

## Cautions for the mediator

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1. Be careful of over-controlling the mediation and letting the process become mediator-centered rather than client-centered..
2. Don't confuse participants' self-determination with mediator impassivity. They need you to act, to provide motivation, focus and structure.
3. If they're asking you if they can speak, you may be conducting a too formal process.
4. If what is essentially happening, is that the parent is presenting a wish list, to which the administrator is consenting or denying, then they didn't need you. How can you frame questions which encourage fresh thinking?
5. You have *special permissions* as a mediator. You can interrupt the participants and direct the flow of the conversation to a productive vein. If you're letting people speak uninterrupted for fifteen minutes or, as I've observed, for a *full hour*, you're allowing precious time and opportunity to be wasted.
6. Stay on top of the details. If you miss points of agreement, if you don't discover the rationale behind people's thinking, if you don't know how they constructed a request or an offer, you can't be a fully knowledgeable participant.
7. You need to participate in the intramural caucuses. If you allow participants to meet separately without you at some length, you will not be able to encourage new thinking or re-examination. You won't get to ask some hard questions which need to be asked. You won't know what some of the dynamics are which inform the negotiation. They'll come back with a hardened position into which you'll have no insight.
8. Maintain the appearance as well as the fact of impartiality. Do not be sitting with the school staff over coffee when the parent walks in. Do not stay to talk with the school staff after the meeting is over.
9. Please don't call the school staff "the school" or the parent "the mother." Call them anything humanizing, and try to avoid calling them parties.