

Peer Mediation Training for Schools

Best Practice Guidelines

This document is primarily aimed at organisations who provide training to schools for peer mediators. It will also be useful for school staff so that they can be aware of what they should expect from service providers.

We realise all services have finite resources available to them, and few will be able to achieve all that is recommended here. This document is to provide something to aim for.

'Good Practice' is the minimum that schools and trainers should aim for. 'Best Practice' is in addition to points covered by 'Good Practice'.

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<http://www.peermediationnetwork.org.uk/>

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What is peer mediation?

Mediation helps people to resolve conflicts by finding their own solutions, using impartial third party mediators.

Peer mediation involves children and young people who are trained to mediate conflicts between fellow students.

How does it function

Mediators work in pairs.

Confidential: The content of the mediation can be discussed in the debrief with the other mediator, or, if needed, with the mediation coordinator, but is otherwise confidential. The exception is if mediators feel the case is 'too hot to handle'. It should be explained to the parties in the introduction that under some circumstances, including if they are told about something that 'will harm you or others' they will inform the mediation coordinator.

Voluntary: Cases can be referred by staff, but mediation is voluntary, so both parties must choose to be there.

When

Most schools have mediation occurring at lunchtime; three services saw mediations during breaktimes; one service mentioned mediations during lessons; two secondary programmes supported mediations after school.

Where

Mediations should take place in a quiet, designated space. This may be outside in the case of a primary school but the disadvantages are: other pupils can see who is visiting the mediators, other pupils may disturb the mediation and it is unsuitable in bad weather.

Party Meetings

Best Practice

Secondary mediators are trained to meet each party separately first in more complicated cases.

Support from staff

Adults are usually not present during mediations but are within call.

The scheme coordinator must support and ensure that debriefs happen between mediators where they discuss how the session went, what was done well and what could have been done better.

The scheme coordinator must be on hand to support mediators for difficult cases.

There should be regular meetings of the whole group of mediators at least monthly.

Contact beforehand

Good Practice

- Consider if more conflict resolution groundwork needs to be done in school before a peer mediation scheme can be set up.

You will need to assess:

- Willingness for the school to take on a whole school approach to conflict, which may involve some cultural change.
- Commitment from the Head, Senior Management Team and Governors.
- Long term commitment and sustainability – ensure there is an enthusiastic senior staff member with time available.
- Foundation skills of pupils (eg listening and communication skills)
- What other peer support and participation schemes already exist in the school and how well they function.
- Present levels of conflict (pupil-pupil, pupil-staff, staff-staff)

This can be done by sending questionnaires to the head and staff (and secondary students), and a follow-up school visit.

Best Practice

- **In depth Conflict Audit** which can be a baseline for later evaluation of how the scheme has affected levels of conflict in the school. (i.e. a systematic assessment of the above)
- A **'Service Level Agreement'**: This contract will clarify what the service and the school will provide. Eg the school must commit to providing a training room, staff present in pupil training, private designated space for the mediations, ongoing staff support for the mediators etc and the service commits to post-training support and regular monitoring eg spot checks.
- **'Levels of Readiness Criteria'** to be agreed and schools to look at before work begins, looking at how mediation fits into an overall ethos of participation.

Preparing for Training

Foundation Skills Work

Good Practice

- Pupils will need to have some understanding of conflict resolution and the skills needed to have successful mediations. This should be planned with the scheme coordinator using a programme provided by the service, or resources such as 'Let's Mediate' (primary) or 'Mediation Works!' (secondary).

Best Practice

- The longer spent working with potential users of the mediation scheme, the more effective it will be. One service provides six circle time sessions (on emotions, communication skills, and mediation awareness) to all years. Another provides twenty hours 'peacemaking skills' training to the relevant year group. (This includes communication, affirmation, anger management, co-operation, problem solving and critical thinking.)

Awareness raising

Good Practice

- Aim for all pupils and staff to be aware of the following:

- What the mediation scheme aims to achieve.
- What will be happening in terms of the training and who will be involved.

Be aware that parents may have concerns unless the scheme is explained carefully. It will help if the school can explain how peer mediation will be a development of its existing bullying, behaviour management and inclusion policies. Communication with parents could also emphasise the confidential and voluntary nature of mediation, and explain that serious problems will be handed on to staff.

- Staff and pupils to have some understanding of the mediation process.
- With the year groups that will contribute mediators, further work must be done on what makes a good mediator, with opportunity for questions, discussion and to check for understanding of what mediators do and ongoing time commitment.
- Other ways the service can support this work include providing a lesson plan, providing a sample letter to parents, presenting an assembly.

