



SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF SACRAMENTO

BUNMI O. AWONIYI
SUPERIOR COURT JUDGE
DEPARTMENT 124

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September 14, 2021

The court recognizes the pandemic has been especially difficult for children. In the best of circumstances, children need the stability provided by routine and the developmentally driven social interaction inherent in educational settings and extracurricular activities. Children need time and space, apart from their parents, to grow into themselves. The restrictions required to combat the coronavirus interrupted that normalcy, negatively impacting all children, some more than others.

With this in mind, in a proactive response to the court's closure and the resumption of Family Court Services mediations by Zoom, the court modified its approach to interviewing children. Specifically, with a focus on children's best interests, it was established that in those cases mediated by Family Court Services, children were interviewed as follows:

- When the Court orders the child to be interviewed, the Notice of Mediation indicates that the child must be available at the time of the scheduled Zoom or in-person mediation
- To ensure safety concerns are fully addressed, children will be interviewed when there are allegations of possible safety issues and CPS is *not* involved
- Mediators will interview children whenever the mediator is recommending a significant change in the current parenting plan
- In addition to the above, mediators will interview children at their discretion, based on the needs of the case

This approach, which will continue going forward, ensures that the interview of a child is developmentally reasoned, protective of concurrent independent investigations, allowing for children's voices to be heard, and is aligned with the forward movement of the parents' case. Most importantly, and especially now with the resumption of in-person education, this approach is mindful of the need to minimize the disruption of children's routine and to prevent them from being brought into parental conflict.