

Resolution

An e-magazine for family mediators across Canada



In this issue:

Member
Spotlight

Upcoming
Opportunities

In Focus:
Child Protection
Mediation

Annotated
Bibliography

Questions &
Answers

Practice
Considerations

Resources

Why does Child Protection Mediation (CPM) certification matter?

Because children's voices must be heard - clearly, respectfully, and safely. When families face serious child protection concerns, skilled mediators can help parties reach voluntary, durable agreements that are more humane than litigation, and often more practical, economical, and likely to endure.

Family Mediation Canada (FMC) is a national, not-for-profit, interdisciplinary association founded in 1985. Our mission is to advance high standards of practice so that children and families across Canada can access safe, competent mediation services. Building on decades of research, consultation, and professional accountability work, FMC recently introduced its fourth certification stream - Child Protection Mediation. As part of that work, our CPM Committee developed training, Standards of Practice, Certification Guidelines, and a Candidate Certification Manual, all aligned with

Welcome

FMC's Professional Code of Conduct and certification framework.

This issue of *Resolution* shines a light on CPM: what quality looks like, why specialized training matters, and how a national approach strengthens outcomes for children - especially those who are over-represented in care. At its best, CPM offers a coordinated, child-centred approach to problem solving that helps children access the support and resources they need to grow into happy, independent adults.

You'll hear from practitioners, trainers, and system partners who are improving safety, reducing conflict, and supporting family well-being.

Thank you for the work you do. We invite you to read, reflect, and join us in advancing excellence in Child Protection Mediation across Canada.

*Margaret Stewart Sweet
Past Board member, FMC
Past Chair, CPM Committee*



Member Spotlight: Margaret Stewart Sweet

FMC is proud to recognize Margaret Stewart Sweet - a Lifetime Member whose leadership and heart have shaped our community for decades. Based in Prince Edward Island, Margaret has spent more than 25 years in rural private practice, specializing in child development, child protection, and Indigenous community mediation. Her work has always centred on preserving relationships and making high-quality mediation affordable and accessible where families live.

With a background spanning special education, social work, financial assistance, and community development, Margaret brings an interdisciplinary lens to every table. She has been deeply involved in community development and social work within First Nations communities, embodying FMC's values of respect, inclusion, and child-centred practice.

After 5 years of service, Margaret is stepping down from FMC's Board of Directors and as Chair of our Child Protection Mediation (CPM) Certification Committee for a well-deserved rest. Under her guidance, we advanced CPM training, standards, and certification tools that reflect both professional rigour and the lived realities of families - especially those in rural communities. Her steady, collaborative approach has helped define what quality looks like in CPM and why specialization matters.

Thank you, Margaret, for your service, your high standards, and your inspiring example!



Upcoming Opportunities

email admin@fmc.ca for more information or to register

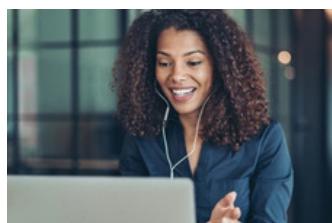


Coffee Time

After several engaging drop-ins in 2025, Coffee Time will be offered monthly in 2026 so that FMC members have access to more regular peer debriefs, resource swaps, and practical strategies.

Upcoming Dates:

Feb 18, Mar 18, Apr 22 at 10AM Pacific / 1PM Eastern. This is an informal chat - just bring a beverage and an open mind! Register at <https://forms.gle/NENM4G7GBLxLeGi68>



Webinars

March 4 (1-2 p.m. ET):

Walking the Line: Ethics in Mediation with Rosa Barraco from the Yukon

April 8 (1-2 p.m. ET):

Mediation in a Global Context: an international perspective with Liliana Amione from Argentina

All are welcome! Register at <https://forms.gle/QKsW3gh7KJBq6w5u7>



Role Play Groups

These unique professional practice groups are an essential tool to prepare for certification. Participants receive feedback and/or coaching in a flexible format allowing an opportunity to practice what you've learned in training and connect with other mediators across Canada.

