

Peer Mediation

School peer mediation is a mode of conflict management employed by students for the purpose of resolving conflicts. Trained mediators work as a team of two to facilitate problem solving between disputants. Students' involvement in the mediation process ensures practice with critical thinking, problem solving, and self-discipline. Awareness of socially approved behaviors is a critical feature.

The words of one student summarizes peer mediation's impact:

All I ever wanted to do was to fight. If someone said something to me I didn't like, I didn't think about talking, I just thought about fighting. I came into a mediation session as a disputant with four girls on the other side. I thought, "who needs this"? What am I doing here? I just wanted to punch these girls out. I figured that the mediator would tell me what I was going to have to do. But she didn't. Instead, she drew me out, listened to me. It felt so good to let it all out; then I wasn't angry anymore. I thought, "Hey, if this can work for me, I want to learn how to do it" (McCormick, 1988, p.54).

The school counselor and principal can conduct an introductory session in a mediation program. It is very important that the initial presentation include evidence of the benefits to students and to the school. There is numerous evidence in this chapter of reductions in discipline events.

Offer to the entire school staff a training sequence and ask them to complete a level-of-interest questionnaire to determine their degree of commitment to the process. If commitment is 80% supportive, training for teacher and support personnel should be initiated.

Training Staff Members:

Content of training includes communication skills that encompass active listening, reflection of feeling, message clarification, body language, giving "I" messages, brainstorming, types of questioning and effective problem solving. Role-play is used extensively with adult staff members.

Training Student Peer Mediators

Plan an orientation assembly for students to find out the level of interest with role-plays and skits to outline the program. Students who wish to become peer mediators nominate themselves or are nominated by others. Nomination can come from counselors, teachers and administrators. Adult staff trains selected students. Adult staff teaches communication skills and role plays as they were trained themselves.

Present a sequence of four basic stages of peer mediation:

- I. Introduction** - mediator introduces themselves and asks, "Do you need a mediator"? Make sure confidentiality assurance is given.
- II. Listening** - mediator listens to each disputant and disputant listens to each other.

III. Wants - disputants express their wants and restated by mediators.

IV. Solutions - disputants asked what they can contribute to the resolution of the problem. The mediator restates and checks solutions for balance. Important to ask if problem is solved! Peer mediators closed sequence by asking former disputants to tell their friends the conflict has been solved, thus reducing the potential for rumors.

When training is complete, student mediators receive recognition and uniform T-shirts, banners, or hats at an assembly. Assign them to recess duty in pairs. Meet twice a week with a staff program coordinator to discuss problems and successes.

Peer mediation programs have a sustained and significant impact on both staff and teacher perception of school climate at all levels - elementary, middle and secondary. The program has shown to increased students perceptions of school as a healthy and safe environment.