

Mediator Insights: The Give and Take of Mediation

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Mediation is a give and take. It requires listening and sharing. It requires understanding wants and needs. To illustrate, let's consider Karen Kaufman Orloff's "*I Wanna Iguana.*"

In this story, young Alex's friend Mikey is moving away and cannot take his pet iguana with him. Alex really, really, really wants to adopt his friend's iguana. He just has to convince his mother.

As the story unfolds, Alex and his mother exchange a series of letters. Alex explains in each letter why he should be allowed to have a pet iguana. His mom responds.

Alex's first letter reads: "Dear Mom, Did you know that iguanas are really quiet and they are cute too. I think they are much cuter than hamsters. Love, Your adorable son, Alex."

Mom responds: "Dear Alex, Tarantulas are quiet too, but I wouldn't want one as a pet. By the way, that iguana of Mikey's is uglier than Godzilla. Just thought I'd mention it. Love, Mom."

Their letters go back and forth as Alex tries various different arguments. These arguments range from, he's so small you will never know he's there, to which Mom responds that iguanas can grow to over 6 feet long so she will know, to the iguana can be the brother that I've always wanted, to which Mom responds that he already has a brother.

Alex perseveres. But, more importantly, both Alex and Mom learn in the process. Through trial and error, they each begin to understand what is important to the other.



In one letter, Mom reminds Alex what happened when he brought home the class fish. Alex responds with “Dear Mom, If I knew the fish was going to jump into the spaghetti sauce, I never would have taken the cover off the jar! Love, Your son who has learned his lesson. P.S. Iguanas don’t like spaghetti.”

This letter marks a turning point because Mom responds by asking, if he were allowed to have the iguana on a trial basis, how would he care for it?

Through more letters, Alex explains how he would feed and water the iguana, clean its cage, and use his allowance to pay for its food. Mom writes in her final letter, “Dear Alex, Look on your dresser. Love, Mom” And there, Alex finds the iguana.

This story beautifully captures the give and take of a successful mediation. Alex and Mom each listened to the other. Each shared with the other. They each considered the wants and the needs of the other. And, ultimately, they reached an agreement.

Listening. Sharing. Considering both your own wants and needs and the other’s wants and needs. These are important parts of finding your path to resolution.

Author’s Note: As a mediator, I am a “forever student” always seeking new ways to help people find a path to resolution in mediation. As a parent, I have spent a gazillion hours reading books to my children. Oftentimes, these books teach me new ways to approach conflict resolution. In this case, Karen Kaufman Orloff’s “I Wanna Iguana” inspired this post.

Disclaimer: Nothing contained herein constitutes legal advice nor does anything contained herein create a professional relationship.