

How do I know that you are impartial?

When I contact someone to arrange an initial consultation about mediation I am sometimes asked this question

Especially if I have already spoken to their former partner and their relationship is fraught with mistrust.

How do I know that you are impartial, unbiased, they ask?

It is an understandable question and one I do not shy away from.

I am of course impartial but as much as I might insist on this the point is that the person I am speaking to needs to believe it.

The way I think about this challenge is that the person is asking for reassurance.

Reassurance that having already listened to their former partner talk about them I have not already formed some kind of bias against them.

My task is to find out what the person is needing to hear or know from me that will reassure them about my impartiality.

I explain that my aim, during these initial individual meetings, is to understand what is important to each person, what are they most concerned about, what beliefs do they hold about themselves, each other and the situation, their approaches and attitudes and how motivated they are to reach fair outcomes, with my help

I explain that my focus is on assessing whether their situation is suitable for mediation and how I am going to help each of them and both of them, working together in mediation, to navigate the challenges of divorce and their communication, to be able to keep them out of court and make important decisions for themselves and their children.

Impartiality is, of course, a perception, a perception that the person I am speaking to holds, and unless I am able to reassure them and help them shift this perception and belief they are unlikely to use me, as the mediator or the mediation process.