

Case Study 2: Neighbourhood dispute over noise levels

Type of dispute: Neighbourhood dispute over noise levels.

Time from mediation to result: One day mediation session.

Background: Bill has lived with his wife in the same house for the past 24 years. He is a respected member of the community, but has been having problems with a noisy neighbour that has recently moved in next door. As the new term started at University, Jeremy has moved in next door to Bill and their lifestyles seem to clash, resulting in conflict.

The challenge: Unfortunately Bill and Jeremy have never been on speaking terms, due to their differences in lifestyle. The challenge was therefore to get these two individuals speaking about issues that upset them.

Objectives:

- Get Bill and Jeremy to talk about how the other person's behaviour annoys them
- Ensure a fair mediation process
- Raise the key issues surrounding the conflict
- Reach a workable agreement to suit both parties

Reason for conflict:

Bill's position: Having lived in the neighbourhood for many years, Bill saw himself as a valued member of the community and was a firm believer in the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. Over the past 24 years of living on the same street, Bill has never had any trouble until Jeremy moved in next door.

Bill was annoyed at Jeremy for play music too loud late at night. This would keep him awake until the early hours and meant that he was not as productive as usual during the working day. Jeremy would also come back from socialising on nights out as late as 4am, which woke Bill up and added to his misery. Bill thinks that Jeremy is becoming a "neighbour from hell."

Jeremy's position: After starting his second year at University, Jeremy decided to move into a rented house with a couple of friends. As a twenty something year old, he enjoys life to the full and often stays out late at parties, returned in the early hours of the morning. He cannot see a problem with this as many of his friends do the same activities and have had no complaints in the past.

After a while Bill began to deliberately wake Jeremy in the mornings and would turn the television on loud when getting ready for work at 6am. Jeremy began to get annoyed with Bill bothering him about the noise, but did not want to keep persistently upsetting him, so was prepared to talk things through in a civilised way, rather than have Bill call the police, which became a common occurrence.

Why mediation? Due to the age gaps between these two individuals, it is apparent that both enjoy life in very different ways. When Bill called the police they suggested that mediation was an alternative option to solve the problem once and for all.

Agreement and settlement: After both neighbours were given the opportunity to express their opinions individually to a mediator, both Jeremy and Bill agreed to make small changes in order to get along. Bill understood that Jeremy was trying to fit in with new friends and living away from home for the first time was a difficult process. Bill then agreed to stop bothering him about the noise level and coming home late, provided that he was not kept awake all night. Jeremy could see how a small action of playing music loudly had a large impact on Bill's life and agreed to play it at a reasonable level and at sensible times of the day. He also agreed not make lots of noise when coming back from bars and clubs during the early hours.

(Please note that the identities of the disputing individuals have been altered, due to the confidentiality element mediation carries.)