

LOWCOUNTRY MEDIATION CENTER

We're glad *you're here.*

This packet covers everything you need to know before your first session. Read it at your own pace, and reach out any time you have questions.

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A Bridge to Affordable, High Quality Mediation

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Who We Are

The Lowcountry Mediation Center (LMC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to providing high-quality, affordable mediation services across the Lowcountry. We connect trained volunteer mediators with individuals, families, and organizations seeking fair, low-cost conflict resolution.

Founded in 2008 as the Mediation and Meeting Center of Charleston, the LMC was created to provide pro bono and low bono mediation services — particularly in response to South Carolina’s family court mediation requirements.

From 2008 to 2019, services were delivered through a membership-based model, where mediators worked directly with clients. In late 2020, MMCC began a transformation project to expand its reach and better serve the Charleston area and surrounding communities.

In 2026, MMCC officially became the Lowcountry Mediation Center. This change reflects our growth and our commitment to serving communities throughout the broader Lowcountry region. Today, under the leadership of President Jill E.M. HaLevi — one of the original founders — LMC continues to grow as a trusted resource for mediation across the Lowcountry.

OUR MISSION

"Providing accessible, high-quality conflict resolution services to help individuals, families, and communities find fair and lasting solutions outside of court."

OUR VISION

" Building a community that embraces mediation as a trusted way to resolve conflict through collaboration and understanding."

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What Is Mediation?

Mediation is a conversation — with a little help. A neutral mediator sits with you and the other party, helps everyone communicate, and guides you toward an agreement that works for both of you.

The mediator doesn't take sides, give legal advice, or decide anything. You're always in control of the outcome.

Mediation is

- Voluntary — you choose to participate
- Confidential — nothing leaves the room
- Collaborative — you shape the outcome
- Affordable — sliding scale and pro bono options
- Fast — most cases resolve in 1–2 sessions
- Flexible — in person or via Zoom

Mediation is not

- A court hearing where attendance is ordered
- A public legal proceeding on the record
- Arbitration, where someone else decides for you
- Only for people who can afford litigation
- Therapy or counseling for emotional processing
- Legally binding without both parties agreeing

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What to Expect

A step-by-step look at what happens from the moment you contact us to the moment your session ends — so nothing feels like a surprise.

1

You contact LMC

Reach out by phone, email, or our online request form. Tell us about your situation. We'll confirm whether LMC is the right fit, explain the process, and answer any questions.

2

Intake & eligibility

You'll receive a welcome email with next steps. Fees are assessed using a sliding scale tied to the Federal Poverty Guidelines. Both parties pay an application fee before scheduling can begin.

3

Scheduling & preparation

Once fees are received and a mediator is matched, your session is scheduled. You'll be asked to submit all relevant documents, a financial declaration (family court), and a personal position statement at least 72 hours in advance. Mediation fees are due within 7 days of scheduling notice.

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The opening

At the beginning of the session, your mediator introduces themselves, explains their role, reviews ground rules, and confirms that all parties consent to mediating in good faith. Confidentiality is established. Notes are destroyed at the end of the session.

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Private breakout rooms

Whether in person or on Zoom, each party participates from a private room. Parties are not required to meet together — if either party prefers not to, the mediator will honor that. The mediator begins with the plaintiff (the party who filed).



Discussion & negotiation

The mediator moves between rooms, listening to each side, identifying areas of agreement and disagreement, and carrying offers and counteroffers. They may offer suggestions based on experience but will never pressure either party and cannot provide legal advice.



If an agreement is reached

A written Settlement Agreement is drafted and signed (or e-signed) by both parties. It becomes legally binding once a judge approves it. You are never required to sign anything you're not comfortable with.



If no agreement is reached

The case returns to court for trial scheduling. Nothing said during mediation can be used against you in court — the session is without prejudice. A follow-up session may also be an option if both parties are willing.

Timing: LMC schedules sessions for a minimum of 4 hours. Family court requires a minimum of 3 hours by South Carolina law. Sessions can last a full day or longer. The mediator may end the session early if a participant is no longer negotiating in good faith.

Location: In person at an attorney's office, the Charleston School of Law mediation center, or a local courthouse — or via Zoom.

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How to Prepare: Before & After Scheduling

Before scheduling

You don't need everything — but having the following information on hand will help us schedule your mediation faster:

- **Your basic information**
Your full name, phone number, and email address. If you were referred by a court, your case number and the name of the referring court.
- **The other party's information**
The other party's name and contact details, if you have them. We'll need to reach out to them as well before a session can be scheduled.
- **A brief description of the dispute**
What is the conflict about? What type of case is it — family, civil, community? You don't need a prepared statement, just a general sense of the situation.
- **Any deadlines or court dates**
If you have an upcoming court date, a mediation deadline from a court order, or another time constraint, let us know upfront so we can prioritize scheduling.
- **A general sense of your household income**
LMC uses a sliding scale tied to the Federal Poverty Guidelines to determine fees. You don't need exact figures — just a rough sense will help us let you know what to expect.
- **Relevant documents (if you have them)**
Court orders, leases, contracts, financial records, or any other paperwork related to your dispute. These won't be needed right away — but having them available will help when we move to scheduling.

