

## **Conflict Resolution:**

Conflict occurs naturally in the process of day to day activities and working with others. Conflict, in and of itself, is not damaging, but how one deals with conflict can be. Teaching students to resolve conflict constructively through conflict resolution or peer mediation programs can help students develop into adults who possess skills to help them manage conflict in their lives.

No matter what the problem is, it needs to be solved. It should not become a source of discontent, hard feelings, broken friendships or strained relationships. It is important to recognize that any problem that involves people with opposing viewpoints may present a conflict. However, *mediation* can help solve the problem.

*Mediation* is a process in which a third-party neutral assists in resolving a dispute between two or more other parties. It is a non-adversarial approach to conflict resolution. The role of the mediator is to facilitate communication between the parties, assist them in focusing on the real issues of the dispute, and generate options and agreements that meet the needs of the parties involved. Unlike arbitration, where the intermediary listens to the arguments of both sides and makes a decision for the disputants, a mediator assists the parties to develop a solution themselves. Although mediators sometimes provide ideas, suggestions, or even formal proposals for settlement, the mediator is primarily a 'process person,' helping the parties *define* the agenda, *identify* and *reframe* issues, *communicate* more effectively, find areas of common ground, *negotiate* fairly and hopefully, reach an agreement. A successful mediation effort has an outcome that is accepted and owned by the parties themselves.

Although a mediator cannot force an outcome, the process is very often effective. The key is the ability of the mediator to create a more productive discussion than the parties could have had by themselves. To do this, mediators help the parties determine the facts; they show empathy and impartiality with the parties; and they help generate new ideas. Mediators also use persuasion to get people to soften hard-line positions. Although the problem needs to be resolved, mediators often work on improving relationships with parties who will have to interact in the future.

Guidance Counsellors can and do provide mediation to students and staff in their school settings. Some schools also train a group of students, who have an interest in being of help to their fellow students, in mediation skills to help deal with simple everyday conflicts. More serious conflicts should be mediated by the Guidance Counsellor.

Mediation teaches several things to young people. Firstly, they begin to realize that their perspective is not the only one and that there is room for differences of opinion without people becoming hostile. Secondly, it gives students the opportunity to learn that there are mature, responsible ways of dealing with disagreements and lastly it teaches them that having integrity and sticking to agreements is an important part of becoming a responsible adult.

## **Programs Addressing and Teaching Conflict Resolution**

- Lion's Quest – Conflict Management Programs
- Teaching Students to be Peacemakers
- Second Step
- PeaceBuilders
- Skills for Life
- Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents
- Conflict Resolution: A Curriculum for Youth Providers
- Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)
- REACH/CHALLENGE
- Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP)
- Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways (RIPP)
- SMART Team
- Peacemakers
- Alberta Teachers' Association Safe and Caring Schools (SACS)
- Conflict Managers
- Creating the Peaceable School
- Project Peace: A Safe-Schools Skills Training Program for Adolescents
- Working Together to Resolve Conflict
- BeCool

### Online (web) Sources

#### **Stepp, Jessica A. How Does the Mediation Process Work?**

**Available at:** <http://www.mediate.com/articles/steppJ.cfm?nl=18>

This article gives an overview of the six steps to formal mediation.

#### **Ahrens, Ed. What Does a Mediator Do? Mediation Information & Resource Center.**

**Available at:** <http://www.mediate.com/articles/ahrens1.cfm>

This article explains the role a mediator actually plays in the process of mediation.

### Offline (Print) Sources

#### **Cobb, Sara. "Empowerment and Mediation: A Narrative Perspective." 9:3, July 1993.**

The author investigates current concepts of empowerment and current mediation practices. She suggests a narrative understanding of empowerment and mediation practices which follow from the narrative approach.