Level One - must have at least 80 hours basic mediation training (theory & skills)

Level Two - must be close to pursuing Advanced Certification

In Focus



Child Protection Mediation: Why Canada needs a national voice

Throughout Canada, child protection mediation (CPM) has quietly emerged as a compassionate and practical approach to resolving disputes between families and child welfare authorities. Despite decades of success, CPM remains under-recognized, inconsistently implemented, and often disconnected from broader family mediation discussions. As Family Mediation Canada (FMC) works to promote professional standards and interdisciplinary collaboration, now is the time to elevate CPM's profile to strengthen its reach, quality, and effectiveness through a unified national voice.

Child protection cases are among the most sensitive in our justice and social service systems as decisions about a child's care have lifelong consequences. While courts ensure accountability and due process, adversarial proceedings can increase conflict and delay stability for children. CPM offers an alternative approach by providing a safe, structured, and collaborative space where parents, family members, child welfare professionals, and sometimes children themselves come together to address concerns and find solutions in the child's best interests.

What the research shows

Research over the past twenty years consistently confirms that CPM is effective. Studies like those by Aguiniga, et al. (2015) and Madden (2011) have shown that mediation can enhance fairness and transparency in decision-making and foster collaborative problem-solving among all involved. These results suggest that CPM is about transforming the tone and structure of decision-making processes in child welfare. Meanwhile, the literature emphasizes that mediation works best when supported by a clear set of professional standards, well-trained mediators, and strong system collaboration.

The Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC) Guidelines for Child Protection Mediation (Giovannucci & Largent, 2013) highlight these principles, which include safety, inclusivity, impartiality, child-centeredness, and trauma-informed practice.

Many regions across Canada already have laws, policies, or directives that support collaborative and alternative dispute resolution in child welfare. These provisions collectively show a growing recognition that families benefit when they actively participate in decisions about their children. Together, these foundations provide Canada with a strong base to develop a coordinated national approach which would not replace local innovation; instead, it would establish a basis for shared learning, quality assurance, and collaboration.

Benefits of a national voice

A national voice for CPM would achieve far more than just promoting uniformity. It would enhance the quality, sustainability, and visibility of this essential practice nationwide. A unified platform could establish consistent standards and training to ensure professional competencies are aligned. This would foster trust among child welfare agencies, the courts, and the public, while ensuring families receive top-quality service no matter where they are. A national effort could also promote trauma-informed and culturally safe practices, making it easier to incorporate approaches that reflect Canada's diversity, including Indigenous families and communities, newcomers, and families living in rural parts of this vast land.

In Focus continued...

CPM programs across Canada gather valuable data but, without coordination, lessons are easily lost. A national organization could broaden awareness of CPM's unique role and support research collaborations to assess outcomes, identify best practices, and measure CPM's role in achieving timely, safe permanency for children. By speaking as a unified community, mediators could advocate for policies and funding that sustain CPM programs and show that mediation is an essential, evidence-based part of effective and compassionate child welfare practice.

Families involved in child protection deserve consistent access to high-quality mediation services wherever they live. A national vision can help bridge regional gaps and ensure all families in Canada can participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their children's lives.

FMC's role

Family Mediation Canada is well-positioned to lead this discussion. As a nationwide, bilingual, multidisciplinary group, FMC unites professionals from law, social work, psychology, and child welfare. Its goal - to promote understanding and application of mediation in family settings - naturally supports the principles of CPM. By convening experts, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, FMC can establish a National CPM Working Group to share insights, establish training standards, and identify best practices. It can also develop a Canadian CPM Practice Framework grounded in international guidelines, and adapted to Canadian laws and cultural contexts.

Additionally, FMC enhances professional growth via national learning opportunities, certification pathways, and mentorship programs for new mediators. It promotes cross-sector cooperation and champions the official recognition of CPM as a vital service within Canada's child welfare framework. FMC's core strength is its capacity to connect and bring people together, fostering dialogue that can drive enduring change.

Child protection mediation captures the core of family mediation: giving voice, showing respect, and solving problems during conflicts. Throughout Canada, many mediators and agencies have shown that families can get better results when they are involved meaningfully in decisions about their children. However, for CPM to reach its full potential, it needs a national platform that brings these local successes together under a shared vision. It's time for Canada to speak with one unified voice: a strong national voice for child protection mediation.



