

Practice profile:

Richard Hendry, National Coordinator of *[Sacro's Work with Schools](#) talks about Peer Mediation.

(*Sacro: Safeguarding Communities, Reducing Conflict)

Richard is the author of [Building and Restoring Respectful Relationships in Schools: A Guide to Restorative Practice \(2009\)](#)

How does your day begin? Full breakfast or coffee on the run?

Every day is different. As a consultant I can work from home some days. I'm a bit of a slow starter but orange juice, toast and coffee is usually enough to get me moving.

What does Peer Mediation do for people?

Mediation is about finding a solution to conflict that satisfies everyone. To use mediation both people in a dispute must have a desire to resolve the problem in hand. Mediators avoid taking sides, making judgments or telling people what to do. The people in dispute, rather than the mediators, decide how a dispute will be resolved. (On the PINS site see [What is Mediation?](#) for a more detailed explanation.)

Peer Mediation usually involves two trained pupils (mediators) helping pupils in conflict to find their own way of resolving their problems. Difficulties and disagreement are discussed and brought out into the open. Through acknowledgement and exploration comes shared understanding, which usually leads to a negotiated and constructive way of managing the conflict. Although no central figures are available, as of 2009 around 200 schools in Scotland (Primary and Secondary) are thought to be using peer mediation.

Mediation, and in particular peer mediation, is often described as a type of Restorative Practice – (On the PINS site see [What is Restorative Practice?](#) for a more detailed explanation.) Unlike many other restorative interventions in schools, peer mediation is a pupil-led process.

Tell us about your front-line work

Sacro staff work with school communities to introduce peer mediation services. We help school staff and pupils to plan, launch and sustain the service, as well as training the young mediators. Here is a typical example of the kind of conflict that can be addressed through peer mediation, which is always a voluntary process.

Example of peer mediation in practice

Having been pals for a while Abbie and Beth have fallen out, big time! They are now demonstrating real conflict in their behaviour towards each other – shunning, name-calling and 'dirty looks'. Abbie approaches the school's peer mediators for help. Firstly the mediators take time to listen to Abbie's concerns and to decide if mediation is appropriate. With Abbie's agreement they approach Beth and explain that Abbie feels there is a problem and that mediation may be a useful way to sort it out. Beth puts her side of the story and then, as both girls are willing, they all work together with the mediators managing the mediation process, allowing each to say how she feels, avoiding too much retrospection and accusation, and working towards a mutually-agreed solution that clarifies individual responsibilities and future actions – in this case an agreement for a mutual truce. A follow-up meeting is offered and agreed for a week later, to see how the agreement has worked.

This is a generalised but realistic scenario based on observed practice in Scottish schools. As well as helping to resolve the conflict, the mediators are modelling behaviours that include empathic listening, taking personal responsibility and respect for others' views.

What else can schools do to resolve conflict?

Peer mediation works best where the school is working with the whole community (pupils, staff and parents) to build their conflict resolution skills. This can be done through the taught curriculum and through effective modelling by adults. In situations where it would not be appropriate for children to resolve the problem themselves then school staff can lead other types of restorative interventions (see the [Restorative Practice Profile](#)). There are also a number of adult mediation services in Scotland - for example Additional Support Needs Mediation (see the [ASN Practice Profile](#)) and Sacro's Community Mediation services that can provide external mediators.

What's the impact? How do you get it right?

Evidence from schools in Scotland and elsewhere has shown that effective peer mediation schemes can play a part in reducing playground incidents and the need for adults to intervene. However, it is important that schools understand, and fully commit to peer mediation if it is to be successful and sustainable. This means adequate preparation, training and support needs to be provided for the mediators. Equally mediators need to learn when not to get directly involved (for instance in cases of established bullying) and how to get adult help when they need it.

Who provides support or training about this work?

In addition to Sacro's involvement, peer mediation work with schools is supported by the Scottish Government's Positive Behaviour Team, the Scottish Mediation Network and a number of private trainers. Although up to 10% of Scotland's schools may now be using peer mediation it is still a relatively new way of working and there is plenty of potential for further development.

More information

- PINS 'What Is?' series provides basic information about key policy and practice issues. See our information on [What is restorative practice?](#)
- Richard Hendry is also author of **Building and Restoring Respectful Relationships in Schools: A Guide to Restorative Practice** (2009). Published by Routledge, London ISBN-10: 0415544270
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