Best Practice

- Work in each form must be carried out by staff who have attended training by the service. This could be the mediation coordinator delivering training to each form with the form teacher present, each form teacher or the mediation service itself.
- At least one hour's work must be done with each form in the school to raise awareness about what mediation is.
- Raise awareness among families about the peer mediation scheme.

Selection of pupils

Good Practice

- Deciding on the process must involve collaboration between staff and service provider. The selection process needs to be open, clear to everyone and seen to be fair.
- Following the lesson on 'What makes a good mediator', pupils can select themselves or nominate others. The selection process could then involve classes voting by secret ballot, interviews by the school council and/or by staff.
- Some places can be left for staff to choose. This can ensure that there is a cross section of the school community based on socio-economic background, ethnicity, gender, academic ability, neighbourhoods and friendship groups.
- If application forms are used, care must be taken that this does not exclude those with difficulties reading and writing.
- Care must be taken if the process involves the rejection of any pupils.
- Potential mediators and staff must understand that being a mediator is voluntary and pupils can drop out at any point if it is not for them.

Best Practice

- Involve pupils in deciding on the selection process, eg through the school council.
- Mediation training provided for the whole class before mediators are selected.

Training

Training for school staff

Good Practice

- **Consider which staff need training.** Think about who deals with conflict in the school, eg teaching assistants, lunchtime supervisors.
- Approximately **three hours' INSET training** for core staff or representatives from each relevant group within the school community.
- Two staff to attend additional training.
- **Focus on the 'Whole School Approach'** to conflict.
- **Make links with appropriate government initiatives eg Every Child Matters, SEAL curriculum and other emotional literacy initiatives.**

Best Practice

- Encourage a **'Whole Community Approach'**:
Involve a wider range of groups such as governors, parents and others from the community such as police officers, eg by providing workshops.
- Develop ongoing strategies to involve 'resistant' staff (teaching and non-teaching).
- All staff to have a whole day training on conflict management skills and peer mediation.

Key Components of training

Good Practice

- Groundrules: for the training, for mediation
- Conflict: understanding conflict, responding to conflict (eg dealing with anger), power relationships, identifying feelings and needs (own and other people's)
- Mediation principles & philosophy: Impartiality, confidentiality, voluntary participation, parties rather than mediators solve the problem
- Skills and qualities of a mediator:
 - Communication Skills: Active listening, reframing and summarising, 'I' Statements, asking open questions, body language
 - Cooperation: Team work, working with your co-mediator
 - Patience, open-mindedness,
- Mediation process, practice role plays, dealing with difficult behaviour, trouble-shooting guidance ('What to do if...?'), identifying feelings and needs
- How the service will function: Child protection/ boundaries of the service (when to hand cases on to staff), meetings and supervision with the mediation coordinator, what to do when problems occur

Qualifications & Experience of the Trainers

Good Practice

- Experience with training children, with mediation, and with interactive and dynamic training techniques.

Best Practice

- Experienced mediators, with an appropriate qualification, such as Competent Mediator Status and training/teaching qualification.

Hours of mediation training

This will depend on the foundation skills of the pupils and how much training they have already received.

Good Practice

- 12 hours as minimum.

Best Practice

- Five days (30 hours)

Numbers of pupils trained

Good Practice

This should depend on the size of the school and other factors (eg level of conflict, other peer support programmes, make-up of the school community).

- One trainer to 16 pupils as a maximum ratio.

Best Practice

- 10% of the school is trained.

Additional support and training

It is the responsibility of the service provider to agree beforehand with the school what the outcomes of the training will be (perhaps as part of a 'service level agreement'), to ensure that they have left the school in a position to begin an effective mediation scheme.

Post-training support:

Good Practice

- Follow up phone calls
- Refresher day 3-6 months after initial training

Best Practice

- Launch Assembly with pupil involvement
- Termly refresher assemblies to re-raise awareness.
- Spot checks to see if mediation scheme is working.
- Follow-up meeting with teachers, mid-day supervisors and mediators to iron out any teething problems.
- Support pupils in leadership roles so that they can take on the administration of the project, help deliver training and mentor new trainees

Evaluation

Good Practice

Evaluate what the training has achieved by

- Obtaining feedback about the training (content and presentation)
- Assessing the participants' understanding
- Promote an ongoing evaluation of the project by the mediators and support staff.*

This should inform the planning of ongoing support for the school.

Best Practice

- Evaluate the impact of the mediation scheme on conflict in the school by questioning students and staff. Within a year carry out another conflict audit and compare with baseline data.

* Peerlink can provide a framework and guidance on this and produce an analysis for schools from their data.

Tips & Ideas from mediation services and training organisations

Whole School Approach

- Must be on a whole school basis. Strong backing from senior management. A lot of groundwork with everyone concerned with the school.
- Start with a conflict resolution skills course delivered by teachers after a workshop input. Don't try to work in schools that are not willing to take on board the changes in ethos, power, relationships etc that are necessary – waste of time and money!
- Check out the OFSTED report of the school to see how much of an ethos of pupil participation it already has (although do not give it much weight if the report is over two years old).

