**LAW CLASS NAME: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**PEER MEDIATION**

**Resolving Conflict with Peer Mediation**

A Manual for Grades 4-8

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This peer mediation handbook for grades 4-8 will provide you with materials and resources we hope will be helpful in designing, building, implementing and sustaining a peer mediation program.

Peer mediation offers important strategies for critical thinking and productive problem solving, and fosters an empowered sense of self in students as well as rich opportunities for contributing to the overall school climate.

Included in this manual are what we consider to be seven essential skills that students need to learn as they train to become mediators, as well as some resources to support your efforts.

**Introduction**

Conflicts are a normal and inevitable part of our lives. Students are bound to have conflicts with peers over the course of their school careers. But it isn't inevitable that these conflicts have to be unproductive, ruin relationships, take time away from academics, or lead to violence. A peer mediation program is an effective way for schools to decrease violence and empower students to better deal with the difficult situations they experience at school, and later as members of society.

Peer mediation is a voluntary process in which a student trained as a neutral third party helps other students in conflict get clear about their concerns, better understand one another, and come to a mutual agreement about how they want to handle their issues. Using conflict resolution skills and the peer mediation process, students can begin to see conflict as an opportunity for growth and learning, rather than something that fuels anger, frustration or even violence.

During mediation, a student (or pair of students) listens to other students present their side of a disagreement and then helps them find common ground. Many school disputes have to do with rumors or misunderstandings between friends. Listening well to understand each other better provides a framework for empowering students to reconnect as human beings and teaches appreciation for different perspectives.

Peer mediation helps students develop the conflict resolution skills of understanding conflict, confidentiality, effective communication, and intentional listening. The process invites practice in applying those skills in real life situations and helps them learn to settle potentially explosive situations in a positive and constructive manner.

Mediation can help alleviate the sense of disenfranchisement and powerlessness that some students feel and can help turn a difficult situation into a time of mutual growth and understanding for disputants.

It is important to note that mediation is not an appropriate choice for all disputes. Any dispute that involves violence of any kind, weapons, drugs, or physical or sexual harassment or abuse is a case for administrative intervention. However, mediation can sometimes be useful in these types of conflicts after administrative intervention to help students understand the underlying issues and explore different ways of relating.

Research tells us that a sense of belonging is a very important factor in preventing violence in our schools. Traditionally, punitive systems, suspensions, and expulsion offer schools few choices other than to push students further away from their learning, communities. A school peer mediation program promotes critical thinking and builds decision-making skills, develops healthy standards of relationship within the school community and supports student self-determination--all valuable tools in an increasingly violent and disconnected world.

Having a solid peer mediation program in place helps schools become safe and respectful learning environments. The mediation process allows students to become actively involved in transforming school climate by becoming agents of change. Peer mediators become models of peacemaking wherever they go, helping to make their homes, their schools and their world a better place to live.

**Goals and Objectives of Mediation**

The goal of peer mediation is to help a school become a more healthy, positive, and safe learning environment by empowering students to manage conflict, transform relationships and enhance school climate. Program objectives can include: reducing the rates of office referrals, suspensions and expulsions; creating a stronger sense of community by bridging differences; and instilling valuable, lifelong skills that prepare students to become productive citizens.

Specifically, peer mediation:

* Empowers students with the skills and strategies for dealing with conflict;

* Develops communication and decision-making tools that influence choices in the future and increase leadership potential;
* Helps students gain perspective and understanding of themselves, others and their issues;
* Improves school climate by building relationships;

* Reduces the alienation, disenfranchisement and powerlessness that many students feel;
* Builds a strong sense of cooperation within the school community in order to address disputes that interfere with learning.

**Essential Components of a Peer Mediation Program**

**A Readiness Checklist**

This checklist can be used to help ensure that your peer mediation program will get off to a good start by identifying where your school stands with regard to need, readiness and support within the system. It will clarify areas of strong support as well as those where you may need further development.

Our school community experiences conflicts that interfere with learning.

Our school philosophy supports programs that include students in efforts to create a healthier school climate.

We have the support of the principal to initiate a peer mediation program.

We have the support of the disciplinarian (if other than the principal).

The staff generally agrees that this type of undertaking is important and useful for the school and is willing to cooperate with these efforts.

