

06 November 2024

Training of Children's Court Officers in Family Mediation

I wish to submit a freedom of information request to the Belfast Trust in regard to the formal training of Children's Court Officers in Family Mediation.

Please provide any information, emails, minutes of meetings of policy documents where the training of CCO's has been discussed. Please also provide details of the level and content of any training attended by any CCO working in the Belfast Trust area specifically in family mediation.

Have you, or do you intend to provide your staff with training endorsed by and delivered in line with the standards set by the College of Mediators or the Family Mediation Council?

What training has any CCO in the Belfast Trust Area attended in regard to Coercive Control generally? Who was it delivered by and what content areas did it cover?

What training has any CCO in the Belfast Trust area received in regard to training about mediation in situations where coercive control is alleged?

How many mediations have CCO's in the Belfast Trust led?

In those CCO led mediation situations how many involved allegations of coercive control or domestic abuse?

Please see attached two emails in respect of offering mediation training to CCO – which one staff member has commenced.

Please note that where redactions have been made, this information is exempt from release under S40(2) Personal Information relating to a third party and S38 Health and Safety.

With regards to individual names of non-managerial staff and other individuals not working for Belfast Health and Social Services Trust, telephone numbers and email addresses, this information is exempt under Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which relates to personal information relating to a third party. Information of a personal nature is exempt from release where its disclosure would constitute a breach of the principles of the GDPR 2018.

06 November 2024

1. Level and content of training attended by CCO specifically in relation to family mediation. In October 2019 mediation skills training was undertaken by the CCO team over a two day period. This was organised and facilitated by Family Mediation NI. The aim of which was to have an understanding of how mediation can best be applied in a court setting and to develop mediation skills within a court setting. The objectives were to have an understanding of how conflict escalates and de-escalates. To know the different types of conflict styles and how this impacts negotiation. To improve practice in mediation. Identify power imbalance and work towards improving negotiation skills. Understand the theories of negotiation and know how to move mediation forward when challenges arise. Skills practice in the form of role plays. Practical advice and guidance on supporting the mediation process. Assessing for suitability. Dealing with impasse. Questioning techniques. Conflict styles.

Two staff also attended training in respect of Parental Alienation with Irish Parental Alienation Conference, Trinity College in 2019 and one of the two staff attended further training in this area in June 2023.

Staff also attended 3 day training on Working With Childhood Relational Trauma in Divorce and Separation in April 2023.

Other relevant training attended by staff is as following: Sexually Harmful Behaviour training July 2023. Impact of Domestic abuse on the mothering role November 2024. Technology Facilitated Domestic Abuse on November 2024. Managing Conflict through Mediation November 2024. Regular training facilitated by the Trusts Training Team PIA, MARAC and Domestic Violence awareness training.

The Trust offers training on Recognising Impact of Domestic Abuse on Children and also Domestic Violence Awareness Training. Currently we are seeking to provide training on coercive control for staff either via Trust Training or outside provider.

2. One of the CCO's in the team who was not part of the team in 2019 is currently undertaking a course with FMNI. It is FMNI FTP Family Mediation Programme. The trainers of this course are experienced Family Mediators and members of FMNI's Accredited Mediator Panel.
3. With regard to the question "what training has the CCO in the Belfast Trust received in regard to training about mediation in situations where coercive control is alleged". The CCO undertakes individual interviews with each parent in the first instance whereby each parent has the opportunity to discuss their concerns and alert the CCO to any particular issue of concern for them. Domestic abuse is discussed and checked with parents as part of the assessment process. If a parent makes allegations this will be taken into account and it may not be appropriate for joint sessions to be undertaken

06 November 2024

under these circumstances or if a parent does not agree. If a joint session is offered, this is on the basis that both parents are in agreement with this.

4. The Belfast Trust does not collect the data on the exact number of mediations that the CCO's have led. From experience, a high number of cases have not advanced to joint sessions as parents are not in agreement with this or allegations have been made.
5. With regard to the question "in those CCO led mediation situations how many involved allegations of coercive control or domestic abuse". This data is not collect and therefore the exact number of cases is unknown. As mentioned, we would only progress a joint session with both parents if they are both in agreement with this.