On Saturday, November 15th, I mediated with a mother and her son. Initially, a department store representative from Macy’s was to be there as the son was caught shoplifting at Macy’s. Because the store representative forgot about the session, the mediation proceeded with the mother, Donna, and her son, Charles, 15.

At the beginning, Charles, arms crossed and head down, answered questions respectfully but curtly. His answers were mostly one worded and he didn’t give any more than the minimum required. He slowly unwound, however. We talked about the theft itself, how it happened and why. He stole a pair of pants and a shirt. Clothes and style are important to Charles and his birthday was the day after the theft. Birthdays are also important to him. He said that the year prior, he didn’t get anything for his birthday, not even a Happy Birthday from his mom. He wanted this year to be different. He wanted to look nice for his birthday, and he didn’t have the money to pay for it.

Donna prided herself on being strict. She wanted Charles to “make something of himself.” There was no birthday celebration this year due to Charles’s theft and if there wasn’t a celebration last year, Donna thought that it must have been because Charles did something bad.

Donna said that she heard much more from Charles during this mediation period than she had in years. Communicating with her children is valuable to her. Donna and Charles shared similar dreams for Charles’s future, which included music, business and college. They discussed the theft and Charles said he does not want to go down that path again. He was surprised that Macy’s called the police; he thought they might take the clothes back and tell him not to do that again.

In separate sessions, I asked them questions regarding their communication with each other. Donna wanted the communication to be “the way it used to be” when Charles was younger. Ultimately Donna came to the conclusion that she needs to listen more than she does and not “yell” at Charles constantly. Donna promised her son that she would “zip her mouth” when Charles was talking.

Charles realized he may be a bad influence on his younger siblings and didn’t want that. Donna repeated that one of the siblings keeps saying that he doesn’t want to be like Charles. This bothered Charles and with questioning, he realized that he has more attributes to be admired than ashamed of. I believe it was also good for Donna to hear all the positives about Charles.

I thanked them both with an added thanks to Charles, saying that I thought it’s hard for a teenage boy to discuss his feelings with a stranger and his mother. Charles seemed calmer and more self-assured and open when they left.