

# *Generation* **BOOMER**

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**Elder Care Mediation  
Helping Families Bridge Conflict**

**CB** *Talking About Our Generation*

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Photo by Lorie Nesser-Saiz

**When family discussions are not progressing....  
A third party mediator can help in the resolution**



# Elder Care Mediation

## Helping Families Bridge Conflict

It's 7 p.m. and you've just finished cleaning up after dinner. You are just about to turn on the TV when your cell phone rings. You think about not answering it but it's your sister, Elaine. You don't hear from her often and it's pretty late for her to be calling from the east coast.

You answer the phone hoping it's not bad news ... but it is. Your mother has fallen and broken her hip. She's in recovery after a two hour surgery.

At eighty-two, your mom is fiercely independent. She has lived for fifty-eight years in the same house you grew up in. It's where she lived with your dad until he passed away five years ago.

Mom has always done her own shopping, cleaning and cooking, but you noticed that she looked increasing frail during that visit home last Christmas. You made a mental note that you should call her more often. It's so hard to keep track of what's going on when you live 2,700 miles away. Elaine, on the other hand, lives only a few blocks away from Mom and has been doing more and more to make sure that Mom

is safe and eating right. But she's getting burned out.

Elaine tells you that Mom's surgery went well, but she will have to spend two months in a rehab facility. She won't be able to go home and live alone anymore. The staff suggested that assisted living may be the best option.

You can already see how this is going to play out. Mom will want to go home and resume her independent life. Ever since you were a little girl, she has warned, "Whatever you do, don't put me in a home!" When you were ten, it was in a kidding tone. But when she told you about how Mrs. Brown's kids took over, sold her house from underneath her and used the money to put her in that "Sunrise Senior Community," her tone was a lot more serious. Her voice resonates in your head.

Ben, your brother, will want to put Mom in assisted living. He lives in North Carolina and has enough going on in his own life.

Elaine may want Mom to live with her. But how would that work? She doesn't have an extra bedroom in her home. Granted her son is about to finally leave the nest, but he has said that before. And the timing might not be right. You want to honor Mom's wishes but you live so far away. Should Mom move in with you?

Mom's voice pops into your head. "You shouldn't move an old tree," she said when she told you about Mrs. Brown.

How will the family resolve their differences about Mom's future? And how will you have those hard conversations with Mom?

One option is mediation. Mediation is a voluntary process in which families work with an impartial third party, the mediator, to define the problem and explore ways to resolve it. Mediation is used in a variety of settings where conflicts arise.

Using mediation to resolve a conflict is not new. With the aging baby boomer population, mediation is now being used to address many of the issues that arise with aging such as living arrangements, finances and health-care planning. This emerg-

ing type of mediation is called Elder Care Mediation.

Discussing family issues in mediation offers many advantages. The discussion is led by a neutral mediator, who has special training to learn how to facilitate these "hard to talk about" issues. Elder Care mediators often have additional training regarding aging. Participants can express their feelings and concerns in a safe environment and the elder person has a voice in the outcome. All those who participate in mediation are encouraged not only to talk about the issues, but also to explore solutions together.

Additionally, everything said in mediation is confidential.

Another advantage of mediation is that it may avoid a lengthy legal battle. Often, people turn to a court process, such as a guardianship, when faced with these difficult issues. Litigation is

### Elder Care Mediation Services



*Helping Families to be Successful in Decision Making For Elders*

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Bridging conflict through alternative dispute resolution.



Jeanette Belz and Margaret Crowley

Photo - Connie McMullen

## My Generation

### Whatever you do, don't put me in a home!

costly and time-consuming. What's more, once litigation commences, parties generally become more antagonistic and entrenched in their positions.

Mediation, on the other hand, moves parties from taking positions to listening to other points of view and examining solutions they may not have thought of before. Mediation generally takes one or two sessions, with each session lasting no more than three to four

hours. Mediation is a great way to help families communicate and focus on the issues that need to be resolved, instead of retreating to their old family dynamic. It can also help a family develop strategies to work together in the future when other important decisions may need to be made.

So what happened to this family? They came together through mediation. Ben was able to par-

ticipate by telephone. During the mediation, Mom explained how important it was to her to live in her home. The children told Mom about their concerns for her safety. The family explored many different options to address these issues. Ben was clear that he was not able to contribute financially. Elaine suggested that Mom live with her. Mom bristled at the thought. She has never gotten along with her son-in-law.

Ultimately, the family agreed to hire a home health agency to look in on Mom every day and help her with some household tasks. Elaine would continue to do the shopping and taking

Mom to doctor's visits. For the time being, this solution was cheaper than assisted living and could be reassessed as Mom's circumstances changed. The children also decided to communicate weekly by e-mail to discuss issues that will surely arise.

After being released from rehab, Mom is delighted to be back in her own home with her new support system.

Jeanette Belz and Margaret Crowley provide mediation services, including elder care mediation, in Reno, NV. They can be reached at [www.jkbelz.com](http://www.jkbelz.com) and [www.crowleymediation.com/](http://www.crowleymediation.com/)