Michael Saini, PhD, MSW, RSW
President, Family Mediation Canada

References

- Aguiniga, D. M., Madden, E. E., & Hawley, A. (2015). Exploratory analysis of child protection mediation permanency placement outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 50, 20–27.
- Giovannucci, M., & Largent, K. (2013). Association of Family and Conciliation Courts guidelines for child protection mediation. *Family Court Review*, 51(2), 193–197.
- Madden, E. E. (2011). Long-term outcomes of child protection mediation on permanency for children in foster care (Publication No. AAI3429004) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas]. *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global*.

Annotated Bibliography

featuring academic articles relevant to Child Protection Mediation

Aguiniga, D. M., Madden, E. E., & Hawley, A. (2015). Exploratory analysis of child protection mediation permanency placement outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 50, 20–27. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chillyouth.2014.12.021>

Using data from Child Protective Services (CPS) and a nonprofit mediation agency, this study (N = 311) examined how child and family characteristics affect placement outcomes following child protection mediation. Analyses showed that parental substance abuse and mental illness reduced the likelihood of reunification or kin placement. Older children and African American children were less likely to be adopted. The study concluded that systemic and family-level factors strongly influence permanency outcomes, suggesting mediation alone cannot offset broader structural barriers.

Giovannucci, M., & Largent, K. (2013). Association of Family and Conciliation Courts guidelines for child protection mediation. *Family Court Review*, 51(2), 193–197. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12019>

Describes the development of the AFCC Guidelines for Child Protection Mediation, established under the Child Welfare Collaborative Decision Making Network and approved in 2012. The guidelines outline principles of safety, inclusivity, respect, and child-centered practice for designing and maintaining high-quality mediation programs. They serve as a roadmap for practitioners and administrators seeking to implement consistent, ethical, and effective child protection mediation models across jurisdictions.

Browe Olson, K. (2020). Family engagement and collaborative decision-making processes provide multiple benefits in child welfare cases. *Family Court Review*, 58(4), 937–941. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12527>

Highlights the importance of family engagement and collaborative decision-making in child welfare contexts. Drawing on decades of research and practice, Browe Olson argues that mediation and family group conferencing enhance family participation, trust, and durable outcomes. Recommends that juvenile courts and child welfare systems prioritize and expand these collaborative approaches, framing them as essential to humane, effective, and equitable child welfare reform.

Madden, E. E. (2011). Long-term outcomes of child protection mediation on permanency for children in foster care (Publication No. AAI3429004) [Doctoral dissertation, University of Texas].

Evaluates the long-term impact of mediation on permanency outcomes for children in foster care. Using data from a Texas pilot program across 43 counties, Madden employed propensity score matching to compare 315 mediated cases with 315 non-mediated cases. Results indicated no significant effect of mediation or parental engagement on permanency or placement outcomes; unexpectedly, mediated cases took longer to reach permanency. The findings suggest that permanency is influenced by complex interrelated factors—child, family, agency, and court dynamics—beyond any single intervention.

Tetunic, F., & Firestone, G. (2020). Confidentiality and privilege for family and child protection mediation: A roadmap for navigating the innovation, inconsistency and confusion. *Family Court Review*, 58(1), 46–60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fcre.12455>

Examines inconsistencies and confusion about confidentiality and privilege in family and child protection mediation. It distinguishes the two concepts, explains mediation communications, and outlines waiver and exception cases. The author offers practical guidance for determining legal protections and recommends harmonizing laws to improve clarity among courts, mediators, and child welfare professionals.

Questions and Answers about CPM

Q: What makes CPM different from other forms of family mediation?

A: *Unlike separation or custody mediation, CPM focuses on resolving concerns raised throughout the child welfare process while keeping the child's safety and well-being at the center. It brings together parents, extended family, and professionals in a structured, collaborative process to explore solutions that avoid or reduce court involvement.*

Q: Who typically participates in a CPM session?

A: *Participants often include parents or guardians, child welfare workers, sometimes extended family or community supports, and a neutral, trained mediator. In some cases, older children or youth may also be invited to share their perspectives in developmentally appropriate ways.*

Q: What are the main benefits of CPM for families and agencies?

A: *CPM reduces conflict, improves communication, and helps families understand child protection concerns. It also promotes quicker, more sustainable agreements, increases trust between families and child welfare staff, and can reduce time in court – all of which contribute to more stable outcomes for children.*

Q: How is CPM different from Family Group Conferencing?

