



# The 6 Methods of Intervention

The **mediation** approach used by schools requires students to be voluntarily involved in the dispute resolution process.

Under some circumstances this method may be used to address conflict that may involve bullying.

## Rationale

The rationale behind this approach is that by engaging a trained mediator, students can:

- Partake in a successful problem-solving activity to address cases of bullying.
- Take responsibility for their behaviour and explore the underlying reasons for the conflict or grievance.
- Be helped to reach agreement on solutions that are reasonable and fair, even if it has involved compromise on both sides.
- Devise solutions that are better and more sustainable than if they were coerced.
- Participate in a mediation session that is a valuable learning experience that can help one in resolving interpersonal problems later.

## Application

Mediation can be appropriately and most successfully implemented as follows:

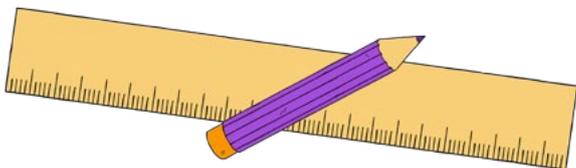
1. Students are informed about the mediation service within a school and invited to seek its help if they so wish.

2. Suitably trained mediators (staff members and/or peers) meet with interested students who are seeking help over a dispute that could involve bullying. Mediation may occur on the spot where the conflict is taking place or may be scheduled for a later time. If the issue is more complicated or serious it should be in a private place where there will be no interruptions.
3. The purpose and ground rules of mediation are discussed.
4. Both sides are enabled to tell their story in turn and without interruption.
5. Concerns are clarified and an agenda is set by the mediator together with participants.
6. A solution is reached through discussion and agreed to by the parties, commonly through a process of compromise and without apportioning any blame for the dispute.
7. A shared agreement is confirmed and sometimes written down.
8. At any stage, students have the right to walk away from the mediation process if they feel it is not being constructive.
9. The situation is then carefully monitored. Techniques may be refined and improved when necessary.

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## Limitations

- Most importantly, bully/victim problems cannot be addressed using this method if either of the participants is not prepared to enter into the process. Quite commonly the 'bully' is not willing to participate.
- Peer mediation is not considered appropriate for cases of severe bullying or issues involving drugs, alcohol or sexual assault, for which schools should have alternative processes and procedures which may involve contacting the police.
- Peer mediation is difficult to conduct if there is an extreme power imbalance. This can greatly disadvantage the target when attempting to negotiate a position.
- The mediator may feel unable to be neutral when the bullying is very unfair and is causing great distress.
- Well-developed skills are needed as in active listening, facilitating constructive interactions and neutral reframing of information on the part of the mediator, and these may be unavailable in a school.



## Conclusion

Mediation is an ideal way of ending a conflict which may include bullying or give rise to bullying. When expert mediators are available and the participants sincerely wish to resolve a dispute that is fuelling the conflict, there is good evidence that mediation can resolve such conflicts. However, the circumstances in which mediation can resolve serious cases of bullying in a school are thought to be severely limited.

## References

Rigby, K. (2010). *Bullying interventions in schools: Six basic methods* (See Chapter 6: 'Mediation' : Camberwell, ACER. Republished (2012: Boston/ Wiley (American edition).

Tyrrell, J. (2002). *Peer mediation: A process for primary schools*. London: Souvenir Press.

