

## Municipal Court Stories

Lynda filed a barking dog complaint against their neighbors, the Smith's. They had tried once to contact them, but were unsuccessful. Animal Control responded with a citation against the Smith's, they went to court and were referred to mediation. Everyone agreed to mediate.

During mediation Lynda explained that she works in the operating room at a nearby hospital, begins work at 6:00am, and really needs her sleep. It wasn't that she hated the dog, or the neighbors. She just needed her sleep. She had tried to talk with them, even if only once. She had knocked on their door, and no one answered. Somewhat sleep deprived she went to Animal Control with her complaint.

Karen Smith initially felt threatened by Animal Control, the citation, and her neighbors. Was her dog at risk? They hadn't received any other complaints! It was nice of Linda to come over, but Karen never answered the door when she was home alone.

After the initial defensiveness from both Lynda and Karen, they both reach a spot where they could explain their concerns constructively and hear the other person. Karen explained that after getting the citation, her husband had enclosed the patio, which provided a better place for the dog. They had also been taking the dog for a walk and were much more diligent about watching the barking.

Lynda agreed the situation was much better. They discussed and agreed that Smith's would control the barking more carefully and Lynda would call if she had a concern. They exchanged phone numbers and established the beginning of a reasonable neighborly relationship.

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Leona called police when her daughter Sonja pushed her against the wall while drunk. Sonja lived at her mom's place and had been drinking too much lately. Her mom was both concerned and afraid. When the police arrived, Sonja was unreasonable, somewhat incoherent, and was hauled away to detox.

The prosecuting attorney suggested that if Sonja would complete an alcohol program, and go to mediation to resolve the conflict with her mother, the court would dismiss the charges. Leona agreed.

Leona loves her daughter, wants her to get some help, and doesn't want the relationship between the two of them permanently damaged. Leona also felt this would be helpful in getting Sonja to take personal responsibility for her actions and her future.

Through mediation Sonja apologized to her mother, they agreed that Sonja would live at her mom's for a short time, while looking for a job, and completing the alcohol program. They talked about how much they loved each other and were sorry things had gotten to this point. They set some specific boundaries and agreed on how they would manage disagreements in the future.

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Davis and Wesley are twelve years old, friends, and got into a fight on a school bus. When they got home from school, they told their parents and thought everything was fine. Another boy on the bus reported the incident and after reviewing video from the school bus, the principal reported the incident to the police.

Both boys were kicked off the bus for ten days and had to go to court. They were scared, uncertain about what all this meant and why it had snowballed so quickly. Fortunately, the court referred them to mediation. During mediation, Wesley talked about how it felt to be picked on, how the teasing sometimes got out of hand and his friend, Davis admitted that he'd never thought about it that way.

Just having the opportunity to talk through the situation, to explain how they felt in a safe setting, away from school, made all the difference. They agreed upon a number of ways they would change their behavior with each other and the importance of the bus rules. They and their parents thanked the mediator and the court for giving them the opportunity to talk their way through this challenging situation.

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Tiffany and John complained to management about noise in their neighbor's apartment. Management said there was nothing they could do. They tried to say something to their neighbor, Chantal, about her music being just too loud! Things got better for a few days and then went back to the noisy normal. Tiffany and John decided they'd tried once, now they were calling the cops. They filed a complaint.

When Chantal showed up for court, she was angry with her neighbors for being too sensitive and calling the cops. Court or maybe the prosecuting attorney suggested mediation might resolve the issue. Initially, Chantal didn't want anything to do with her neighbors and certainly didn't want to talk with them!

The mediator called, explained mediation and under some duress, Chantal agreed to give it a try. Tiffany and John said they would also try mediation. Interestingly enough, both parties ended up asking if they could bring their small children, as daycare was an issue. The mediator agreed as long as they weren't disruptive.

As they discussed the "noise", it was clear that Chantal's stereo was the major problem. Apartment walls being the way they are, any sound carries and bass is the worse! Chantal agreed to move her stereo away from their shared wall and the balcony – keeping it more toward the interior walls of her apartment. She also agreed to watch the volume more closely. Tiffany and John agreed that before calling the police they would give Chantal a call and ask her politely to turn the music down. Chantal said she'd try to keep it low, but a reminder if it got too loud would be great.

We followed up in forty-five days and everyone agreed things had improved greatly!

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Pam and Richard were concerned about their neighbor Raul's small dogs running loose and his large dog barking, or maybe it was howling. Since Raul was never home, Pam couldn't talk with Raul and explain her concern that her dogs were being neglected, and the small ones running loose might cause them to be hit by a car or eaten for a midnight snack by a fox. Pam finally just called Animal Control, who came out and issued a citation for the dogs running at large.

Raul showed up for court, not at all happy and after some persuasion by the attorney, agreed to mediation.

As always, both parties were tense and frustrated that the situation had reached this point and Raul was a bit angry and defensive. Karen explained her concern for the smaller dogs; it wasn't that she was just complaining and calling on her neighbor. They talked about a number of issues and concerns, came to agreement for both barking and keeping the dogs either in the fence, or in his house. Karen also agreed to give Raul a call if she had any ongoing concerns.

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To be continued . . .

- A father and his son-in-law got into a fist fight after drinking too much,
- Two neighbors got into a pushing match over landscaping issues,
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