

## Taking a flexible approach to resolve the most challenging cases



“It’s a great feeling when parents put their signature to an agreement. I find satisfaction on behalf of the children and all parties concerned,” says FairWay Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) Mediator, Ngarongo Ormsby.

Tauranga Moana based Ngarongo specialises in relationship conflict. He has more than 20 years’ experience working with conflict in many different situations.

“Culturally, Ngarongo means “peacemaker” originating from the Māori god Rongomātāne and his grandma, Ngarongoa. Being a peacemaker is my calling and it’s much more than a job,” says Ngarongo.

“I built my foundational skills in the prison service where conflict and disputes occur daily. You learned very quickly how to read situations, trust your instincts and be creative when resolving issues of conflict with staff and prisoners,” says Ngarongo.

“Many family disputes can have complex factors. There can be hostility, unresolved issues, blended families, inter-ethnic marriages and relationships with differing beliefs - those things tend to really manifest themselves when it comes to shared parenting issues.”

Ngarongo developed FairWay’s Tumeke Whānau Whanui, a family dispute resolution approach for Māori based on traditional Māori values.

“The approach draws on our ancient stories of wisdom and analogies. It’s respectful of te reo tikanga and kawa, our collective culture and protocols. In the whānau, parental guardianship is a collective responsibility and it’s good to understand how what happens in the family today will make a difference to the generations yet to come,” says Ngarongo.

One of his most memorable cases involved a family with a deep commitment to Kura Kaupapa Māori, primary schools dedicated to Māori custom and language and Kōhanga Reo, a Māori family programme for young children.

“The parents and their children preferred a family mediation so we explored a whānau centric way of collectivising their voices and decision making. We called it a hui-a-whānau. It was a cultural process of kawa, tikanga, te reo and mediation.

“We held it at their home, observing shared Māori protocols. It is uncommon to have children involved in a mediation, however, hui-a-whānau enabled that to occur. It resulted in an inclusive agreement acknowledged with traditional hongī. I was then invited to the hakari (meal) afterwards, which made it extra special for me.”

Another comparable case involved a non-Māori family where their five children requested to be involved in the mediation. In this all-of-family mediation session, we called a family meeting.

“In that case, the children wanted to voice their hurt feelings and opinions to their father. The father agreed to work with the family to resolve the issues. I met with the children and their

grandmother to help formulate a plan. The parents came into the room around a large table. Each child had their say. The older children held the hands of the younger ones in support while their grandmother brought stability and comfort. Afterwards, we all had some tea and some food. Then the children left with grandmother and the mediation continued with the parents, who then mutually reached an agreement.”

Ngarongo believes assessment and preparation for mediation are the most critical parts of the process.

“I often talk about kanohi kōrero, which involves meeting each party individually and face to face where possible. It helps to provide a sense of connectedness, confidence and reassurance.

“Every case is different but there are three common themes, I call them my three C’s – communication, co-operation and commitment. When there is a breakdown in relationships, communication will become difficult, strained, hostile or non-existent. When communication breaks down, co-operation goes out the door. People position themselves into corners in anticipation for fight or flight. There can be demands, threats, accusations and manipulation. It is very oppositional.

“The mediator needs to identify those unhelpful power bases, strip them back and neutralise them. FDR is about creating a safe level playing field to help parents reach an agreement that meets their children’s needs.

“A very skilled mediator will work quickly to assess the situation, get to know each person’s story and provide an opportunity for both parties to have conversations about a commitment to shared parenting. We know that most parents can make good decisions for their families, they just need the right tools and support.”



### ***How Family Dispute Resolution can help you***

Family Dispute Resolution will have the right fit for your family, with over 80 accredited mediators around New Zealand.

Many families are entitled to 12 hours of fully-funded Family Dispute Resolution services.

*Get in touch with Ngarongo and the Family Dispute Resolution team to find out more.*

**Phone 0800 774 420.**

**Website [Family Dispute Resolution webpage](#)**