

Peer Mediation

The Peer Mediation program in the Brockton Public Elementary Schools enables peers to resolve disputes using a process involving talking and active listening. Students are trained to develop and refine the necessary skills for effective communication.

PEER MEDIATOR SELECTION PROCESS

Those who elect to become peer mediators must follow a three-step process. First, the student must complete an application form, signed by his or her parent/guardian. Next, the student's teacher completes an evaluation based on the Lichert Scale model. The final step occurs when the student is interviewed by the Peer Mediation Advisors at school.

STUDENT COMMITMENT

Once the process is complete and the student has met the criteria, there is a one-day training workshop scheduled for the "new" mediators to attend. The training is ongoing throughout the year at school, when the Peer Advisors meet with all Peer Mediators after school. Each elementary school develops its own after school training schedule. Also, peer mediators are dedicated to promoting peaceful co-existence throughout the school; they model that philosophy in their everyday living and participate regularly in "good works" projects.

THE MEDIATION

Students who are experiencing a conflict with another student can choose to request mediation. Participation must be voluntary and each member must agree to work together to resolve a conflict. There are rules that must be followed during mediation. They are: no interrupting, no name-calling or put-downs, be as honest as you can, and respect confidentiality. The mediators are responsible for repeating the rules if or when the disputants forget them. If there is any problem during mediation, the mediators are taught to involve one of the advisors.

Peer Mediators are not allowed to give advice. They must remain non-judgmental. They assist the disputants by listening to them carefully during mediation. The mediators ask many questions after each disputant has told his or her side of the story. Sometimes notes are taken by the mediators to be sure that the story each person tells is clearly understood. These notes are destroyed at the end of mediation to ensure confidentiality. The mediators are responsible for filling out a Peer Mediation Report Form, which is handed over to an advisor after mediation. This form is signed by the mediators and the disputants at the end of mediation, and serves as a contract to be followed by the disputants. A successful mediation is when the disputants can come up with and agree to a solution to the problem.



PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM GOALS

The Peer Mediation Program has several goals:
-to empower students to resolve conflicts

- to teach problem-solving skills to students
- to provide models for character via the peer mediators
- to enhance communication skills

Additional Resources:

PEER MEDIATORS are nominated by fellow students, they possess leadership ability and are students in.....

PEER MEDIATION is a fair way for students to resolve disputes and conflicts.....

Solutions Through Peer Mediation

By Leah Davies, M.Ed.

Peer mediation programs offer schools an alternative to traditional disciplinary practices and help schools become safer places. The goal of peer mediation is to reduce conflict and provide children with problem-solving skills. Trained peer mediators create a safe atmosphere, allowing disputing students to tell their stories and assisting them in working out a mutually acceptable agreement. Since a solution is not forced on the students, the disputants feel empowered to take responsibility for their actions and to deal constructively with their immediate and future disagreements.

The conflicts that lend themselves to peer mediation include interpersonal disputes like friendship issues, verbal harassment, spreading rumors, physical aggression, or other bullying behaviors. Assault or other criminal activities are not referred for peer mediation.

Peer mediators are trained students who are taught communication and mediation skills. The youngest peer mediators in most programs are fourth graders, although younger students have been trained in some schools. Trained mediators reportedly exhibit increased self-control, self-confidence, and problem-solving skills which they use not only at school, but at home and with friends outside of school. Both mediators and disputants learn to communicate more effectively and solve problems without violence.



Types of Peer Mediation Sessions

A session can take place formally or informally. Students can refer themselves or teachers can make referrals for peer mediation; disputants, however, must voluntarily participate. In formal mediation a peer mediator or a team of two mediators meet at a scheduled time and place with the disputants. The sessions vary in length depending on the nature of the conflict and some may be conducted over several days. Sessions take place during class time, recess, lunch time, or after school. The program coordinator follows up with the parties to ensure the agreement is working.

If a dispute occurs in the hall, cafeteria, or on the playground, peer mediators may engage in informal mediation. During these transition times mediators are often available and identified by arm bands, vests or badges. When an altercation occurs, students are taught to seek out a peer mediator to facilitate a solution to the problem.

Peer Mediation Program Models

The following are some examples of peer mediation programs:



In a school-wide program, students representing various grade levels and groups are chosen to participate in training. Those who successfully complete the course serve as school-wide peer mediators for a year. The mediations are scheduled and conducted in a designated area with minimal adult supervision.

A classroom model often involves the children in one or more grades who are all trained in conflict resolution skills. In addition, several students are selected to receive additional peer mediation training.

Those students serve as peer mediators in their own class or in other classes at their grade level or with younger children.

A whole class model provides every student in a classroom with training in peer mediation skills. When two students cannot decide on a reasonable solution to a problem, other students assist by facilitating the mediation at a "peace table" located in the classroom.

