



60 Gore Street  
Cambridge, MA 02141

Tel: 617-876-5376

Fax: 617-876-6663

Website: [communitydispute.org](http://communitydispute.org)

Email: [cdscinfo@communitydispute.org](mailto:cdscinfo@communitydispute.org)

To: DG Mawn, President, NAFCM  
From: Gail S. Packer, Executive Director  
Re: The “New Normal”: How A community mediation center responds  
Date: April 1, 2020 – no joke!

The Community Dispute Settlement Center, Inc., based in Cambridge MA, is taking pro-active steps to re-define what our mediation services look like, after four decades in this dispute resolution biz.

Yes, we can be responsive to what the world needs now. Yes, we can adapt. Yes, we can re-frame our Mediation services into what’s possible in the context of the “new normal”. The COVID-19 world has dramatically and drastically altered the distance of our human interactions and, in so doing, re-defined what traditional face-to-face mediation looks like.

Last week CDSC staff conferred with other Community Mediation Centers across Massachusetts, sharing ideas, strategies, and experiences, as some had already implemented phone conference calls and virtual platforms, like Zoom.

Subsequently, CDSC reached out via email to our dedicated group of 60+ volunteer mediators to check in and connect, with the purpose of engaging them as we re-invent a new form/forum for our mediation. We provided them with the following update, too:

**Serving the Courts:** District, Juvenile, Probate & Family Courts are closed for the near future. We are hearing that when they re-open, it may still be in a limited way and they may be very receptive to referring cases to ADR programs using video or phone Mediation.

**Serving the Community:** we want to keep our virtual doors open to be available for people dealing with conflict by offering alternatives to in-person mediation.

We surveyed our Mediators, asking about their comfort and competence in handling two options: mediation via phone conferencing and via Zoom platform. The response, to date, has been extremely positive, with close to half the group game to try Zoom. Our next step: a Zoom info session and tutorial has been scheduled to discuss how to roll this out, what challenges to anticipate, and, ultimately, to continue to share best practices.

It’s a new frontier.  
Our mantra: Be All In!