Peer mediation for NSW public schools: Helping students to resolve conflict in peaceful ways



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# Overview and rationale

This guide provides an introduction and overview of the peer mediation program. Peer mediation is a program that schools can use to explicitly teach conflict resolution skills to students that they in turn use to support positive relationships with their peers. Peer mediation involves two trained student mediators assisting two disputants through a structured process to reach resolution of a dispute.

Peer mediation can be used as early intervention strategy in the care continuum. Schools that use peer mediation should include it as an intervention in their School behaviour support and management plan (SBSMP). It can be used to support low level problem solving between students but is not recommended as a response to more serious behaviours of concern or student bullying.

This guide covers the following topics:

* conflict resolution
* what is peer mediation?
* what to consider prior to implementing a peer mediation program
* what to consider once your school has decided to begin a peer mediation program.

## Target audience and instructions for use

Peer mediation is suitable for use in all NSW school settings K-12 including Schools for Specific Purposes and support units. Separate resources are provided for primary and secondary schools.

Peer mediation is supported by the following resources:

* Peer mediation: Training guides for teachers is for use by the teacher and outlines four sessions, over two days, to train peer mediators.
  + Peer mediation primary school teacher training guide
  + Peer mediation secondary school teacher training guide
* **Peer mediation: Student workbook** is to be distributed to all students undertaking peer mediation training. The workbook provides worksheets for students to complete over the two training days.
  + Peer mediation primary school student workbook
  + Peer mediation secondary school student workbook

Peer mediation program coordinators may wish to print the teacher training guide and student workbook separately for use in delivering the training.

## Conflict resolution

NSW public schools can access a broad range of conflict resolution strategies. Peer mediation is one of these strategies. Conflict resolution is the process of attempting to resolve a dispute. Conflict resolution skills empower, prepare and support students and staff to deal successfully with conflict situations at school, at home and in later life. The range of skills that students develop includes listening, negotiation, assertiveness, problem solving and reflecting.

All students, including students with disability, benefit from peer-to-peer support with conflict resolution and in acquiring skills to support conflict resolution. Peer mediation helps develop a safe, supportive school community.

The ideal system of conflict resolution

* Ideally, all the time: Conflicts that never occur because of a supportive environment.
* Most of the time: Conflicts that people solve by negotiating with each other.
* Some of the time: Conflicts that are mediated.
* Rarely: Arbitration conflicts.

Arbitration

You tell your side of the story to a neutral person and they make a decision about what is best to do next to resolve the conflict.

Mediation

A neutral third party helps you both make your own decision by encouraging each party to tell their side of the story, discuss issues and find solutions that will work for both.

Negotiation

People talk to each other, sort out the problem and decide what to do without anyone else being involved.

*Adapted from Cohen, R. (2005). Students resolving conflict: Peer mediation in schools. Good Year Books.*

## What is peer mediation?

Peer mediation can be defined as:

“The process by which the participants, together with the assistance of a neutral person or persons, systematically isolate disputed issues in order to develop options, consider alternatives, and reach a consensual settlement that will accommodate their needs. Mediation is a process that emphasises the participants’ own responsibility for making decisions that affect their lives” (Cohen, 2005).

Peer mediation involves two trained student mediators assisting two disputants through a structured process to reach resolution of a dispute.

## Why peer mediation

* Peers relate better to one another than to adults.
* Peers communicate more authentically.
* Peers share their own perspective and norms.
* Peers may be more honest with each other.
* Builds skills in both mediators and disputants.

# Peer mediation programs for NSW public schools

## Where does it fit?

Peer mediation is a program that complements a school’s whole school approach to supporting a safe and supportive school environment as part of the [care continuum](https://resources.education.nsw.gov.au/detail/IPR-JK220603103651).

This program teaches students conflict management skills that can support resolution of low-level or minor disputes in schools. Serious issues or conflict that involves bullying should be supported by a teacher in line with their school’s processes outlined in the School behaviour support and management plan (SBSMP) and are not suitable for peer mediation.

The key departmental documents include:

* [Student Behaviour policy](https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2006-0316-04)
* [Student behaviour support management plan](https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2006-0316-05) (SBSMP)
* [Behaviour code for students](https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2006-0316-01).

## How does it work?

Peer mediation offers a dispute resolution process by which students are actively involved in resolving their own low-level disputes. It is a strategy that many schools find to be very effective. This program involves two trained students assisting other students through a structured process to reach a resolution of a dispute.

Peer mediation programs are coordinated by school staff trained in mediation, who provide ongoing supervision and support to student mediators.

**Disputes suitable for peer mediation:**

* gossip and rumour spreading
* name-calling
* friendship problems
* teasing
* loss of property
* exclusion.

