

Peer mediation – helping students to resolve conflict in peaceful ways

Information for parents and community members



The NSW Department of Education and Training is committed to ensuring that students are safe at school. Students have the right to expect that they will spend the school day free from the fear of bullying, harassment and intimidation.

In any school community there is the potential for conflict. This is because people have different needs, views and values. The challenge for schools and the wider community is to find ways of managing conflict positively so that those involved can learn and grow from the experience.

What is peer mediation?

Peer mediation is one of the conflict resolution strategies available to schools. Peer mediation invites students (disputants) to take responsibility for their actions by working together to find solutions to conflict. It involves two trained students (mediators) leading the disputants through a structured process. The mediators do not take sides and conflicts mediated remain confidential.

The program aims to:

- increase awareness of how conflict affects people's lives
- improve communication between students and between teachers and students
- teach students skills such as listening, critical thinking and problem-solving
- empower students by having them take greater responsibility for resolving their own disputes.

How peer mediation works



Dispute between students



Referred to school peer mediation coordinator



Peer mediation coordinator selects appropriate mediators



Peer mediators arrange to meet with disputants



Disputants agree to a solution to resolve the dispute

Basic steps in mediation

Step 1 Introduction

Mediators explain the process and set the ground rules for mediation. The disputing parties agree to participate and follow the rules.

Step 2 Telling the story

The disputants take turns to tell their story and share their feelings without interruption.

Step 3 Defining the issues

Disputants clarify their concerns by exploring the facts and their feelings.

Step 4 Exploring the options

Disputants brainstorm options to resolve the conflict. Mediators facilitate this process by helping the disputants create options that address the concerns of both disputants.

Step 5 Evaluating the options

The disputants select the solution they think will best solve the problem. Mediators help to evaluate how fair and realistic the solutions are.

Step 6 Creating an agreement

Mediators write the agreement which states what both disputants agree to do.

The benefits of peer mediation

Benefits for students include:

- increased ability of students to resolve their own problems
- exposure to alternative ways of solving conflicts
- improved social skills for mediators.

Benefits for staff include:

- less time spent dealing with minor issues
- fewer conflicts flowing into classrooms.

Benefits for the whole school include:

- a safer and more harmonious school environment
- reduced incidents of bullying.

Types of disputes for mediation

Mediators deal with minor disputes such as:

- minor squabbles
- name calling
- rumour spreading
- friendship problems
- property issues
- teasing
- exclusion.

Types of disputes *not* for mediation

- physical violence
- incidents involving weapons
- drug related matters
- child protection matters
- criminal behaviour.

Program coordination

Peer mediation programs are coordinated by school staff trained in mediation who provide ongoing supervision and support to student mediators.

'Conflict is an inevitable part of human life. However, conflict can be creative, promoting new ideas and better understanding, strengthening personal relationships and facilitating more effective solutions to problems.'

Greg Tillett (1991).

'Teaching every student how to negotiate and mediate will ensure that future generations are prepared to manage conflicts constructively in career, family, community, national and international settings.'

Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, R.T. (1995). *Teaching students to be peace makers: The results of five years of research.*

For further information

Contact your local school, or the student welfare consultant in your local Department of Education and Training regional office.

Find your regional office telephone number at www.det.nsw.edu.au/contactus/index.htm