

Option generation

Taken from the Australian Commercial Disputes Centre (ACDC) commercial mediation course. The options have been changed slightly for family mediations.

“There are four basic interrelated requirements for ensuring successful option generation.”
(*Techniques & strategies used in mediation* ACDC 1995)

Requirement	Example
Create a non-judgmental atmosphere	No idea, no matter how seemingly obscure, should be rejected or ridiculed.
Separate the ideas from the solution	Many good ideas (which couldn't be the actual final solution) lead to the idea that does become the solution. The nexus between ideas and final decision must be broken, in the minds of the parties. In the option generation phase of the mediation one party may suggest something, which if considered as an actual solution, would be rejected outright. However, an idea may spark other ideas, which result in the final solution. This can happen if in the option generation session the idea was considered just as an idea not as the solution.
Don't search for a single solution	The assumption of a fixed amount or a single solution is the antithesis of what option generation can achieve. In some cases, a number of unrelated elements can make up the final solution.
The zanier the ideas, the better	In the option generation phase, seemingly outrageous ideas can be put forth. These ideas can be the spark that eventually leads to the final solution. However, people will not put forth zany ideas unless the atmosphere is non-judgmental because nobody likes to be ridiculed.

Other ideas:-

Use the whiteboard to put up different options and variants.

Use butchers paper to set out different options. Alternative options can then be spread across a wall.

In family matters, what would be the ideal? What sort of parent do you want to be? What sort of parent do you want your ex-partner to be? What is needed to achieve that? How can you help each other to achieve that? What are you modelling for the children?