

# PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM



**Richmond Peace Education Center**

3500 Patterson Ave., Richmond, VA 23221  
[www.rpec.org](http://www.rpec.org) [rpec@rpec.org](mailto:rpec@rpec.org) 804-232-1002

## WHY PEER MEDIATION?

Conflict among young people is a fact of life. Schools and youth programs experience countless student conflicts each year, and some of these conflicts may escalate into physical violence. As any teacher or parent knows, unmanaged youth conflict often takes a more subtle, but still costly, toll: diverting teacher and staff time to disciplinary matters and distracting students from learning.

While administrators and teachers work hard to build positive learning environments, they often require additional support for developing effective conflict resolution programs that empower students to resolve peer disputes in a healthy way.

## WHAT IS PEER MEDIATION?

Peer mediation helps young people learn to successfully resolve their own conflicts with the guidance of trained peers. It is a structured, step-by-step process that has been widely and successfully used across the country. Peer mediation has proven to be effective for use with young people from elementary school through college.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PEER MEDIATION?

Peer mediation can reduce violent or disruptive behavior in schools (or other youth serving programs), teach students to settle disagreements peacefully, and develop youth leadership.

Peer mediation is also an effective means to:

- Reduce the time teachers and staff spend addressing conflicts;
- Provide more time for teaching and learning;
- Encourage early intervention in conflicts;
- Promote a climate that values nonviolent problem-solving, and;
- Provide positive youth role models for other students.



## HOW DOES PEER MEDIATION WORK?

Student mediators are trained to take disputants through a structured, step-by-step process as they work to settle their disagreement.

In peer mediation, students with a dispute meet with a pair of trained student mediators, who help them resolve their problem.<sup>1</sup>

The mediators lead the disputants through a sequential process, including: ground rules, problem definition and clarification, solution-finding, and final agreement. Responsibility for resolving the disagreement rests on the participants themselves—the mediators' job is to facilitate the process.

Mediators use active listening, anger de-fusion and other conflict resolution techniques. Sometimes mediators help the disputants brainstorm win-win solutions that are realistic and produce mutual satisfaction. After the parties agree on a solution, the mediators write it out and everyone signs the agreement. If the settlement later fails for some reason, the parties can return and try to repair it.

Referrals to mediation can be made by students themselves, or by teachers and staff. When a teacher or staff person refers a conflict to mediation, he or she receives a written form in return indicating whether the conflict was resolved; however the exact terms of the solution remains confidential.

*<sup>1</sup> Mediators inform the disputants that anything dangerous, illegal or a major infraction of school policy will be reported to a responsible adult.*

## HOW DO WE HELP YOU IMPLEMENT A PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM?

The Richmond Peace Education Center (RPEC) has a team of experienced trainers who can help establish an effective and strong Peer Mediation Program. We can . . .

- Describe and explain the program to staff and students;
- Help your staff select potential youth mediators from among the student body;
- Fully train your team of youth peer mediators and their adult advisor(s);
- Support your mediation program through its first year (or longer, at your discretion); and
- Help you create a transition plan for continued program sustainability.

In sum, RPEC can provide you the expertise and support in the first year to launch a strong program tailored to your needs, and then either provide continuing support in the following years, or transition the program to enable in-school staff advisors to maintain it themselves.



# ANSWERS TO COMMON QUESTIONS

## **Peer Mediation does not diminish the authority of traditional discipline systems.**

The idea is to help young people resolve minor disputes before they develop into big ones that require administrative intervention. The process complements traditional discipline—it does not replace it. In some cases, administrators may use mediation to address an underlying dispute between students after disciplinary action has been applied. Mediation is not used for infractions involving weapons, physical assault or abuse. It can, however, potentially be used to successfully address other serious conflicts and tensions.

## **Peer Mediation is voluntary, and no student should be forced to participate.**

However, it is common for teachers or administrators to encourage participation by emphasizing the consequences of not choosing mediation (e.g., the teacher or principal will decide how to settle the problem.) This way, mediation can serve as a useful tool in teachers' toolbox of responses to student conflict.

## **Confidentiality is an important component of mediation.**

Training for student mediators emphasizes the issue of confidentiality and mediators are instructed not to discuss information about a conflict outside of meetings arranged by the advisor. However, exceptions are made when issues involve a serious potential for harm such as with weapons, drugs or other contraband, abuse, or other reportable offenses. Student parties are informed of these limitations at the beginning of each mediation session.

## **Mediators themselves can also participate in mediations if and when they are involved in a dispute.**

Mediators also disqualify themselves from mediating any dispute involving their close friends.

## STAFF

**Paul Fleisher, M.Ed.**, has worked as an educator for 35 years. He has written seven curriculum resource books for educators, is an experienced conflict resolution facilitator and has led peer mediation programs in city schools.

**Wendy Northup**, advisor to RPEC's Conflict Resolution Program, is president of Prevention Opportunities, LLC, a nationally-known violence-prevention training firm, and has more than 30 years of experience in the field of conflict resolution training.

**Adria Scharf, PhD**, has served as director of the peace center for six years and has a doctorate in Sociology.

**Tony Scott** attained court certification as a mediator in both New York State and Virginia. He has set up peer mediation programs at more than a dozen schools and has extensive experience in various alternative dispute resolution processes.

**Santa Sorenson**, RPEC's Conflict Resolution Coordinator, is a certified Conflict Resolution and Alternatives to Violence Project facilitator.

In addition, RPEC has a skilled team of trained and certified conflict resolution facilitators who assist with training.

To learn more about how you might be able to use peer mediation in your school or program, contact the Richmond Peace Education Center at [rpec@rpec.org](mailto:rpec@rpec.org) or (804) 232-1002.



## Richmond Peace Education Center

Richmond Peace Education Center was founded in 1980 as an initiative to widen the Richmond community's understanding of nonviolent approaches to conflict. The center has taught nonviolent conflict resolution for more than 25 years, working extensively in the schools. In the past year, RPEC has led trainings with Richmond Public Schools principals, assistant principals, and new teachers, and with student at Henderson Middle School, Fairfield Court Elementary School, and Westover Hills Elementary School, as well as many other non-school agencies and programs.