**Disputes unsuitable for peer mediation:**

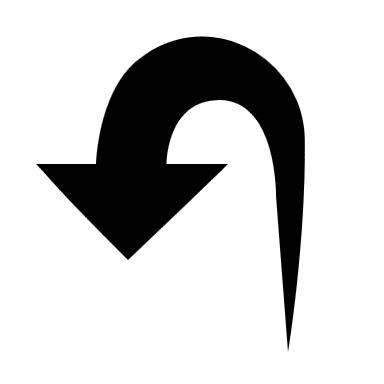
* bullying or cyberbullying
* sexual abuse
* physical violence
* racism
* weapons/drugs
* criminal behaviour.

Peer mediation is suitable for minor disputes only. More serious behaviours of concern, including assault and bullying, are not suitable for this process. Serious disputes should be reported to a teacher immediately.

## Peer mediation process

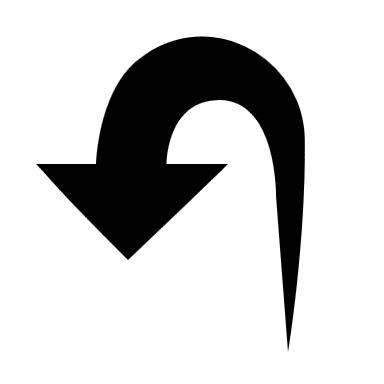
Student wellbeing is a targeted priority based on an evaluation of school data as part of the school’s SBSMP process. The program is listed in the care continuum section under early-intervention.

The identified need is for intervention for resolving conflict between students.

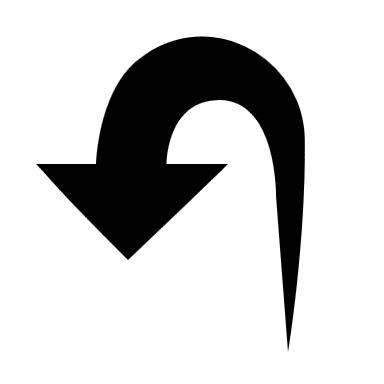


School investigates options. Consensus across stakeholders.

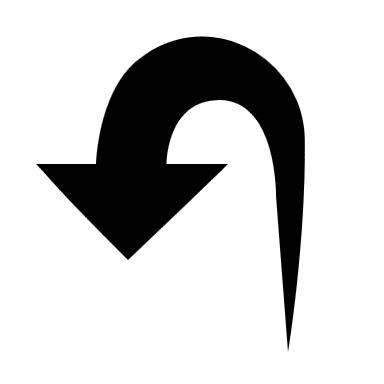
Access peer mediation program and training.



Students selected and trained as peer mediators.



Peer mediation program implemented. School community promotes mediation to resolve conflicts.



Students in conflicts participate voluntarily. Mediators have adequate support and resources.

## How might peer mediation benefit a school?

**Benefits for the whole school:**

* a safer and more harmonious school environment
* improves overall school culture through positive student relationships.

**Benefits for staff:**

* less time spent dealing with minor issues
* fewer conflicts flowing into classrooms

**Benefits for students:**

* students assume greater responsibility for solving their own problems
* students develop leadership, communication, listening and problem-solving skills.

## What to consider prior to implementing a peer mediation program

**Consider your school context:**

* What evidence do you have that a program is needed in your school?
* Check the care continuum section of the school’s SBSMP to see if there is a successful behaviour management program already operating that peer mediation could be included in? Peer mediation is designed to augment existing programs in the prevention and/or early intervention section of the care continuum.
* Are the school executive, staff, students and parents/carers supportive of change and willing to make a commitment to this long-term program?
* Does the school acknowledge the importance of student participation in the structure and the organisation of the school, eg school representative council, peer support?
* Are staff willing to consider different methods of conflict resolution and to undertake training and development in these areas?
* How will the school consult with and inform parents about the program?
* Do parents need to give approval for their child’s dispute to be mediated?
* How will the program be communicated to parents? Will the school seek parent permission for their child’s dispute to be mediated on a case-by-case basis, as blanket permission at the start of the year, or will parents be given an opt-out option. This could take place as part of the community consultation process on the School behaviour support and management plan. For example, 'Our school uses peer mediation which involves XXX. Please let us know if you do not want your child to be involved.".
* How will you manage the situation if parents do not wish their child's dispute to be mediated?

# What to consider once your school decides to begin a peer mediation program

**Consider how peer mediation will operate:**

* What disputes are suitable for mediation at your school?
* How many mediators do you train?
* What qualities do you look for in a mediator?
* What year level do you need the mediators to be in? Many programs recommend identifying potential mediators in stages 3 and 5.
* How can you ensure that all students can access the program, including those who require English language support and students with disability? See following section on accessible peer mediation.
* Who will be the program coordinators?
* How many mediators do you need at any one time?
* How will disputes be referred for mediation?
* What locations in your school are suitable for mediations?
* What student training, preparation and materials will you need?
* How will you allocate time to support student training and debriefing?
* What information will you provide to the school, parents/carers and community?
* How will you get support for the program from: school executive, staff, parents/carers and students?
* How will permission be sought from parents/carers regarding their child being trained in peer mediation?

