



SADD Campaigns and Activities: Avoid Violence. Try Mediation.

What Is Mediation?

In a process called mediation, a person trained as a mediator helps two (or more) people resolve a conflict or disagreement. The conflict being resolved might be as simple as who should pay for a damaged locker, or it might be as complex as which parent should receive custody of a child in the case of a divorce. In any situation, mediation involves solving the dispute through peaceful means. The mediator does not draw up the terms of the solution; the people with the conflict (the participants) do that. In addition, it is the participants, not the mediator, who enforce the agreed-upon solution.

The mediator doesn't decide what is right or wrong or find people guilty or innocent as a judge would in a courtroom. Instead, the mediator plays a special role. The mediator tries to help the disputants find and agree upon a peaceful way to resolve their conflict.

How Does Mediation Prevent Violence?

Conflict is an unavoidable part of life. Passengers in a car might disagree about a wrong turn on a road trip. One person might play music more loudly than others would like. Friends might argue over who is to blame for a broken possession. These are all types of conflict.

Conflicts are not always minor and harmless. Assaults or threatened assaults often happen between people who know each other and, in many of these cases, start off with small arguments or disagreements. The mediation process provides a way for these people to resolve their disagreements before either party resorts to violence. It also helps people reach agreements without feeling they have had to "give in." In this way, both sides in mediation come out winners!

According to the National Crime Prevention Council, mediation has helped to reduce violence in neighborhoods and in schools. Using peers as mediators -- a process known as "peer mediation" -- is a popular way of handling conflicts and preventing violence in middle school and high schools. Those schools using this process recruit and train students interested in being peer mediators. Guidance counselors or other trained professionals teach the young mediators how to listen to both sides of an argument, offer unbiased impressions, and help students in conflict find a workable solution to their problem.

Peer mediators help the disputants rechannel anger and reach peaceful agreements. When a disagreement or conflict arises, a teacher, an administrator, a concerned student, or the fighting students themselves can refer the issue to peer mediation. A peer mediator is quickly assigned, and the mediation process begins, resolving the issue and preventing further discord. Playground mediators in elementary schools similarly help prevent fights and resolve disagreements between much younger students.

Mediation programs run for and by youth have enjoyed great success across the nation. School systems report reduced violence in their schools as a result of mediation programs.



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For more detailed information on peer to peer mediation:

National Crime Prevention Council www.ncpc.org

National Peer Helpers Association www.peerhelping.org

MEDIATION SESSION AGENDA

Step 1: Introduction

The mediator's first job is to make the parties feel at ease and to explain the ground rules. The mediator's role is not to make a decision but to help the parties reach agreement. The mediator explains that he or she will not take sides.

Step 2: Telling the Story

Each party tells what happened. One person tells his or her side of the story first. No interruptions are allowed. The other party then explains his or her version of the facts. Again, no interruptions are allowed. Any of the participants, including the mediator, may take notes during the process. The mediator's notes are destroyed at the end of the session to ensure confidentiality.

Step 3: Identifying Facts, Issues, and Interests

The mediator next attempts to identify any agreed-upon facts and issues and the items that are important to each person. The mediator listens to each side, summarizes each party's view, and checks to make sure each party understands the other's view.

Step 4: Identifying Alternative Solutions

During this step, the participants (with help from the mediator) think of all the possible solutions to their problem. Because the opposing sides of the dispute probably arrived at the mediation session with a desired outcome in mind, it is often difficult for them to consider other options. The mediator makes a list of solutions and asks each party to explain his or her feelings about each one.

Step 5: Revising and Discussing Solutions

On the basis of feelings expressed by each party, the mediator revises the list of possible solutions and tries to identify a solution that both parties may be able to agree to.

Step 6: Reaching an Agreement

The mediator helps the parties to reach an agreement by choosing a solution that has been discussed and that both parties accept. After the parties have decided on a solution, an agreement should be put in writing. The written agreement should be as specific as possible, stating exactly what each party has agreed to do and when he or she will do it. The agreement should also explain what will happen if either disputant breaks the agreement. Some agreements require parties to appear for additional mediation; others call for the payment of money or the perform-



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ance of services when an agreement is broken. In most instances, the parties themselves are responsible for enforcing the contract by bringing examples of breached agreements to the attention of the mediation program. Once it is finalized, the agreement, which usually takes the form of a contract, is signed by both parties.

Good luck with mediation. Resolve some conflicts -- stop violence!

Provided by Youth in Action, National Youth Network