

## **Scottish Mediation's Young Talk**

### **Peer Mediation: How does it work and how does it fit into Scottish Schools?**

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## What is Peer Mediation?

According to the Institute of Citizenship, “Peer mediation involves pupil mediators acting as an impartial third party to help their peers resolve conflicts, such as name calling, bullying, arguing and fighting. The pupil mediators facilitate communication, empathy and conflict resolution.”

Peer mediation is an approach by young people, for young people, and empowers them with the skills to handle conflict with their peers in a way that is attentive to needs and relationships. It is hoped that the communication and conflict resolution skills young people learn in peer mediation will not only benefit them, their peers, and school culture in the moment, but will continue to benefit them and their communities throughout their entire lives.

## Scottish Mediation’s YoungTalk Peer Mediation Program:

Since 2006, Scottish Mediation’s YoungTalk program has been training children and young people in primary and secondary schools to be peer mediators across Scotland. Working closely with Our Minds Matter in Fife since 2021, we have managed to train pupils in every primary school, and are currently training pupils in every high school, to be peer mediators within Fife. This collaboration has been a great success and is Scotland’s biggest roll out of peer mediation. Based on this success, Scottish Mediation is currently working to implement a similar model of training in other local authorities, such as Perth and Kinross.

Figure 1:



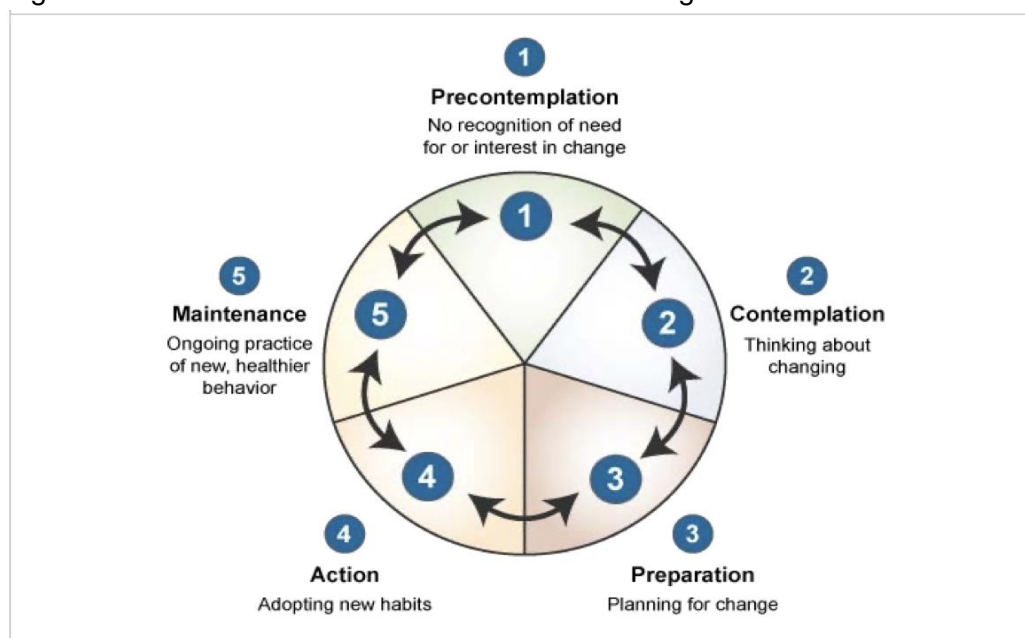
Qualitative Feedback Received from Staff in Fife Post Training

## How does peer mediation work to decrease violent behavior from a public health perspective?

Inspired by public health approaches to violence reduction taken by groups such as the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit and Medics Against Violence, Scottish Mediation's YoungTalk program seeks to effectively prevent violence from occurring in schools and beyond. Peer mediation decreases violence by introducing young people to conflict resolution skills that enable those in conflict to get their needs met without having to use any form of violence. The implementation of peer mediation within schools also aligns well with the World Health Organization's *World Report on Violence and Health* which highlights, "programmes that emphasize social and competency skills appear to be among the most effective among youth violence prevention strategies."<sup>1</sup>

One of the theoretical models underpinning our approach to behaviour change in positive conflict resolution is the Transtheoretical Model. To demonstrate how peer mediation enables children and young people to adopt more productive behaviors regarding conflict resolution, we have included this model, and how it corresponds to peer mediation, below.

Figure 2: Transtheoretical Model of Behaviour Change



- 1) **Precontemplation:** Because the default narrative surrounding conflict in our culture often resorts to violence as a means of resolving conflict, young people usually see this as the most effective means of conflict resolution. Before peer mediation is introduced, children and young people are often not aware or taught the skills to facilitate and/or engage in conflict in ways that are productive and nonviolent, thus there is not a demand for programs like peer mediation.

- 2) **Contemplation:** Once peer mediation is introduced and brought into young people's awareness at the school, they are able to consider it as an alternative to resolving conflict through other means, such as violent action or staff involvement.
- 3) **Preparation:** Young people experience a situation in which they think peer mediation might be helpful- whether this is conflict with friends or classmates.
- 4) **Action:** Young people participate in peer mediation and hopefully have a positive experience that allows them to see the impact of their actions and express how others' actions have affected them. Ideally, the two young people in conflict will be able to find a resolution that works to the benefit of them both, changing the idea that conflict is only a win-lose situation.
- 5) **Maintenance:** After having this experience, young people are more likely to engage in peer mediation again, and take the skills they've learned into other facets of their lives. Consciously or unconsciously, this experience will have helped them start to develop behaviours that enable them to articulate their needs, and resolve conflict through nonviolent strategies.