**Review the qualities of a peer mediator:**

* conflict resolution skills
* effective communication
* assertiveness
* understanding feelings and empathy
* active listening and reframing.

Most students will still be developing these skills. This program is an opportunity for students to improve their ability to manage conflict. For this reason, schools do not need to limit their selection of students to become mediators to those who already demonstrate competency. Some schools choose to train whole cohorts to be peer mediators to improve the social skills of all.

## Accessible peer mediation

Ensuring that peer mediation is accessible to all participants is essential to its success.

By actively involving students with a diverse range of abilities in peer mediation, schools can promote inclusion, self-advocacy and support the development of a deeper sense of belonging for all students. This may require:

* English language support: For students who require support with English, the level of support a school provides will depend on the needs of the student/s. When implementing training and supporting peer mediation, staff should make use of available existing school resources provided for the student to access other school activities.
* Supporting students with disability: This may include:
  + Providing multiple communication options: Offer communication alternatives such as written options, visual versions of questions or the use of assistive communication devices or Auslan interpreters.
  + Sensory considerations: Offer environments for dialogue which take into consideration students who may be sensitive to light, noise or other environmental factors.
  + Consultation and collaboration: Involve students with disability, their families, and relevant support professionals when planning and implementing peer mediation to ensure that processes are inclusive and responsive to the needs of all students.
  + Scripting or social narratives: Partial scripting and/or social narratives may support some students with disability to engage in restorative problem-solving conversations.

## Review the good practice guidelines for peer mediation

**Guideline 1**: Program is embedded in the school culture.

* Refer to the school’s SBSMP for successful behaviour management programs already in place at the school, with peer mediation complementing conflict resolution initiatives.
* Integrated into the curriculum, with conflict resolution being taught explicitly as a set of skills.
* Provides a voluntary and non-punitive option for students to use in resolving conflict.

All students can access and participate in the program.

**Guideline 2**: Strong awareness and support for peer mediation in the school community

* Teachers support the initiatives and consider peer mediation an option for conflict resolution.
* Parents/carers are aware of the initiative and support their child’s involvement in peer mediation.
* Students know who the peer mediators are and have trust in them as mediators.

**Guideline 3**: Peer mediation is implemented within an environment of strong leadership and participation

* Students are acknowledged as having an important role to play in the structure and decision-making process at the school.
* Student leaders play an active role within the school.
* Students are represented on school committees.

**Guideline 4**: Supportive school executive staff are willing and able to commit the necessary resources

* An ongoing yearly budget for the initiative, including training for students and teachers, and period allocations for coordinator(s).
* A comfortable, private and neutral mediation room.
* Ongoing promotion of the initiative via assemblies, posters, newsletters, P&C meetings, staff meetings, learning and support team meetings and SBSMP.

**Guideline 5**: Adequate training for teachers and students

* Teachers, coordinators and students receive specialist peer mediation training.
* Conduct training in a neutral venue external to the school.
* Combine with other schools to share training and promote a support network.
* Utilise a fair and transparent process for selecting mediators.

**Guideline 6**: Ongoing support for student mediators

* Systematic rostering of mediators to avoid overusing the same mediators.
* Debrief with student mediators after mediation sessions.
* Refresher training for student mediators to update skills.
* Scripts and guidelines provided for student peer mediators in accessible formats.

**Guideline 7:** Committed school staff coordinate the initiative

* More than one coordinator is committed to making peer mediation work.

**Guideline 8**: Regular monitoring and evaluation

* Assess the extent to which the initiative achieves the intended “good practice guidelines”.

## Implement a referral process for peer mediation

The student dispute may be discussed with teachers, school counselling staff, assistant or deputy principal, student support officer, stage supervisor, year advisor and/or friends before being referred to the peer mediation school coordinator.

The process would then be:

Student dispute

Sent to

C:\Users\kwafer1\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.MSO\DB12CF66.tmp

School coordinator

Sent to

C:\Users\kwafer1\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.MSO\EA5CF864.tmp

Peer mediator

Leading to

C:\Users\kwafer1\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.MSO\729D5012.tmp

Dispute resolved

# Evaluate the peer mediation program

Evaluation is an ongoing process involving the collection of data from a variety of sources.

Use the peer mediation data collection sheet to keep a record of the students accessing peer mediation. This will assist with future planning and evaluation in your school.

**Peer mediation data collection**

School name:

Peer mediation coordinator:

How many students have been trained in peer mediation?

Year level?

When are peer mediators on duty?

How many times per week are each of the student peer mediators on duty?

Have behaviour reports in the playground reduced since peer mediation was implemented?

