



**SHIV MARTIN CONSULTING**

*RESOLVE CONFLICT. BUILD TRUST.*

*STRENGTHEN TEAMS.*

# IS A FACILITATED CONVERSATION (MEDIATION) THE RIGHT NEXT STEP?

\*Remember you don't have to call it conflict or call it a mediation.

A 10-Question Checklist for Principals,  
School Leaders, and HR Staff



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*In schools, conflict is inevitable. But when it's handled early and respectfully, it becomes an opportunity for growth and connection. My job is to help schools manage these situations calmly and constructively, while protecting everyone involved.*



## INTRODUCTION

When tension starts to build between staff, with a parent, or within your leadership team, it can be hard to know what to do next. You don't want to overreact, but you also don't want to let things fester. This checklist helps you decide whether to offer a structured, supported conversation.

I work as a mediator, and this conversation looks a lot like a mediation process BUT you don't need to call it mediation. In fact, avoiding formal or legal language can reduce anxiety, support voluntary participation, and keep the tone constructive. You're not escalating the situation. You're offering a safe and professional way to move forward.

## ABOUT SHIV MARTIN ✨



Shiv Martin is a nationally accredited mediator, lawyer, and trainer with over 15 years' experience supporting school leaders and HR teams to resolve workplace conflict and strengthen team culture. She has worked with education departments, principals' associations, and independent schools across Australia to mediate complex staff issues, facilitate restorative conversations, and deliver training in early intervention and conflict resolution. Shiv brings a calm, practical, and culturally sensitive approach informed by legal expertise, psychology, and lived experience. Her services include structured mediations, leadership coaching, and tailored workshops to equip school leaders with the confidence and tools to manage conflict effectively.

# 10 QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU DECIDE

Answer Yes, No, or Not Sure to each:

- 1 *Is there an ongoing relationship that needs to be preserved?  
(e.g. colleagues, parent with multiple children, long-term staff)*
- 2 *Have previous attempts to resolve the issue not worked?*
- 3 *Are the people involved open to talking, even if reluctantly?*
- 4 *Is the situation beginning to affect morale or performance?*
- 5 *Are emotions high, but respectful conversation still possible with support?*
- 6 *Do you want to resolve the issue quietly, quickly, and informally?*
- 7 *Is this a misunderstanding or values-based issue, not a misconduct matter?*
- 8 *Would a neutral third party help shift the dynamic and build trust?*
- 9 *Is someone feeling unsafe, unheard, or uncertain about how to proceed?*
- 10 *Are you keen to prevent formal complaints or external escalation?*



## SCORING

- **8 to 10 Yes answers** = A structured, facilitated conversation is highly recommended.
- **5 to 7 Yes answers** = A good candidate for early intervention.
- **0 to 4 Yes answers** = A different strategy may be more appropriate. Consider HR advice, policy-based response, or individual coaching.

## WHY BRINGING IN A THIRD PARTY CAN HELP

Sometimes, school leaders feel caught in the middle. You want to support everyone, but you're also part of the team or leadership structure. That can make neutrality difficult to maintain. This is where a third party can make a real difference.

**A neutral facilitator isn't on anyone's side. Their role is to:**

- ✓ Create a safe and structured space
- ✓ Help everyone feel heard
- ✓ Ensure fairness and dignity throughout the process
- ✓ Interrupt negative cycles or communication breakdowns
- ✓ Support agreement on next steps

**You might say:**

*"I want everyone to feel supported and heard. That's why I'm bringing in someone neutral to help us work through this."*

*"This isn't a disciplinary step. It's a supported, professional conversation to help us move forward."*

These kinds of phrases communicate **care, fairness, and accountability**. They also help reduce defensiveness and fear.

## HOW TO INTRODUCE THE PROCESS WITHOUT SAYING "MEDIATION"

You don't need to label the issue as conflict or use the word mediation. Softer language often encourages participation. Try:



You're still offering the same process, just with language that feels safer and more constructive. Here are a few examples of what you might say:

- "This situation matters, and I'd like to support a clear, respectful conversation so we don't carry this forward."
- "We've been through a few informal steps, and I think this could benefit from some structure and neutrality."
- "A lot of schools find that bringing someone external into the conversation changes the dynamic and helps people feel safer."

# THE COST–BENEFIT OF EXTERNAL SUPPORT

It's easy to delay dealing with conflict, especially when it feels uncomfortable or time-consuming. But the cost of doing nothing is often much greater than the cost of early support.

## **Unresolved conflict can lead to:**

- Psychological injury and workers' compensation claims
- Parent-school relationship breakdowns
- Staff disengagement or turnover
- Legal costs and time-consuming formal processes
- Reputation damage or media attention



Under Australian psychosocial safety legislation, schools have a duty to manage risks to mental health. This includes interpersonal conflict, poor team dynamics, and communication breakdowns.

## **Engaging external support:**

- Reduces pressure on leaders
- Protects staff wellbeing and safety
- Demonstrates fairness and transparency
- Prevents escalation to more formal or costly processes
- Saves time, energy, and legal risk in the long run

Even one supported conversation can shift the tone, restore relationships, and support long-term team resilience.

“If we catch it early, we don't need to fix it later.”

# HOW I CAN HELP

I support schools across Australia with:

- Facilitated staff and leadership conversations
- Parent-school relationship repair
- Team check-ins and culture reset sessions
- Custom training for school leaders on handling conflict
- Legal-compliant early resolution options that preserve relationships

## FEEDBACK FROM SHIV'S CLIENTS

"If you're seeking a reliable partner to help **navigate conflicts, improve team dynamics, or gain specialised training in mediation and conflict management**, please reach out to Shiv Martin. Having worked with Shiv over several years, she offers tailored solutions and has a practical and engaging style. **A wealth of knowledge and experience leaders and HR professionals can depend on.**" - Executive Manager, Master Builders (QLD)

"I recently attended a two-day training course led by Shiv Martin, and it was an **exceptional experience**. She was incredibly warm and approachable, making the **learning environment comfortable and engaging**. Her depth of knowledge, experience and practical insights into mediation were truly impressive. I left the course **feeling confident and equipped with valuable skills.**" - HR Business Partner, Local Government

"I loved your workshop - it was **expertly facilitated and very relatable**. You were able to create a safe space for open discussion and reflection with non-clinical examples. I would highly recommend anyone who works in a team environment attend." - Staff Specialist | Royal Brisbane and Women's Emergency and Trauma Centre




## BOOK A **FREE 30-MINUTE** CONSULTATION

to explore the right approach for your team.

**BOOK A TIME HERE** 

**OR REACH OUT ANYTIME**

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