Peer Mediator Selection

Since peer mediators are role models for other students, it is important to choose them carefully. In some programs mediators are selected by their classmates after engaging in a discussion of the qualities of a good peer mediator. While no single quality predominates, many mediators exhibit high levels of trustworthiness, helpfulness, and respect for individual differences. Self-referrals as well as those made by teachers, counselors, and other staff are considered. A cross-section of students representing the ethnicity, socioeconomic level, grade and gender of the school population are chosen for the intensive training. Since these students miss some class time, they need to be willing and able to make up assignments.

Parent cooperation is necessary for the success of the program. A letter or meeting informing them of their child's role as a peer mediator, the child's responsibilities, schedule of the training, plus a permission form should be signed by each child's parent or guardian.

Organization

Usually a teacher or school counselor, who has training in mediation skills, serves as a program coordinator. Some schools have a team of trained coordinators who conduct training for peer mediators, keep the general population of students and school staff informed about the program, oversee the sessions, conduct debriefing, and follow up with disputants. Scheduled weekly, bi-monthly, or monthly meetings where peer mediators share experiences, review difficult situations, and receive additional training are also held.

Studies confirm that a successful peer mediation program will reduce discipline referrals if it has strong staff support and ongoing training for the mediators who represent the school population. To assure the continuation of the program, the program coordinator needs to monitor and evaluate the program's impact through an examination of disciplinary incident records and by maintaining teacher/participant assessments.

Peer Mediation Training and Process

Peer mediators need to be carefully chosen (see *Peer Mediation Selection*). The intensive student training usually lasts twelve or more hours and is conducted by the program coordinator. The students participate in activities and role plays that promote empathy, self-respect, self-discipline, responsibility, bias awareness, patience and respectfulness. They gain an understanding of conflict and learn strategies for dealing with anger. Confidentiality is stressed. Students practice the following mediation techniques and skills:

- Communicating verbally and nonverbally
- Active listening
- Problem analysis
- Identifying common interests
- Plan development

Characteristics of a Peer Mediator

- Cares about others
- Is serious about helping peers solve their problem
- Provides an opportunity for both disputants to tell their story
- Listens carefully and respectfully
- Is sensitive to each child's feelings
- Is patient and friendly

A Peer Mediator Does Not ...

- Physically restrain peers
- Place blame
- Take sides
- Judge guilt or innocence
- Make decisions regarding a solution
- Force a solution on disputants

Procedure for Peer Mediator

1. Introduce oneself, welcome the disputants, and ask each disputant their name and grade level.
2. Explains mediator's neutral role in facilitating a peaceful solution to the problem, and discuss the ground rules which the disputants must agree to follow for the mediation to continue. The ground rules include:
 - Doing their best to solve the problem
 - Telling the truth
 - Being polite; no put-downs or threats
 - Listening to each other without interrupting
 - Agreeing to a solution
 - Signing a written agreement
 - Taking responsibility for carrying out the agreement
 - Keeping the mediation confidential
3. Define the problem by asking each student to tell their story.



- "Please describe what happened."
 - "Tell me your story."
4. Listen to and reflects on the content and feelings expressed by both students.
 - "If I understand you correctly"
 - "I can see that you are angry."
 5. Show understanding of each child's perspective through your nonverbal reactions and comments.
 - "Is this what I heard you say ...?"
 6. Verify the stories by paraphrasing what was said.
 - "Are you saying that ...?"
 7. Ask the disputants to speak directly to each other as they discuss their issues, feelings, needs, and hopes.
 - "I need each of you to look at each other when you talk."
 8. Keep them on the topic.
 - "I need you to stay on the topic."
 - "Is there anything else either of you want to share about ...?"
 9. Ask clarifying questions and summarize the concerns and issues.
 - "Is the main concern ...?"
 - "It sounds like you agree (or disagree) that"
 10. Ask them to brainstorm ways to solve the problem.
 - "What are some of your ideas on how to solve this problem?"
 11. Look for areas of agreement and present possible solutions.
 - "Let's see, would ... work for you (and you)?"
 12. Together decide what to try. Clarify the first step that needs to be taken. Who will do what and when? Write down the solution in an agreement.
 13. Decide on a consequence if either party does not follow through and add it to the agreement.
 14. Have both students sign the agreement.
 15. Congratulate them and have them shake hands.

Costs associated with implementation of a peer mediation program include training for the coordinator, materials, including a coordinator manual, workbooks, forms, etc., and time for the coordinator to oversee the program. If a peer mediation program is carefully planned, has the support of school staff and a committed coordinator, it will be effective in reducing interpersonal disputes and discipline referrals. In addition, participating students will learn valuable mediation skills that will assist them throughout their life.