A: *Both CPM and FGC promote family participation and collaborative decision-making in child welfare. They are both complementary tools that can strengthen outcomes for children, but they differ in structure and purpose.*

CPM is a facilitated negotiation led by a neutral mediator, focused on resolving specific issues or disputes between families and child welfare authorities—often within defined timelines or court processes.

FGC is a family-led planning process, coordinated by a neutral facilitator, where extended family and support networks develop their own plan for the child's care and present it to the agency for approval.

Practice Considerations

The Expanding Potential of Online Child Protection Mediation by Kenneth Markley, M.A., CFM Advanced

I have been a provider of family services since 1972. Over my career, I have served as a Child Protection Social Worker, Family Counsellor, Community Youth Worker, Child Care Worker and Adolescent Addictions Counsellor. I have conducted over 600 mediations and family conferences for the BC Ministry of Children and Family Development. I am currently on the child protection roster with [Mediate BC](#).

For the past fifteen years, I've worked as a family mediator—mostly in living rooms, courthouses, and community spaces.

Over time, my practice has evolved, and so has the way I meet with families. Today, I'm leaning fully into online mediation. The shift hasn't just been about convenience—it's changed how people show up, participate, and find their own voice in the process.

The accessibility of Online Child Protection Mediation (OCPM) is undeniable. Eliminating travel costs and scheduling barriers makes it easier for families—and professionals—to participate. For clients in rural or remote areas, or those balancing childcare or mobility challenges, the ability to log in from home can make the difference between getting help early and not getting it at all.

There's also a subtle but meaningful empowerment that can happen online. In one child protection case, a teenager who was hesitant to attend in person agreed to participate virtually. Being able to control her camera and visibility gave her a sense of safety and agency that changed the whole tone of the conversation. Moments like that remind me why this medium matters.

From a mediator's perspective, the tools are surprisingly flexible. Breakout rooms allow quick shifts between joint and private sessions. Screen sharing and digital signing simplify documentation. Even the "mute" button can be strategic—letting someone observe without pressure before engaging directly.

Still, OCPM isn't without challenges. Confidentiality and data security require constant vigilance, and it can be difficult to detect emotional cues through a screen. Not everyone has stable internet or private space, and technology itself can create inequities. The rise of AI-enabled features adds new ethical questions we'll need to navigate together as a profession.

Despite these complexities, I'm convinced that online mediation is not a compromise—it's an expansion of what's possible. It broadens access, preserves safety, and allows us to meet families where they are. My goal is to continue refining this practice and to encourage colleagues to explore how online mediation can strengthen—not replace—the heart of what we do: helping families resolve conflict with dignity, respect, and choice.



*Kenneth Markley, M.A.
CFM Advanced with FMC
Child Protection Mediator with Mediate BC*

Practice Considerations

The Importance of Process Design in Child Protection Mediation

by Lori Frank, B.A, RRM

Director of Child Welfare Initiatives, Mediate BC

Child protection mediation is most effective when it is grounded in the principle that process matters as much as outcome. The way a mediation is structured - the setting, participants, timing, and facilitation style - can deeply influence whether families experience the process as empowering and fair, or intimidating and alienating. A well-designed process creates space for understanding, dignity, and self-determination; a poorly designed one can unintentionally reinforce power imbalances or retraumatize those already in distress.

Moving Beyond a “Cookie-Cutter” Approach

No two families or communities are alike. Each mediation brings its own context of relationships, history, and cultural or systemic factors. When the process is rigid it risks overlooking what matters most to the people involved. A flexible, responsive process design allows mediators to adapt to the specific needs of participants, creating conditions for authentic dialogue and problem-solving. This flexibility might mean extending or shortening sessions or structuring the conversation in smaller steps to accommodate emotional readiness. It can also mean adjusting the order of topics, incorporating breaks, or engaging cultural or community supports to ensure that everyone can participate safely and meaningfully.

Choosing the Right Mediator

An essential aspect of process design is who facilitates the conversation. Mediator selection should reflect not only skill and impartiality, but also relevance to the parties' lived experiences and identities.

