

**SFUFC Form 11.17**

ATTORNEY OR PARTY WITHOUT ATTORNEY (Name and Address) Telephone No.:	FOR COURT USE ONLY
ATTORNEY FOR (Name):	
SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO	
STREET ADDRESS:	
MAILING ADDRESS:	
CITY AND ZIP CODE:	
BRANCH NAME:	
PLAINTIFF/PETITIONER:	CASE NUMBER:
DEFENDANT/RESPONDENT:	

**NOTICE OF NATURE AND AVAILABILITY OF ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION METHODS IN FAMILY LAW MATTERS**

**A. Superior Court and Family Law Department Policy Recommending Use of Alternative Dispute Resolution Methods in Family Law Matters**

The San Francisco Superior Court and its Family Law Department strongly recommend the use of alternative dispute resolution methods in family law matters. This Notice is intended to inform parties and counsel about the nature and availability of such methods. All parties and all counsel in such matters must file and serve a signed copy of this Notice in the manner prescribed in Rule 11.17 of these Rules.

The term "alternative dispute resolution" (sometimes called "ADR") refers generally to methods of resolving disputes without going through formal adversarial court proceedings. Although there are several methods of ADR, the two methods to which this Notice applies are mediation and collaborative law (also called collaborative divorce and collaborative practice).

Mediation and collaborative law can be used at any point in a family law proceeding to resolve disputes about property division, child support, spousal support, child custody, parenting plans, and many other family law issues. Mediation and collaborative law can save time and money and can greatly increase parties' satisfaction with the outcome of their case. Rule 11.17(A) of these Rules states the policy of the San Francisco Superior Court as follows:

"The Superior Court of the County of San Francisco and its Family Law Department strongly encourage the resolution of family law matters through the use of alternative dispute resolution procedures. The Court and the Department recognize

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that formal adversarial litigation in family law is expensive, time-consuming, and often emotionally destructive for parties and their children. The Court and the Department further recognize that alternative dispute resolution procedures can help parties avoid these undesirable aspects of family law litigation. Accordingly, in an effort to reduce hostility between the parties, facilitate early resolution of issues, minimize expense, and maximize the opportunity for parties to reach mutually satisfactory agreements, the Court and the Department institute this Rule 11.17 supporting and promoting alternative dispute resolution procedures in family law cases.”

The Superior Court strongly encourages the use of mediation and collaborative law in family law matters but does not favor any particular form of ADR. Other forms of ADR, including arbitration, court-supervised settlement conferences, and judicial case management are referenced in Rule 11 of these Rules. For purposes of mediation and collaborative law the Court does not endorse any particular attorney or group provider, nor does the Court guarantee the outcome or cost in any particular case.

**B. Description and Availability of Mediation and Collaborative Law in Family Law Matters**

**1. Mediation**

Mediation is a voluntary process. In mediation a neutral attorney called a “mediator” meets with the parties together, or with the parties and their attorneys, to assist them in reaching an agreement. The mediator facilitates communication between the participants, clarifies issues, explores each party’s needs and interests, and helps the participants consider options for settlement.

In mediation the parties may resolve a single issue or the entire case. The agreements reached in mediation are not limited by the results available under the law, so mediated solutions can more easily accommodate the circumstances of individual cases. An agreement reached in mediation is binding once it is signed and later it generally becomes a court order. A party cannot be forced to accept a decision in mediation, and participating in mediation does not affect a party’s right to a court hearing. If an agreement is not reached a party may continue through the court system.

Mediation is private and confidential. The sessions are conducted in the mediator’s office. Anything spoken or written during mediation by any of the participants is confidential and may not be disclosed to the Court or any other person without the consent of the participants.

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There are several ways to find out more about mediation, including costs, and to locate a mediator. The San Francisco Superior Court maintains a list of court-approved mediators, including family law mediators, on the Court Website at [www.sfgov.org/courts](http://www.sfgov.org/courts). The Superior Court information telephone number is 415-551-4000. The Bar Association of San Francisco also maintains a list of mediators, including family law mediators, on its Website at [www.sfbar.org](http://www.sfbar.org). The Bar Association information telephone number is 415-982-1600.

## **2. Collaborative Practice**

In collaborative practice each party has a private lawyer. Both parties and both lawyers make a formal commitment not to initiate or engage in any type of litigation or adversarial proceedings. There is no neutral mediator. The parties and lawyers hold a series of four-way meetings designed to develop information and to find solutions to the problems presented in each individual case. The lawyers in collaborative practice, who are referred to as "collaborative counsel", work together with the parties to enhance communication between the parties, clarify issues, identify the parties' needs, goals, and interests, and develop options for resolution of issues. Often, collaborative counsel help the parties assemble a team of professionals specially suited to address the parties' unique issues. The team may include mental health professionals who serve as divorce "coaches" for the parties, child specialists, financial specialists and vocational experts. Problem-solving in a collaborative divorce is not limited to the results available under the law, so that collaborative divorce offers a broader and more flexible approach to dispute resolution than traditional litigation can provide.

An agreement reached in collaborative practice is binding once it is signed and later it generally becomes a court order. Also collaborative practice, like mediation, is private and confidential. The parties agree at the outset that all spoken and written communication is confidential and cannot be disclosed to the court or any other person unless the participants consent.

To find more information and to locate attorneys and other professionals who are trained in the collaborative process and maintain collaborative practices, parties can consult the Website for Collaborative Practice San Francisco at [www.collaborativepracticesanfrancisco.com](http://www.collaborativepracticesanfrancisco.com).

## **C. Mediation and Collaborative Practice Inapplicable In Certain Situations**

Mediation and collaborative practice are most useful when parties are able to communicate and solve problems without fear or intimidation. For this reason these methods may not be appropriate when parties have a history of domestic violence.

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The Court encourages the use of mediation and collaborative practice to resolve child custody and parenting plan issues. However, where such issues are not resolved by mediation, collaborative practice, or other forms of alternative dispute resolution, before any such dispute is submitted to a judicial officer for determination, California law requires the disputing parties to conduct child custody mediation with the Office of Family Court Services of the Superior Court. This mediation is conducted under the supervision of the Court, is limited to child custody and parenting issues, and does not address property, support, or other financial questions.

The undersigned certifies that s/he has read this Notice In compliance with San Francisco County Local Rule 11.17.

Date:

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Petitioner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Respondent

Attorney Certification of compliance with San Francisco County Local Rule 11.17:

Date:

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Attorney for Petitioner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Attorney for Respondent