

Establishing a Peer Mediation Scheme in Your School

- Guidelines and Recommendations -

How Peer Mediation works

Peer mediators are available on a rota basis to mediate in a room or playground space during lunch or other times. Any two pupils/students who are having an argument have the choice to go to the mediators to resolve their conflict. They can be encouraged in this by lunchtime supervisors, teachers or other staff. If only one person goes to the mediators, the mediators can discuss the problem with them informally and help them decide what they could do about their problem. The mediators are trained and encouraged not to boss others around or tell them what to do, but rather to use active listening skills to help those in conflict. Peer Mediation is for the 'middle' range of conflicts in a school. Serious conflicts, or conflicts that involve pupils with deep behavioural issues, will still need to be dealt with by adults.

The core mediation skills also support mediators to mentor pupils, and a mentoring element can be included in the training upon request. During their turn on duty, mediators can patrol the playground, approach any children that seem to be struggling or unhappy, listen to their problem and offer support as needed.

Length of Training

Two full days. It is best if the training is not held on consecutive days, as it can be emotionally challenging for students to maintain the quality of attention needed to mediate well. Having a gap of at least one day allows the student mediators to recharge their batteries.

Topics Covered During Training

Day 1: Pupils'/students' own responses to conflict; win/win approach to conflict resolution; helping others to feel safe during mediation; listening to and expressing feelings; exploring needs underlying conflict; distinguishing between facts and opinions; active listening skills; one-to-one listening/mentoring.

Day 2: In-depth practice of the 5 stages of the mediation process (using role play); turning blaming language into language of needs; seeing both sides of an argument; using questions to help reach a solution; managing challenging behaviour during mediations.

Criterion for Selection of Students to be Peer Mediators

In our experience it is best that pupils are not selected because they 'may benefit' from the scheme. Mediating will require considerable skill and application from pupils. We recommend choosing:

- Pupils/students who are emotionally stable and able to give of themselves.
- Pupils/students who are willing to give their time and take their responsibility seriously, e.g. they will turn up when they are required to.
- Pupils/students who already have communication abilities.
- An ethnic mix that reflects the mix in the school.
- Girls tend to have more natural aptitude and interest in mediation. It is reasonable to expect a mediation team to have $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ girls and $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ boys.
- If any pupils/students are selected because they may 'benefit' from the scheme or the training, your school will need to allow for the fact that they may not succeed as mediators.

Number of Mediators Trained

12-20 depending on size of school. Primary school pupils are generally selected from year 5 / 6. In secondary school, students can be selected from any year. Mediators work with those in their own year and/or below.

Selection of Mediators

- Hand out application form / questionnaire to provide basis for selection. Questions may include: What do you think the causes of arguments between pupils in our school are? What abilities do you have that would help you to be a successful mediator? Considering the mediation scheme will probably run during lunch times, how much of your lunchtime would you be willing to devote to working as a mediator?
- Combine with interviews and teacher recommendations to narrow down the group.
- During interview, discuss commitment and the responsibilities involved.
- Another approach is to get class members to vote for whom they would trust to mediate them.
- Ensure parental consent is obtained for all pupils/students involved. A letter to parents could emphasise: the honour of being selected; valuable training in interpersonal skills that will be of benefit to the pupil/student throughout their life; the benefit to the pupil/student of contributing to the life of the school.

Co-ordination of the Scheme

- If your school wants the scheme to be successful it is essential that your school takes ownership and invests the necessary time and energy into it.
- To successfully run the scheme requires adult input. Two adults running the scheme together is ideal, as they can share the load, bounce ideas off each other, and generally support one another. Other members of staff providing occasional assistance will also be helpful.
- Your Peer Mediation coordinator could be a learning mentor, teacher or teacher assistant, or staff member with pastoral responsibilities. Choose as coordinator and assistant, staff members who are likely to be at the school for some time.
- It is essential that your coordinator and assistant are given the necessary support to successfully run the scheme – e.g. full attendance at the peer mediation training and time off from their regular responsibilities if necessary, to develop the scheme.
- We recommend that your coordinators undergo additional training, with us or externally. For example, your coordinator could attend a two day foundation training in Nonviolent Communication - see www.nvc-resolutions.co.uk for more information re this training. There are a many interventions that support restorative rather than punitive approaches to conflict in schools, as well as the development of a listening culture. To have a few members of your staff who are 'experts' in this field will feed considerably into the life of your whole school, and it will reap many benefits.

Training of Mediators

- Arrange dates + location. The location needs to be a room big enough to sit everyone on chairs in a large circle, with space to spread out for small group work and for educational / team building games. A large classroom is generally sufficient.
- If your school intends to train peer mediators in future years yourselves, it is essential that your coordinator and assistant are present for the full training in order to acquire the required skills of mediation and familiarity with the training programme. This is also necessary so that they can build links with the team of mediators and develop awareness of their relative strengths and weaknesses. We are also open to returning to your school to deliver the training for you in future years.
- If the assistant is also present for the entire training they will be in a position to take over the scheme should your coordinator happen to leave your school.

Referral Procedure

How will students be referred to the mediators? Possibilities could include:

- Pupils may approach mediators themselves - they will need to know where to go or who to go to. In these cases, mediators usually check first with a teacher / lunchtime supervisor before proceeding to mediate.
- Lunchtime supervisors may encourage pupils to go to the mediators (It is particularly important that lunchtime supervisors understand and support the scheme, otherwise they may tend to block its success. We recommend that your peer mediation coordinator has one session with the lunchtime supervisors to explain the scheme and listen to any concerns they may have.
- Teachers referring students (N.B. Whilst students may be encouraged to attend, mediation works best if the parties attend voluntarily).

Location

Where will mediations be held? Ideally somewhere:

- Quiet.
- Free from interruption, e.g. other students wandering through, or standing around watching.
- Within reasonable access to a teacher for help, should it ever be required. Some secondary schools require an adult to be present if mediations take place indoors.
- Easily accessed by pupils from the playground.

Times

- Lunchtimes, generally. Will mediations be allowed to overrun lunchtimes? If so, for how long?
- Other possible times - morning break.
- In our opinion, your mediators could perform a valuable function during school lesson time, to mediate conflicts that arise in your classrooms. This could most easily be arranged in classes (or tutor groups) that the mediators belong to. The class teachers could send mediators out of the room or into a corner with the pupils in conflict. This would support harmony and the spreading of conflict resolution skills in the classroom.
- Have a clear rota of mediators + support staff, particularly in a place where playground supervisors can see it.

Promotion

- Start date.
- Fun title for scheme – made up by mediators, or run a competition for a name. In one school the mediation team made up a rap song to promote their scheme.
- Assemblies.
- Class visits to all classes involved in the scheme. Mediators demonstrate a mediation, explain the scheme and answer questions. The concept of ‘needs’ with the needs handout can also be introduced here.
- Posters, photos of mediators in communal areas.
- Badges, caps or sashes to distinguish mediators in the playground.
- Staff promotion - all your teachers and playground supervisors should be familiar with the scheme and procedures.
- Inform parents through newsletters / parents meetings.

NVC Resolutions Conflict & Listening Skills Training Programmes for Schools

For more information or to discuss delivery of this programme in your school, please contact Daren De Witt

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