

Case Study

Mediating between teenage boys in a postcode conflict

CPS intervened in a youth conflict between excluded boys in order to assist with coming back to school.

What we did

The head teacher asked for our support with 'back to school' interviews with Year 11 boys that had been excluded for fighting.

We agreed that the best way forward would be to mediate between the boys on a voluntary basis. Furthermore we decided that the invitation should be extended to the parents.

There had been two separate and unconnected fights and therefore two separate mediations were required.

The boys and their parents were invited to attend and all agreed. On the day a private room was allocated in the school building and the mediations were run in succession.

Two mediators were present.

The first mediation.

At first, the two boys were detached and silent. The mediators did not put pressure on them to talk. Instead they engaged with the parents. The parents were from different religions, cultures and backgrounds. Dialogue soon revealed their common ground of worry for their sons' futures and frustration at the futility of postcode battles being fought on the streets between youths.

Having heard their parents speak, it was noticeable that there was an energy shift in the room between the boys. Seeing their parents engagement had a positive effect and one of the boys told the other that he liked him and didn't have a problem with him but he got mad when he heard him 'diss' his 'endz'.

Building on this the mediators encouraged the other boy to respond and he apologised for his behaviour. The meeting concluded with all parties agreeing to get past the postcode war and to allow friendship to reign whilst in the school.

The second mediation

The boys were keen to put their points across and default to blaming the other. By remaining empathic the mediators were able to help the boys take responsibility for their own part in the fight. The parents were fully engaged and supportive of the process encouraging their sons to make progress in the discussion.

At one point the parents tried to insist that the boys shake hands. The mediators explained that they should only do this if they felt fully able to and not to feel any pressure to 'perform'. It became clear that the reluctance was about who made the first move and this signalled that not enough dialogue had taken place to secure trust in each other.

The parents were from diverse cultures but had in common a long term residency in the area. The mediators took the pressure off the boys while they engaged the parents who expressed true commitment to the community and living in peace.

The mediators then checked in with the boys who said they were ready to shake hands. The mediators brokered the handshake so that they both stood up and came forward at the same time. They agreed to leave all postcode wars at the gates and to ensure that all their friends were informed that they would not be provoked or enter into any argument with the other. They would tell everyone that the matter was over and not up for discussion.

Outcomes

The staff immediately reported a change in behaviour towards each other and subsequent check-ins have shown the process to have worked.

Six months had elapsed at the last check-in and the agreements have held.

The school has decided to adopt restorative processes and CPS is embarking on a staff, student and parent consultation process.

Reflection

There is no doubt that the parents' participation in a collaborative, non judgemental process had a deep, lasting effect.