- *Cultural and community representation:* For Indigenous families, an Indigenous mediator - or one who has a deep understanding of Indigenous worldviews, protocols, and community dynamics - can foster greater cultural safety and trust.
- *Gender and identity:* In some situations, participants may feel more comfortable with a mediator of a particular gender or someone who identifies as part of the LGBTQ2S+ community. Feeling seen and respected can profoundly affect the tone and openness of the mediation.
- *Specialized expertise:* Where trauma, disability, or systemic barriers are central to the issues, mediators with experience in trauma-informed, disability-inclusive, or anti-oppressive practice can design and guide processes that honour participants' needs.

The Role of Place and Setting

Where a mediation happens sends a powerful message. A government office or courthouse may symbolize authority and control, while a community centre or Indigenous justice hub can feel more neutral and humanizing. Mediators should work collaboratively with participants to choose venues that are accessible, culturally comfortable, and supportive of confidentiality and safety.

Virtual or hybrid formats can also be considered when travel, childcare, or emotional safety are concerns - but they must be supported with intentional planning to preserve connection and clarity.

Considering Who Should Attend

Process design also includes deciding who should be at the table. Beyond statutory parties, it may be beneficial to include extended family, Elders, youth, community advocates, or support people who can provide emotional, cultural, or practical assistance. In some cases, youth themselves may wish to participate directly; in others, they may prefer to share their voice through a trusted representative or pre-meeting conversation. What matters is that participation is voluntary, informed, and empowering—not tokenistic.

Integrating Cultural Perspectives, Language, and Practices

Cultural and linguistic differences must be intentionally acknowledged in the design of the process. Mediation can only be meaningful when everyone fully understands and is understood. For participants whose first language is not English, the use of a trained interpreter - ideally one familiar with mediation or child welfare contexts - is essential. This ensures accuracy and avoids placing family members or children in the difficult position of translating sensitive material.

Cultural perspectives are not an “add-on” but a foundation for meaningful engagement. Incorporating an opening prayer or smudge, acknowledging traditional territory, or allowing space for storytelling and silence can help create a sense of safety and belonging that Western legal formats often overlook. Mediators should approach this work with humility, openness, and collaboration—recognizing that cultural protocols and language preferences must come from the community itself, not imposed or approximated.

A Living Process

Ultimately, effective child protection mediation is a *living process* - one that adapts in real time to the emotional, cultural, and relational needs of those involved. Process design is not a checklist but an act of care and creativity. When mediators take the time to design the process collaboratively - with awareness of culture, identity, trauma, and context - they help restore voice and agency to families navigating some of the most difficult moments of their lives.



*Lori Frank, B.A, RRM
Director of Child Welfare Initiatives, Mediate BC*

For more CPM insights from Lori, check out the series of short videos available on @MediateBCSociety's You Tube channel.

*Looking for place to start?
Try <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehVMot-K-2U>*

Resources

If you are interested in learning more about the topic of Child Protection Mediation, we have compiled a few resources that may be helpful

Child Protection Mediation Across Canada

Family Mediation Canada Child Protection Mediation Training & Certification

<https://fmc.ca/types-of-mediation/child-protection/>

Alberta Children's Services Mediation Program
<https://www.alberta.ca/childrens-services-mediation>

Mediate BC Child Protection Mediation Program
<https://mediatebc.com/our-services/child-welfare/cpmp/>

Ontario Child Protection Mediation Roster
<https://cpmed.ca/>

Government of BC - Interviews about Child Protection Mediation

Interviews with child protection mediators who talk about what the mediation process is and what participants can expect.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVjaeORorJY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSs-goNrwo>

AFCC Guidelines for CPM

The Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC) is a key organization that promotes child protection mediation through training, conferences, and publications like the ["Guidelines for Child Protection Mediation"](#).

This important resource provides educational resources for professionals and works to advance best practices in family and child welfare mediation.



RESOLUTION

Issue #12
Winter 2025/26

Editor
Michael Saini, PhD

Contributing Editors
Annalise Stenekes
Julie Thériault
Scott Cruickshank
Willow McLean

Published by
Family Mediation Canada

Email: admin@fmc.ca
Telephone: 1-877-269-2970

Mailing address:
#1650, 246 Stewart Green SW
Calgary, AB T3H 3C8

Resolution is a bi-annual
publication of Family
Mediation Canada.

Deadline for content
submission:
May 1
Nov 1

Thank you for reading!