### How does peer mediation complement current policies within Scottish Schools?

Peer mediation helps support many different initiatives that are already taking place within Scottish schools including: supporting Health and Wellbeing outcomes and experiences in the Curriculum for Excellence, delivering on actions brought forth in the Relationships and Behaviour in Schools: National Action Plan 2024 to 2027, and implementing best practice in anti bullying work as articulated by RespectMe.

### *Curriculum for Excellence: Health and Wellbeing*

#### *Mental and Emotional Wellbeing*

Peer mediation benefits young people's mental and emotional wellbeing at several levels. Within peer mediation training, there is a large focus on helping peer mediators to understand and articulate their own emotions and needs, and how they might be able to recognize the emotions and needs of the participants in conflict. While this increase in emotional intelligence is beneficial within peer mediation, it also enables peer mediators to better care for their own emotional wellbeing outside the peer mediation process.

Furthermore, within peer mediation, the young people in conflict are asked to identify how certain things made them feel, and what they need in order to feel better about the situation. This allows them to increase their emotional intelligence and be true to their boundaries and needs, while also being able to acknowledge and empathise with the boundaries and needs of the person with whom they are in conflict.

Peer mediation also betters mental and emotional wellbeing by providing a space for young people to re-engage in relationships when conflict has occurred. It has been shown that positive relationships are incredibly important for children and young people's mental health.<sup>3</sup> Research

also shows that conflict, when not resolved well, can lead to relationship breakdown.<sup>4</sup> However, when conflict is communicated well, and a resolution is found together, it can actually strengthen relationships.<sup>5</sup> Thus, by providing a space in which young people can work through conflict together, those in conflict are better able to maintain vital friendships, or cordial relationships, that respect each person's needs.

### *Social Wellbeing*

Peer mediation training empowers peer mediators with the skills needed to help resolve conflict and make a positive contribution to the wider community. From our research, we have found that peer mediation increases the confidence and self-esteem of young people who have been trained to be peer mediators within their school. In our post-evaluation survey, we also had teachers mention how vital this work has been, particularly as young people continue to readjust after COVID.

### *Relationships and Behaviour in Schools: National Action Plan 2024 to 2027*

The recently published Relationships and Behaviour in Schools National Action Plan 2024-2027 laid out some of the actions that would be taken in order to ensure schools are safe and consistent environments for all. This document detailed 20 Action Points that will be carried out in the next three years to make this a reality. Below we have laid out how peer mediation is uniquely suited to support actions 6, 10, 11, 13, and 16.

#### *Action 6: Identify examples of current/ developing practices that can be shared with schools.*

Scottish Mediation continuously seeks to develop and maintain best practices in regard to peer mediation programs and conflict resolution curricula that can be updated and shared between schools. We have also begun to create networks of schools who have been trained in peer mediation so they can share best practice with each other.

#### *Action 10: Children and young people are supported to develop healthy relationships and behaviours, grounded in tolerance and respect*

As spoken about above, peer mediation helps young people to interact with one another in a way that helps develop respect, tolerance, and empathy.

#### *Action 11: Children and young people's views are embedded in the development of school policies and procedures.*

Peer mediation is by young people, for young people. From the development of the program within the school to the leading of mediations, peer mediation is entirely student-led, and staff supported, ensuring young people have a huge voice in developing and delivering the program.

*Action 13: Empower staff through provision of relevant professional learning to support relationships and behaviour approaches and practice, and to respond to emerging trends in behaviour.*

The Training for Trainers which staff can undergo is a huge opportunity for them to develop their own conflict resolution, communication, and leadership skills they need to be Peer Mediation Advisors. We have found this role to be particularly well suited to PSAs and other support staff.

*Action 16: Support schools' development of clear protocols for both preventing and responding to violent incidents and incidents involving a weapon, including risk assessments, relevant to the age and stage of a child or young person.*

Implementing peer mediation within schools provides a clear program through which to engage in positive, relationship-based models of conflict resolution. Furthermore, because peer mediators are equipped to handle low level conflict, more time is freed up for staff to handle more serious issues related to continuous instances of bullying, racism, sexism, and sexual violence.

### **Anti Bullying Programs**

When looking at Scotland's anti-bullying program, RespectMe, one can see how peer mediation helps support anti-bullying work within schools. In RespectMe they recommend, 'Giving a supportive approach, seeking understanding and showing compassion are all things that build a solid relationship with a child and provide the foundation for taking positive actions that help make a difference to children and young people's lives.' Within peer mediation, the peer mediators do just that: they are supportive, understanding, compassionate, and nonpartial in a way that allows young people to empathise with one another and better understand the impact of their actions in a way that is not blame or shame based. It is the hope that this leads to a decrease in instances of bullying, and to more understanding among peers.

### **Conclusion:**

We are so grateful and inspired by the young people and staff who we have been able work with across Scotland. As we find peer mediation to be particularly well-suited to this tumultuous time that we live in, and the current priority areas within Scottish schools, we look forward to continuing this journey and our learning for many years to come.

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