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PART A

Mediation – the What, the Why and the How

Imagine two young children in separate houses, both sitting at a table drawing pictures. In both houses, the door is open and the wind is creating a draft. A gust of air blows papers off the table and across the room.

In the first house an adult says, ‘Shut that door.’ The child follows orders and returns to her drawing. She completes the task but learned almost nothing from the episode.

In the second house an adult says, ‘The air is blowing through the door and creating a draft, which is blowing your papers across the room. Shut the door, and you will stop the draft.’ This child has learned not only what to do, but also how and why. This child has been *mediated*.

Mediation means that you identify the stimulus (the *what*), give it meaning (tell *why*) and then give it a *how* (Payne, 2005).

Make no assumptions about what children already know.

Almost nothing should be assumed about what children already know in terms of mediation, as the following true story illustrates:

Becky’s mother called her into the kitchen and said, ‘Watch the butter until it melts,’ before quickly leaving the room to attend to an emergency elsewhere. Becky looked at the stove and saw a stick of butter in a frying pan, sizzling around the edges. Within a minute the solid stick liquefied. Satisfied that she had done as she had been asked, Becky ran outside to play. Several minutes later Becky heard her mother’s excited and angry voice calling out. Becky walked into a smoke-filled house where her mother stood



The research says ...

Effective mediation requires that caregivers tell children the What, Why and How of directions and other interactions. For example, if we simply request that a child ‘close the door’, no mediation has taken place. If we explain, however, that we can stop the draft (*what*) by closing the door (*how*) so we’ll feel warmer (*why*), then mediation has taken place (Sharron & Coulter, 2004).

angrily fanning the air with her hands. 'I thought I told you to watch the butter until it melted!' she bellowed. 'I did,' Becky replied, genuinely confused.

Becky's mother assumed that the child knew to remove the pan and turn off the burner once the butter had melted. In terms of needed mediation, however, we should assume nothing for at least the first couple of times the instructions are given. Then the mediation attempts can either become less intense or be dropped altogether.

Hundreds of opportunities to mediate a young person are available on any given day. Obviously, no one can mediate every occurrence for every child in his or her care, but the goal is for mediation to occur regularly, and as often as feasible.

Following are responses that can provide mediation to children in various situations:

- 'We need to close the window tightly because cold air is coming in. If we close the window, the air will be blocked, and we'll feel warmer.'
- 'You need to wash your hands. Washing your hands with soap and hot water kills germs that could make you sick.'
- 'Put your things in the right place so you can find them when you need them. Then you will be able to get your work done faster.'
- 'You need to tie your shoe so you won't trip on your shoestring and hurt yourself.'
- 'Try not to splash water. Water on the floor could cause someone to slip and get hurt. If you splash water onto the floor, you'll have to clean it up and miss (reading) time.'
- 'You need to put your rubbish in the bin so our classroom will stay neat and clean. We can learn and play better in a clean room.'
- 'You need to sit down so the children behind you can see and we can all learn.'



- ‘We need to walk quietly in the corridor so we won’t disturb children in the other classrooms. They need to concentrate on what they are doing, and if we make noise, we will distract them from their work.’
- ‘We need to say nice things to other people so we won’t hurt their feelings. Let’s all practice by saying, ‘Hi, _____,’ and smiling.’
- ‘You need to button your coat before you go outside so you will stay warm and won’t catch cold. Buttoning your coat traps warmth from your body inside of your coat. This keeps you warm.’
- ‘We need to start cleaning up now because your parents will be here soon and we want to be ready. Your parents have many things to take care of every day, and if we aren’t ready for them, we will cause them to waste time.’
- ‘You need to take a nap now so you’ll be rested and feel great for the rest of the day. When you lie down and close your eyes, you will get sleepy.’
- ‘I need to put this money somewhere so that I can find it later. If I lose this money, I will have to replace it with my own, and I need my money to pay my bills.’
- ‘I need to put my reading glasses in their case so I won’t misplace or scratch them. I wouldn’t want them to get broken because reading glasses are expensive. Also, I need them in order to be able to read comfortably.’

The need for mediation applies to older students, as well, as the following example illustrates:

- ‘You need to look closely at your marking rubric before you write your essay. Studying the rubric will inform you as to what a perfect essay would look like.’



Now it's your turn.

I. How could each of the following daily events provide opportunities for mediation?

Putting coats in the closet. _____

Putting signed notes in the basket. _____

Opening a window for fresh air. _____

Returning a book to the bookcase after read-aloud time. _____

Not inviting someone to get in front of you in line. (Not fair to others behind you.) _____

Writing thank you letters. _____

Eating healthful foods. _____

Remaining seated on the bus. _____

Writing neatly. _____

Keeping shoes on and fastened. _____

II. Certain social expectations and cultural values need to be mediated numerous times in a variety of settings. Make notes in the spaces below to remind yourself of opportunities to mediate cultural expectations and values.

Being honest. _____

Being positive. _____

Speaking softly and calmly. _____

Speaking clearly. _____

Standing up straight. _____

Smiling. _____

Respecting authority. _____

Being kind to animals. _____

Listening to other people. _____

Showing strength through self-control. (The reasons for this behaviour include creating a positive impression, as well as enhancing the other person's feelings.) _____