Have behaviour reports in the classroom reduced since peer mediation was implemented?

## Data collection sheet

**School:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Date | M / F | Year | Friendship | Gossip/ rumours | Name calling | Teasing | Loss of property | Exclusion | Resolved? | Mediation stopped and referred to coordinator |
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# Peer mediation: Parent permission form

Your child has been selected to be trained as a peer mediator. Peer mediation programs are used in schools to teach students the principles and techniques of conflict resolution so that they can solve their own minor disputes.

In both primary and secondary schools, students are trained under the supervision of a teacher to use a systematic mediation process to resolve disputes. Peer mediation aligns to the department’s Student Behaviour policy and is documented in our School behaviour support and management plan [provide link to school SBSMP on school website]

Peer mediation invites students (disputants) to take responsibility for their actions by working together to find solutions to conflict. It involves two trained students (mediators) leading the disputants through a structured process. The mediators do not take sides and conflicts mediated remain confidential.

The program aims to:

* increase awareness of how conflict affects people’s lives
* improve communication between students and between teachers and students
* teach students skills such as listening, critical thinking and problem-solving
* empower students by having them take greater responsibility for resolving their own disputes.

Peer mediation programs are coordinated by school staff trained in peer mediation who provide training, ongoing supervision and support for student mediators.

The trained student mediators will deal with minor disputes such as:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| * name calling | * rumour spreading |
| * friendship problems | * property issues |
| * teasing | * exclusion. |

If you have any concerns about the training, please contact the peer mediation coordinator [School to provide contact information].

I give permission for my child to take part in the two-day peer mediator training course. I understand that my child will be paired with another student to provide mediation for students.

Student’s name:

Parent’s/carer’s signature:

Date:

# Alignment and identified need

#### System priorities and/or needs

This resource aligns with:

* [Our Plan for NSW Public Education’s](https://aus01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Feducation.nsw.gov.au%2Fabout-us%2Fstrategies-and-reports%2Fplan-for-nsw-public-education&data=05%7C01%7CLeah.Penney%40det.nsw.edu.au%7C9b7b4ab41de04def0ea308dbd8f21351%7C05a0e69a418a47c19c259387261bf991%7C0%7C0%7C638342306444335325%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=BBxlx8QOoRZImbLmHiqw0sKrReRzv%2FdKIBLNxRT48mc%3D&reserved=0) direction and priorities of strengthening student wellbeing and development and advancing equitable outcomes, opportunities and experiences.
* Need identified by principal partner associations for a variety of positive behaviour programs that support students across the care continuum.
* [Student Behaviour policy](https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2006-0316)
* [School Excellence Framework](https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/strategies-and-reports/school-excellence-and-accountability/school-excellence/about-sef)
  + Learning domain – Wellbeing (behaviour)
  + Teaching domain – Effective classroom practice (classroom management).

#### Relevant frameworks

* [NESA Syllabus documents](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/Understanding-the-curriculum/syllabuses-a-z)– personal and social capabilities in all K-10 syllabi, and  [PDHPE K-10 syllabus](https://educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/k-10/learning-areas/pdhpe/pdhpe-k-10-2018) Health Wellbeing and Relationships content strand outcome
* [Australian Professional Standards for Teachers](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/professional-learning/teacher-quality-and-accreditation/teaching-standards)
* [Disability Standards for Education 2005](https://education.nsw.gov.au/inside-the-department/teaching-and-learning/students-with-disability/personalised-support-for-learning/disability-standards-for-education)
* [Wellbeing Framework for Schools](https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/school-community/wellbeing-framework-for-schools) - Behaviour, discipline and character education
* [Achieving School Excellence in Wellbeing and Inclusion](https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/school-community/wellbeing-framework-for-schools/wellbeing-for-school-excellence).

#### Existing resources

* [Behaviour support toolkit](https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/school-community/attendance-behaviour-and-engagement/behaviour-support-toolkit) resources and [professional learning](https://education.nsw.gov.au/schooling/school-community/attendance-behaviour-and-engagement/behaviour-professional-learning), particularly, restorative practice, classroom practice, understanding and managing behaviour, and the care continuum.
* [Inclusive Practice hub](https://education.nsw.gov.au/campaigns/inclusive-practice-hub) resources, particularly social skills (primary), social skills (secondary)
* [Universal Resources Hub](https://resources.education.nsw.gov.au/home) (DoE staff only) particularly CESE Classroom management: Creating and maintaining positive learning environments, Whole school behaviour support resources
* Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) - Foundational classroom management resources handbook.

#### Consultation and Review

**Consulted with**: Student Wellbeing Support team, Aboriginal Partnerships and Outcomes, Inclusion and Wellbeing.

**Reviewed by**: Student Participation, Inclusion and Wellbeing Directorate

**Last updated**: March 2025

## Evidence Base

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