After scheduling

Documents to gather and send to the LMC in advance (*all materials are due at least 72 hours before the session):

Gather and send in:

- All relevant documents, evidence, correspondence, and notes
- In family court: both parties' financial declarations and all documents filed with the court
- Any relevant deadlines or court dates
- A personal position statement explaining your perspective

Questions to think about:

- What outcomes do you want? Where might you be willing to compromise?
- What would a fair outcome look like for you?
- What are the strengths of your position?
What are the weaknesses?

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

We're happy to answer anything before your session. There are no silly questions — just reach out.

CONTACT US

Phone: (843) 972-3683

Email: info@lowcountrymediation.org

Website: lowcountrymediationcenter.org

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After Your Session

IF YOU REACHED AN AGREEMENT

A written Settlement Agreement is drafted and signed (or e-signed) by both parties. It becomes legally binding once a judge approves it. Keep a copy somewhere safe.

Remember—you are never required to sign anything you're not comfortable with.

If you have any legal questions about your agreement afterward, it's worth talking to an attorney.

IF YOU DIDN'T REACH AN AGREEMENT

That's okay — it doesn't mean the process failed.

Your case returns to court, and nothing from the session can be used against you. Sometimes a second session — after everyone has had time to reflect — is all it takes.

If you were court-referred, LMC will notify the court that mediation was attempted.

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Glossary of Terms

Words you might hear during your session — explained in plain language.

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution. An umbrella term for methods of resolving disputes outside of traditional court litigation. Mediation, arbitration, and collaborative law are all forms of ADR.
Agreement <i>Also called: Settlement Agreement, Memorandum of Understanding</i>	The written document recording the terms both parties have agreed to. Can be made legally binding if both parties sign it as a contract.
Arbitration <i>Also called: Binding Arbitration</i>	A different form of dispute resolution where a neutral arbitrator hears both sides and makes a binding decision — similar to a judge. Unlike mediation, arbitration removes control of the outcome from the parties.
Arbitrator	A neutral third party who presides over an arbitration and issues a binding decision. Unlike a mediator, an arbitrator acts more like a private judge — they hear arguments from both sides and determine the outcome themselves.
Caucus	A private, confidential meeting between the mediator and one party, separate from the other. Used when direct communication has broken down or when a party wants to speak privately.
Confidentiality	Everything discussed in mediation is private and cannot be used in court proceedings. This allows people to speak openly without fear that their words will be used against them.
Guardian ad Litem <i>Also called: GAL</i>	A person appointed by the court to represent the best interests of a child in a legal proceeding. May be involved in family court mediation cases involving custody.
Impasse	A point where parties cannot reach agreement and progress has stalled. An impasse does not mean mediation has failed — a break or caucus can often move things forward.

Indigent	A legal term for a person who qualifies as low-income under court standards. Parties designated as indigent by a judge may be ordered to use LMC for mediation at reduced or no cost.
Joint Session <i>Also called: Plenary Session</i>	A meeting where all parties and the mediator are present at the same time. Commonly used to open mediation and to finalize agreements.
Litigation	The process of resolving a dispute through the court system. Typically more formal, more expensive, slower, and more adversarial than mediation. The outcome is decided by a judge or jury.
Mediation	A voluntary, confidential process in which a neutral third party helps two or more parties communicate, negotiate, and reach a mutually acceptable agreement. The mediator does not decide the outcome — the parties do.
Mediator <i>Also called: Neutral, Facilitator</i>	A trained, neutral professional who facilitates the session. They do not represent either party, offer legal advice, or make decisions. Their role is to guide the conversation.
Petitioner <i>Also called: Plaintiff (in some contexts)</i>	The party that initiates a case by filing a petition or complaint.
Probate	The court-supervised legal process of validating a will, paying final debts, and distributing remaining assets.
Pro Bono	Latin for ‘for the public good.’ Services provided free of charge to individuals who cannot afford to pay. LMC offers pro bono mediation to qualifying low-income clients.
Pro Se	A Latin term meaning ‘for oneself.’ Someone who represents themselves in a legal proceeding without an attorney is said to be appearing pro se.

Respondent <i>Also called: Defendant (in some contexts)</i>	The party in a legal proceeding that is responding to a claim filed by another party.
Sliding Scale	A fee structure where the amount charged is adjusted based on the client's ability to pay, tied to household income.
Without Prejudice	A legal term meaning that what is said or offered during mediation cannot be used as evidence in later court proceedings. All LMC sessions are conducted on this basis.

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Contact Us

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TAKE THE NEXT STEP

REQUEST A MEDIATION

Submit a request and hear back within 2 business days.

MAKE A DONATION

Support LMC programs, outreach, and operations.

STILL HAVE QUESTIONS?

EXPLORE OUR WEBSITE

Find everything you need—from how mediation works to our full glossary, FAQ, fee information, and more.

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES & FAQ

Our resources page includes guides, a full glossary, external legal links, and SC court rules.

Have a question? Our FAQ covers the most common ones.