynamics, including sibling rivalries, to be addressed at a time when everyone is calm and thoughtful decision-making can occur.

Involving a mediator proactively in an estate planning process can reduce the probability of family litigation in the future. As in other types of mediation, a mediator working in estate planning is a neutral party making no decisions and giving no advice. Instead, s/he helps family members clarify individual interests and explore options. An attorney, financial planner, or both may then step in to craft a plan that will carry out the wishes of their clients.

About the Elder Decisions Team

Elder Decisions draws on the talents of John Dugan, LICSW; Arline Kardasis, MAT; Rikk Larsen, MBA; Michael Lass, LICSW; Crystal Thorpe, MSW, MBA; and Blaire Trippe, MBA. Collectively, they bring advanced mediation training and education from The Center for Social Gerontology in Ann Arbor, MI; The Wyman Center at Mt. Auburn Hospital; the Center for Mediation in Law in New York; the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University; the Program on Negotiation at Harvard Law School; Harvard Business School; Boston University; and Connecticut College.

For more information about private mediation services for seniors and their families, please visit the **Elder Decisions** web site (www.ElderDecisions.com), or call or send email to Blair Trippe or Arline Kardasis, whose contact information appears at the top of this release.

Elder Decisions is a joint venture of Agreement Resources and Howell-Larsen Associates with offices in Cambridge, Lexington, and Norwood.