

PEER MEDIATION

All of the following information was obtained from <http://www.studygs.net/peermed.htm>

What is Peer Mediation?

Peer mediation is both a program and a process where students of the same age-group facilitate resolving disputes between two people or small groups. This process has proven effective in schools around the United States, changing the way students understand and resolve conflict in their lives. Changes include improved self-esteem, listening and critical thinking skills, and school climate for learning, as well as reduced disciplinary actions and less fights. These skills are transferable outside of the classroom.

What types of problems would it help solve?

Rumor and gossip, minor assaults and fighting, relationship difficulties/harassment, cheating and stealing, racial and cultural confrontations, vandalism, classroom or extracurricular disputes.

What are the costs of a Peer Mediation program?

No materials are needed, only time and dedication from a teacher/advisor and the student/peer mediators.

Beginning a School Program

Students form a leadership team, facilitated by an experienced, respected coordinator, and a few trusted teachers and /or professionals. The team can be appointed or self-developed. The team:

- Researches the basics of peer mediation, the system of conflict resolution and discipline in the school, administrative and peer support
- Develops and publishes a clear vision of its conflict resolution program. This vision includes an overview of publicity, training, practice, modeling, and evaluation. **The goal is to educate various communities of the school on peer mediation, its expectations and limits toward building a commitment toward its implementation into a more comprehensive peace-based curriculum**
- The team secures commitment and support from the school's administration, including agreements from all major school groups to follow this practice (including teachers and administrators)
- The team commits to long term buy-in: preparation meetings, practice mediation skills, and continued research about violence, its causes and prevention

The coordinator acts as liaison between major groups, including: the leadership team, student body, administrators, parent groups, and outside trainers/professionals. Main duties include:

- Develop a core group of adults within school community to carry out and model the mediation program
- Oversee the selection, training, motivation, debriefing of mediators

- Serve as a trained mediator for co-facilitation and program start-up
- Establish protocol for intake and referrals
- Select and schedule mediators with case load
- Keep records and report regularly to all communities/stakeholders whether via newsletters, web sites
- Keep current with literature and research
- Work aggressively to overcome attitudinal and structural resistance with their schools, developing and maintaining support from strategic groups, including parents

Peer Mediator selection:

- Mediators should reflect school's diversity including cultures, gender, behavior, academic social, race
- Selection procedure and process should be publicized and include recommendations and self-referral
- Commitments include continued skills development, willingness to co-facilitate sessions and mentor new trainers
- Rejection or deferral should be sensitively explained so as not to alienate the student

Initially a system of "experience" must be developed: Peer mediators must be trained and monitored since they often lack maturity and experience, both in conflict management and negotiation skills. Strategies include role-playing, problem-based learning and active-learning. If possible, workshops should be conducted away from school to minimize distraction.

Peer mediations sessions, core elements: the goal is to move from mutual blame toward a solution acceptable to all parties.

Disputants fill out a pre-session questionnaire establishing ground rules, committing to solve the problem, tell the truth, and listen respectfully and without interrupting. Disputants meet with mediators to see if chemistry is right and ensure there are no conflicts of interest

Mediators

- Meet with disputants and explain exceptions to confidentiality at the beginning of the mediation and ask if they wish to continue
- Explain steps the mediators role: using listening and communication skills to help fellow students resolve conflict and disagreements before they escalate and lose power over the situation
- Solicit questions and clarifications on the process before beginning

The session, disputants:

- Introduce themselves
- Each in turn tells their story to the mediator focusing on issues, not on who did what, while the other concentrates on listening without interrupting
- Parties change roles: each repeats the other's story to their satisfaction to demonstrate they understand the other's position (not that they necessarily agree with it)

The session, co-mediators:

- Summarize the facts and feelings of both sides for verification and agreement on the issues; leads a discussion of the issues and acknowledges the difficulty in dealing with its emotional baggage
- Ask both parties if any solutions have come to mind, or begins a brain-storming session without judgment. All suggestions noted and acknowledged.
- Lead a discussion of the solutions checking off only the solution(s) that both parties can agree to

Disputants

- Determine implications of solutions in selecting the best possible outcome
- Select the best alternative

Co-mediators:

- Verify the verbal agreement with all parties, ensuring that no one is reluctant or afraid to speak out or dissent
- Write a memo of understanding/contract in parties' own words

Co-mediators and disputants:

- Sign contract
- Develop a process for follow up, verify that all will be committed and monitor this process
- Co-mediators thank each person for their contribution to the process, and for letting the mediation service help them