

PEER MEDIATION IN SCHOOLS

Compassionate & Peaceful Conflict Resolution For Students By Students

What Is Peer Mediation?

Peer Mediation in schools is a form of conflict resolution carried out within peer groups. Its aim is to enable students to resolve their conflicts compassionately and peacefully with minimal or no staff involvement. Pupils are trained in communication skills such as listening, respecting other points of view and demonstrating empathy. The trained peer mediators empower disputants to work together to find solutions that are agreeable to all parties.

Why Peer Mediation?

Peer Mediation enhances children's learning and prepares them for coping with conflict wherever they may encounter it. Conflict arises for many different reasons, in the playground, at home or in the classroom. When conflict does arise it is important that everyone feels they have been treated fairly and that the conflict has been dealt with appropriately. Mediation empowers everyone involved to resolve their differences without the need to fight it out or ignore the problem. Mediators guide disputants through their conflict to reach agreements that end the dispute peacefully.

How does Peer Mediation fit into school life?

Peer Mediation is a voluntary process during which trained pairs of pupils act as mediators for their peer group. A rota system is put in place and the mediators can be called on whenever an incident occurs. Peer mediation schemes often operate in school during free time.

The Benefits

**Reduce incidents of bullying • Change repetitive patterns of misbehaviour •
Reduce the number of exclusions • Improve behaviour and increase respect • Give
a safe voice to victims • Resolve minor disputes without adult intervention**

Peer mediation resolves student conflicts. Approximately 90 percent of all mediation sessions result in an agreement that satisfies not only the parties, but teachers, administrators, and parents as well. And when students choose to end a conflict in mediation, it is resolved for good. This is because mediators encourage their peers to discuss all issues in dispute, not only the precipitating incidents.

Peer mediation teaches students essential life-skills. Just as reading and writing are essential skills for leading a productive life, so too are conflict resolution skills. Young people need to be able to communicate effectively, appreciate the consequences of their actions, generate and evaluate alternative solutions to problems, and coexist with people with whom they disagree. Peer mediation teaches these fundamental skills and attitudes to both mediators and parties.

Peer mediation motivates students to resolve their conflicts collaboratively. Peer mediation motivates students to talk things out rather than fight things out. Mediation is the students' process. The proceedings are confidential, and there is much to gain and little to lose. Students learn from older students who model that talking problems out is the way to resolve them. Students also learn from their friends who are mediators or who have been through mediation that resolving conflicts peaceably works.

Peer mediation deepens the educational impact of school. Peer mediation uses an essentially extracurricular distraction—students' interpersonal conflicts—as a teaching tool. While mediators model pro-social methods of resolving conflicts, student parties practice resolving their differences using criteria of fairness and mutual benefit rather than brute strength, intimidation, or character assassination. The non-punitive forum of mediation encourages students to accept responsibility for their actions.

Peer mediation empowers students. Just as teachers don't teach students algebra by solving problems for them, adults don't teach young people to resolve conflicts by doing it for them. Peer mediation teaches students the skills and then encourages them to resolve their own conflicts in a supervised setting. It also gives students a forum for resolving conflicts that might never come to the attention of adults. And although mediation enables students to resolve their own conflicts, it does not exonerate them from responsibility for their behaviour. The school disciplinary system remains uncompromised.

Peer mediation increases self-esteem. Mediators experience their ability to make a profound difference in the lives of others. Parties participate in a process that enables them to take charge of their lives and leaves them feeling successful rather than diminished.

Peer mediation gives students greater insight. Students learn that many conflicts cannot be reduced to right vs. wrong or us vs. them, but are instead the result of misperception, misunderstanding, and legitimately differing needs. Peer mediation helps students to understand different points of view and to appreciate diversity.

Peer mediation expects the best from students. During mediation students are challenged to understand another's viewpoint, to think creatively about solutions, to forgive as well as apologize, and to willingly change behaviour. Mediation challenges students to be the best they can be, and they usually respond to the challenge.

Peer mediation creates more time for learning. When conflicts are resolved, students are not distracted and concentrate better. When students can resolve conflicts before they escalate, then suspension rates go down. When teachers have a way to refer conflicts for peaceful resolution, they do not have to spend their valuable teaching time being a referee.

Peer mediation is preventive. The development of conflict resolution skills in both mediators and the students-at-large enables them to resolve more of their own conflicts on their own. Students learn to listen to the other person's side and work to resolve disagreements and hurt feelings before they escalate into anger and harmful actions.

Peer mediation improves school climate. Having a way to resolve conflicts peaceably and the skills to do so on their own gives students a feeling of safety. They know they will not be attacked either physically or verbally. This fosters feelings of belonging and ownership over school life. It improves communication between students. It preserves old friendships and begins new ones. All of this makes school a more productive place.

Peer mediation meets the needs of both students and educators. Teenagers have a increasing need for control over their own lives. At the same time, their immaturity and lack of experience can lead them to make mistakes, behave irresponsibly, and hurt one another. Peer mediation accommodates these competing needs by providing a structure within which students are free to make their own choices. As long as they obey the rules of mediation, students control their own destinies.

Aims of the project

To train, develop and support students to learn nonviolent communication and mediation skills for use in school to develop understanding and mutual respect and to train staff members to help support the programme. To instil in individuals the skills and responsibility of becoming young mediators and to help others look at mediation as an action of first resort.

Activities

- Identify and engage with the adults who will be supporting the programme
- Identify candidates and select which students will participate in the training
- Two-day introductory trainings/workshops for adults
- 3-day Peer Mediation trainings for students

Training

Mediation training takes place within school time and works within the curriculum PHSE and contributes to Ofsted's Behaviour and Safety criteria. Training is usually carried out with a mixture of ages. There is a noticeable difference in a young person's ability to handle conflict early on in the training process. Trainees are given tasks to try out and encouraged to practise their mediation skills at school and home. Adults are encouraged to work closely with the trainers to increase staff awareness and knowledge

2-day training in Mediation and Dialogue Road Map

The two-day training on Introduction to Mediation and Dialogue Road Map (DRM) is for staff members to support the students in the project. They will be trained in different aspects of mediation, non-violent communication and DRM. Mediation is a conflict resolution process designed to help disputing parties make agreements while DRM helps people to engage in meaningful dialogue through the use of listening skills, empathy and compassionate questioning. The training consists of theoretical foundation of the subject, group work and mediation practice during the sessions. This forms part of the restorative practices training.

3-day Peer mediation Training

This training is for the students with a 2 or 3 of staff members to support the students during the training. The training consists of a theoretical understanding of mediation/peer mediation, conflict, Dialogue Road Map and non-violent communication. It also has role plays, drama style activities, large group discussion, small group discussions, working in pairs and games.

Maintenance

Ongoing training and supervision

While this initial training course will enable the group to begin working as mediators, further support will be needed to ensure continued quality of delivery. As well as honing skills and introducing more advanced techniques through additional training, supervision sessions are crucial to allow the mediators a constructive, supportive forum to discuss the frustrations and stress of their role.

In the absence of both these training and supervision elements, it is likely that the quality of delivery from the mediators will suffer, resulting in a devaluing of the system and a reduction of student participation and effectiveness