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## "Conflicts are not always bad"

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Since the beginning of the pandemic, tensions within families have increased. According to experts, a wave of separation and divorce is looming. In an interview, Imke Wulfmeyer, a lawyer and mediator from Stuttgart, shows ways out of family crises.

Ms Wulfmeyer, who comes to you for family mediation?

People with the most diverse intra-family conflicts. The majority are separating and divorcing couples who want a peaceful, family-friendly separation. In addition, there is family mediation, among other things, in inheritance disputes or in the regulation of the takeover of family businesses, i.e. when the senior boss hands over the company but wants to continue to have a say. A growing area is so-called elder mediation, which deals with issues related to ageing.

What is meant by this?

Most of the time, it is about questions concerning the care of relatives. Conflicts can arise between the adult siblings or between the generations, for example, if they have different opinions about the right to care or the division of labour. How do you help then?

There are two ways to resolve a conflict: by arguing or by working together. This second way is often difficult after a separation because strong feelings are involved, which make a factual discussion almost impossible. As a mediator, I therefore offer to support the conflicting parties through mediation. With my help, the two partners work out a solution freely and on their own responsibility.

tailor-made solution for your family. Everything that is discussed between us is confidential. As a mediator, I am impartial, i.e. not only neutral like an arbitrator, but I also support and encourage each partner like a coach. At the end there is a binding agreement that is equivalent to a court settlement.

Are there also rules for conflicts? In other words: How do you argue properly?

Basically, conflicts are not bad in themselves - what is bad is the way they are usually dealt with. Wherever people live or work together, conflicts occur - and that is a good thing, because conflicts are the motor for change. Mediators are convinced that conflicts can have a power to promote development. Listening well is the most important thing

What do you mean?

Most people do not listen in order to understand, but in order to respond. While the other person is still talking, they already have the counter-argument on the tip of their tongue. In mediation, people have the opportunity to learn a different way of listening. And the solution to a conflict is particularly sustainable if it is worked out by the parties themselves. I support them on the way to a good solution by providing structure and ensuring that the rules of the conversation are observed. I always compare this to the work of a midwife: I help with the birth, but the baby - i.e. the solution - has to be delivered by the conflict parties themselves.

Who suffers from quarrels in the family?

Everyone involved suffers from heated family arguments. It can even lead to health problems. However, it is usually the children who are most affected. It is important for them to maintain close contact with both parents even after the separation and to be kept out of their conflict. If they feel that the parents themselves are taking responsibility for the issue of separation, that they will find an agreeable solution and that they can continue to communicate constructively with each other, this relieves the children greatly.

What are the most frequent reasons for disputes? For separating couples, it is mostly about money and about the children.

Normally, you then hire a lawyer.

Fortunately, it is no longer like that. Most separating couples want a fair divorce and therefore explicitly ask for mediation. For good reason: lawyers have a different role, they have to get the best for their client. This often gives the other partner the feeling that he or she is being ripped off. In mediation, however, they do not work against each other, but towards a common goal. In the case of separations, for example, the common wish can be: To go their separate ways as a couple, but to continue to pull together as parents.

Have you been busier since the pandemic started?

Especially before Christmas, the number of enquiries increased significantly. The close living together has sometimes caused increased potential for conflict in families.

What does mediation cost?

A half-hour information session is free of charge for BAFM members. After that, it depends on how many sessions you need. And whether you work with a psychologist, social pedagogue or lawyer. There will be

different hourly rates are due in each case. Overall, mediation reduces the costs of divorce.

In the UK, family media is financially supported by the state.

We would like to achieve the same in Germany. Those who cannot afford a procedure

If you can afford the costs, you will receive legal aid. In mediation, on the other hand, all costs have been borne by the parties themselves up to now.

The interview was conducted by Bettina Hartmann.

**Figure:**

Good listening is important in resolving conflicts. It is about engaging with the other person.

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