Staff Support

- Key person from school needed to coordinate sessions. This person must be given time and money to do the job properly.
- A minimum of two staff to support and carry the project through and forward
- Need a 'mediator support group'.
- Ensure there is enough commitment from the head and staff. Ensure there will be enough staff to offer support to peer mediators when the training is complete.
- Ensure someone high up is involved with the process. Make sure all staff have an awareness of how it works.
- Needs at least one enthusiastic teacher.
- Get lunchtime support staff on board.

Service Support

- Assign a support worker from the mediation service to ensure the project continues in the school.
- Keep regular contact with the school.
- Factor in the follow up to a training programme.

Pupil ownership & input

- Let pupils 'own' the project – eg pick the name, organise the publicity etc
- Get ideas from the students about improving it
- We now set secondary schools up with Team Leaders who are students and are responsible for the logistics of their Peer Mediation teams.

Curriculum links

- Staff need to feel the benefits. Fit into the curriculum eg PHSE. Conflict resolution skills need to be adopted by the whole school for a climate where mediation can be encouraged. Can provide a PHSE package to schools before specific mediation training.

Resources

- We leave a folder of activities with the school & they can add to this themselves.
- LAMP have an 'introduction to mediation in schools' sheet available to projects thinking of setting up.

Networking

- Always contact other projects that provide peer mediation training. Contact LEAP [020 7272 5630].

Funding

- Find out what core funders want you to prove.

- Do your sums thoroughly before applying for funding.
- Don't do it just to attract additional funding (usually short-term) to keep a Community Mediation Service going or to expand it. It is more skilled than this and community mediators *may* not have child-centred skills.

Other

- Get the schools to take ownership of their schemes.
- Work within a pyramid ie Secondary and Primary feeders.
- Don't expect too much. Some schools we have worked with are using Peer Mediation in ways that we find difficult to understand. The skill level of the mediators can be very low but it still achieves amazing results.

Research

Projects who have evaluations of their programme available:

Lambeth Schools - Partners in Evaluation Ltd., 123 Westminster Bridge Road, London SE1 7HR, tel: 020 7401 6554, email: partners@evaluation.u-net.com

Leicestershire Mediation Service's CRISP (Conflict Resolution in Schools Programme) - Charities Evaluation Services - 4 Coldbath Square, London EC1R 5HL, tel: 020 7713 5722, email: enquiries@ces-vol.org.uk

Tower Hamlets Conflict Resolution Project - evaluated by South Bank University, by Sally Inman & Nola Turner on behalf of the Centre for Cross Curricular Initiatives, South Bank University; commissioned by Tower Hamlets Education. Possibly available from LEAP who were involved.

CRISP's own evaluation of their experience - The Old Rectory, Main Street, Glenfield, Leicester LE3 8DG, tel: 0870 756 4912, e:info@crispuk.org

Fife Community Mediation's Evaluation of their training for Primary7 & Secondary1 pupils 'An Introduction to Conflict Resolution' - Amanda Steele, Fife Community Mediation, 24 Hill Street, Kirkcaldy, Fife KY1 1HX, tel: 01592 597063, e:info@fife.sacro.org.uk

Other research

Baginsky, William. Peer mediation in the UK: a guide for schools, NSPCC, 2004. Available to download from www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/EducationProgramme/PeerSupport.asp

Sellman, Edward Mark. The Processes and Outcomes of Implementing Peer Mediation Services in Schools: A Cultural-Historical Activity Theory Approach. Birmingham University PhD.

Sellman, Edward Mark. Peer Mediation, School Culture & Sustainability. Birmingham University research paper. Contact Edward.Sellman@nottingham.ac.uk for copies of these papers.

Useful Resources

Statement of Restorative Justice Principles: As applied in a school setting, Restorative Justice Consortium, 2003. Available to download from www.restorativejustice.org.uk/resources/standards.htm

Let's Mediate: A Teachers Guide to Peer Support and Conflict Resolution Skills for all Ages by Hilary Stacey and Pat Robinson. Lucky Duck Publishers. Available with handbook and video.

Mediation Works! Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation Manual for Secondary Schools. Mediation UK.

www.peermediationnetwork.org.uk

This document was put together by the Peer Mediation Network committee, made up of representatives from the following organisations:

Supporting Mediation in Local Education (North Staffs)
West Midlands Peace Education Programme

Peerlink
Quaker Peace and Social Witness
Conflict Resolution Education in Sheffield Schools
Out of Conflict
School Councils UK
Norfolk County Council

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Comments to pea@quaker.org.uk