

The Benefits of Peer Mediation

Peer mediation resolves student conflicts. Approximately 90 percent of all mediation sessions result in an agreement that satisfies not only the parties, but teachers, administrators, and parents as well. And when students choose to end a conflict in mediation, it is resolved for good. This is because mediators encourage their peers to discuss all issues in dispute, not only the precipitating incidents.

Peer mediation teaches students essential life-skills. Just as reading and writing are essential skills for leading a productive life, so too are conflict resolution skills. Young people need to be able to communicate effectively, appreciate the consequences of their actions, generate and evaluate alternative solutions to problems, and coexist with people with whom they disagree. Peer mediation teaches these fundamental skills and attitudes to both mediators and parties.

Peer mediation motivates students to resolve their conflicts collaboratively. Peer mediation motivates students to talk things out rather than fight things out. Mediation is the students' process. The proceedings are confidential, and there is much to gain and little to lose. Students learn from older students who model that talking problems out is the way to resolve them. Students also learn from their friends who are mediators or who have been through mediation that resolving conflicts peaceably works. Currently most mediations at Bishop Dwenger High School are student referred.

Peer mediation deepens the educational impact of school. Peer mediation uses an essentially extracurricular distraction—students' interpersonal conflicts—as a teaching tool. While mediators model pro-social methods of resolving conflicts, student parties practice resolving their differences using criteria of fairness and mutual benefit rather than brute strength, intimidation, or character assassination. The non-punitive forum of mediation encourages students to accept responsibility for their actions.

Peer mediation empowers students. Just as teachers don't teach students algebra by solving problems for them, adults don't teach young people to resolve conflicts by doing it for them. Peer mediation teaches students the skills and then encourages them to resolve their own conflicts in a supervised setting. It also gives students a forum for resolving conflicts that might never come to the attention of adults. And although mediation enables students to resolve their own conflicts, it does not exonerate them from responsibility for their behavior. The school disciplinary system remains uncompromised.

Peer mediation increases self-esteem. Mediators experience their ability to make a profound difference in the lives of others. Parties participate in a process that enables them to take charge of their lives and leaves them feeling successful rather than diminished.

Peer mediation gives students greater insight. Students learn that many conflicts cannot be reduced to right vs. wrong or us vs. them, but are instead the result of misperception, misunderstanding, and legitimately differing needs. Peer mediation helps students to understand different points of view and to appreciate diversity.

Peer mediation expects the best from students. During mediation students are challenged to understand another's viewpoint, to think creatively about solutions, to forgive as well as apologize, and to willingly change behavior. Mediation challenges students to be the best they can be, and they usually respond to the challenge.

Peer mediation creates more time for learning. When conflicts are resolved, students are not distracted and concentrate better. When students can resolve conflicts before they escalate, then suspension rates go down. When teachers have a way to refer conflicts for peaceful resolution, they do not have to spend their valuable teaching time being a referee.

Peer mediation is preventive. The development of conflict resolution skills in both mediators and the students-at-large enables them to resolve more of their own conflicts on their own. Students learn to listen to the other person's side and work to resolve disagreements and hurt feelings before they escalate into anger and harmful actions.

Peer mediation improves school climate. Having a way to resolve conflicts peaceably and the skills to do so on their own gives students a feeling of safety. They know they will not be attacked either physically or verbally. This fosters feelings of belonging and ownership over school life. It improves communication between students. It preserves old friendships and begins new ones. All of this makes school a more productive place.

Peer mediation meets the needs of both students and educators. Teenagers have a increasing need for control over their own lives. At the same time, their immaturity and lack of experience can lead them to make mistakes, behave irresponsibly, and hurt one another. Peer mediation accommodates these competing needs by providing a structure within which students are free to make their own choices. As long as they obey the rules of mediation, students control their own destinies.