The school board is aware of and supportive of these efforts.

The broader school community is aware of the value we see in introducing this program.

We have a core group that includes faculty, administration, parents and students that will design and implement a peer mediation program.

A person(s) is willing to coordinate the program.

Funding is available, if needed (for stipends, conferences, trainings, or materials).

**The Peer Mediator as an Active Listener**

Active listening is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding. Often when people talk to each other, they don’t listen with their full attention. They are often distracted, half listening, half thinking about something else.

When people are engaged in a conflict, they are often busy figuring out a response to what is being said. They assume that they have heard what their opponent is saying many times before, so rather than paying attention, they focus on how they can respond to win the argument.

Active listening is a structured form of listening and responding that peer mediators use to focus the attention on the speaker. The mediator takes great care to give the speaker their full attention, remain neutral, and then repeat--in their own words--what they think the speaker has said. This enables the speaker to determine if the mediator has really understood what they were saying. If the mediator does not completely understand, the speaker can explain further.

Peer mediators are also encouraged to restate or reframe the speaker’s words in terms of feelings. Instead of just repeating what happened, the mediator as active listener might say, “It sounds like you felt angry (etc.) when (the described event happened).” In doing this, the mediator allows the disputant to also confirm that the mediator has heard and understood the disputant’s emotional response to what happened.

**The Mediation Process**

Introduction

* Mediators introduce themselves to the disputants, ask for the disputants’ names, and explain the process, including confidentiality.

Sharing Perspectives

* Each disputant tells his/her story of what happened.
* Disputants share their interpretation of what happened.

Getting More Information

* Mediators ask open-ended questions to clarify and verify.
* Mediators ask, “Is there anything else that we need to know?”

Defining the Problem

* Mediators paraphrase and restate each disputant’s account.
* Mediators guide disputants to agree about what the problem really is.

Brainstorming Solutions

* Disputants brainstorm possible solutions.
* Mediators ask disputants to talk about which solutions the disputants are willing to agree on and which ones are not agreeable.
* Mediators ask disputants to talk about how each possible solution will affect the disputants’ relationship with each other.

Choosing Solutions

* Disputants decide together how they will proceed.
* Disputants come to an agreement on which solutions are the best.
* Mediators ask if the disputants are satisfied and if they need anything else from the mediation.

Closing

* Mediators thank the disputants for participating and remind them, if necessary, of confidentiality.
* Mediators mention that if the disputants need help in the future, the mediation process is always available to them.

**Helpful Mediator Questions**

1. What would you like to talk about?
2. Can you say more about that?

1. How does this make you feel?
2. Can you tell us what’s happening here?

1. What do you need or want?
2. What is it that bothers you most about this?

1. What ideas do you have about this?
2. What would you like to see happen?
3. Is there anything else you’d like to talk about?

1. What would you find helpful right now?

1. So that we can understand each other better, can you repeat for us what you heard \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ say about the situation and how he/she is feeling about it?

1. What would you like \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to understand about this situation?

1. What needs to change for you to feel better about this situation?

1. Is there anything you could do to make this situation better?
2. I’m not quite clear about this. Could you help me get a better understanding?

1. What could you do differently if this conflict happens again?
2. Do you feel this conflict is resolved?

**Essential Skills & Practices for a Peer Mediator Training**

These are seven essential skills and practices that students need to learn as they train to become peer mediators. Each of these skills includes an activity as a reproducible handout that can be used during the “skill centers” part of a peer mediation training

1. Feelings Charades

Mediators practice identifying the feelings expressed through body language and verbal cues in mediation.

2. Listening and Paraphrasing

Mediators practice active listening and reflecting back what they have heard.

3. The Beginning Says it All

Mediators practice getting comfortable with the beginning of the mediation process, which is essential to setting the tone.

4. Tip of the Iceberg

Mediators practice learning to identify the underlying issues and needs that drive a conflict.

5. Asking the Right Questions

Mediators gather information for clarity and understanding. This exercise gives mediators practice in asking open-ended questions.

6. Getting Your Buttons Pushed

Mediators reflect on situations in mediation that might make it difficult to remain neutral, and how to deal with their own emotions during mediation.

7. Perspective

Taking Mediators recognize that multiple points of view exist and practice seeing different perspectives of specific conflict situations.