

Conflict Resolution in Schools

Guide for Educators in South Africa

Booklet I

INTRODUCTION TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SCHOOLS

Topics in this booklet:

- Introduction to Conflict Resolution in schools
- Setting up Conflict Resolution Mediation Programmes in schools





Introduction to Conflict Resolution in Schools

Guide for Educators in South Africa

Booklet I - Introduction to Conflict Resolution

Notes

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Notes for CR Class Monitors

The role of CR class monitors is to act as a first stage for advice on class conflicts and potential conflicts, and to be the 'eyes and ears' of the CR mediators.

The advice that CR class monitors offer should be limited to: -

- The learners in their class only;
- In the case of a conflict: the procedures that could be followed;
- In the case of a potential conflict, ways in which the parties involved could diffuse this themselves before it becomes a conflict.

With regard to the last point, the ways in which learners themselves could try to diffuse potential conflicts would include: -

- Meeting to talk in a peaceful and constructive manner about the potential conflict;
- Clarifying each party's interests and desires;
- Checking that each understands the other's position;
- Exploring ways of solving the problem;
- Trying to find a solution that everyone involved likes.

If it is not possible for the parties to meet and discuss things constructively and dispassionately on their own, then it might be possible for the CR class monitor or a CR mediator to be an independent observer.

Alternatively, two friends or allies could be asked to meet and discuss the problem on their behalf. However, as this would be a 'second-hand' discussion, it may cause further communication problems.

CR class monitors who abuse their position in any way (for example by themselves bullying or intimidating learners) will be replaced immediately, and the reasons for this explained to the class and school.

Notes for Parental Awareness

It would be helpful to write to parents about the proposed introduction of this system, following this with a parents meeting to discuss any lingering concerns.

The following are some points that could be included.

- This conflict resolution programme includes a system of peer mediation. Peer mediation is a specific form of conflict resolution utilising learners as neutral third parties in resolving disputes. In this system the school will utilise a learner mediation team for the school (which comprises three learners from the top class and three from the class below this), plus three monitors for each class.
- The system provides for an early warning of any conflicts or bullying in the school. Trained learner mediators and class monitors can intervene to try and

diffuse this. However, they are not permitted to put themselves at any risk. There are also two/three nominated staff members with responsibility for CR. This initiative will help the school to enhance its capacity to deal with conflict (it is certainly not abdicating responsibility to learners). Each educator and learner with responsibility for CR will receive special training to equip them for this role.

- In addition, over time each learner will receive conflict resolution skills training. This should help to create a school able to overcome conflict, violence and bullying. The hope is that the CR monitoring and mediation system will become redundant over time. But for the present, it will provide the early warning and intervention needed to make the school a more peaceful environment for all learners.
- Children chosen as members of the CR mediation team will learn some vital new skills, which will help them both practically and in building their reputation and future prospects. It will be an excellent addition to their CV and university/job interviews.
- Similarly, CR class monitors will be provided with useful new training and skills. They will also be first in line to be chosen as future CR mediators.
- It would also be helpful to ask parents not only to support this initiative in the school, but also to back it up by providing a peaceful and non-violent home environment. Conflict resolution is all about resolving conflicts through effective communication and negotiation - without resorting to violence. Conflict resolution is unlikely to be effective if it is only carried out within school hours (and where, as soon as learners return to their homes, they are again faced with violence and aggression).



Introduction to Conflict Resolution in Schools

Background

Conflict is a fight, struggle or a battle – a direct opposition; a clash, discord, contention, dispute or quarrel; a disagreement between two people or parties with different ideas or beliefs; a mental or spiritual struggle within a person.

Conflict resolution is about finding ways of resolving the conflict so both parties are satisfied with the outcome. It is a 'win-win' approach.

Conflict resolution is needed in South African schools to reduce school conflict and violence and to equip learners to become adults who are able to solve conflicts peacefully, and thus to avoid violence.

Conflict resolution in education is linked to democracy and citizenship, developing a peaceful world, cooperative learning, multicultural education, prejudice reduction, social justice, violence prevention and intervention, critical thinking and problem-solving, and site-based management.

School Conflict Resolution Mediation Programmes

The peer mediation system introduced in this manual is a system of learner mediation programmes that can reduce classroom conflict, and in particular teacher/learner antagonisms and polarisation.

The system outlined is one method for achieving peer mediation in schools, but it can easily be adapted to suit the requirements of individual schools.

Key elements of the system are: -

- Gaining support of school governors, and training/awareness briefing;
- Selection and training of educators with special responsibility for CR (Conflict Resolution);
- Selection and training of learner conflict resolution mediator members;
- Selection and training of class conflict resolution monitors;
- Establishment of monitoring and mediation procedures.

The mediation and negotiation techniques used include key aspects, such as:

- Use of a neutral adjudicator/facilitator (or team);
- Meeting to talk in a peaceful and constructive manner about the potential conflict;
- Clarifying each party's interests and desires;
- Checking that each party understands the other's position;



- Exploring ways of solving the problem;
- Trying to find a solution that everyone involved likes.

Similar systems have already been introduced in the USA, where they were found to reduce the amount of time teachers need to spend on resolving disputes, whilst providing learners with the opportunity to talk over their difficulties with others. Simultaneously, these systems provide mediators with valuable life skills.

Conflict Resolution Skills

Suggested lessons are included which are specially designed to increase empathy and understanding of other perspectives and viewpoints. These lessons also provide peaceful anger-management and negotiation tools for solving disputes. They are arranged in a number of sections, and cover the following: -

- Bullying;
- Perception;
- Communication skills;
- Empathy and compassion;
- Cooperation;
- Tolerance;
- Anger and other emotions;
- Assertiveness;
- Critical & creative thinking;
- Mapping the conflict;
- Negotiation techniques;
- Mediation.

Each section begins by providing background information for the educator on the subject, and a suggested list of further resources, in case the educator wants to research the subject in more detail. The introduction is followed by suggested lessons for each subject area, which can be delivered directly, or adapted to suit the skills, abilities and experiences of the individual school and educator. This approach is designed to help educators to develop their own skills and knowledge, while at the same time providing lessons that can be either directly delivered or enhanced by more experienced educators.

Conflict resolution skills are important for the settlement of playground disputes and the avoidance of learner aggression and violence. But their value goes much deeper than this: these CR skills are also vital components of the emotional intelligence of learners, which helps them in all their future relationships - be they personal, family, social, workplace-related, or national/international.

A peaceable classroom or school results when these values and skills are taught and supported in all areas of school culture.

Previous Experience in Conflict Resolution

There is existing international experience in conflict resolution in schools, including in Australia and the USA. A joint report, from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education in the USA, cited examples of effective conflict resolution programs. Among the success stories they noted are the following: -

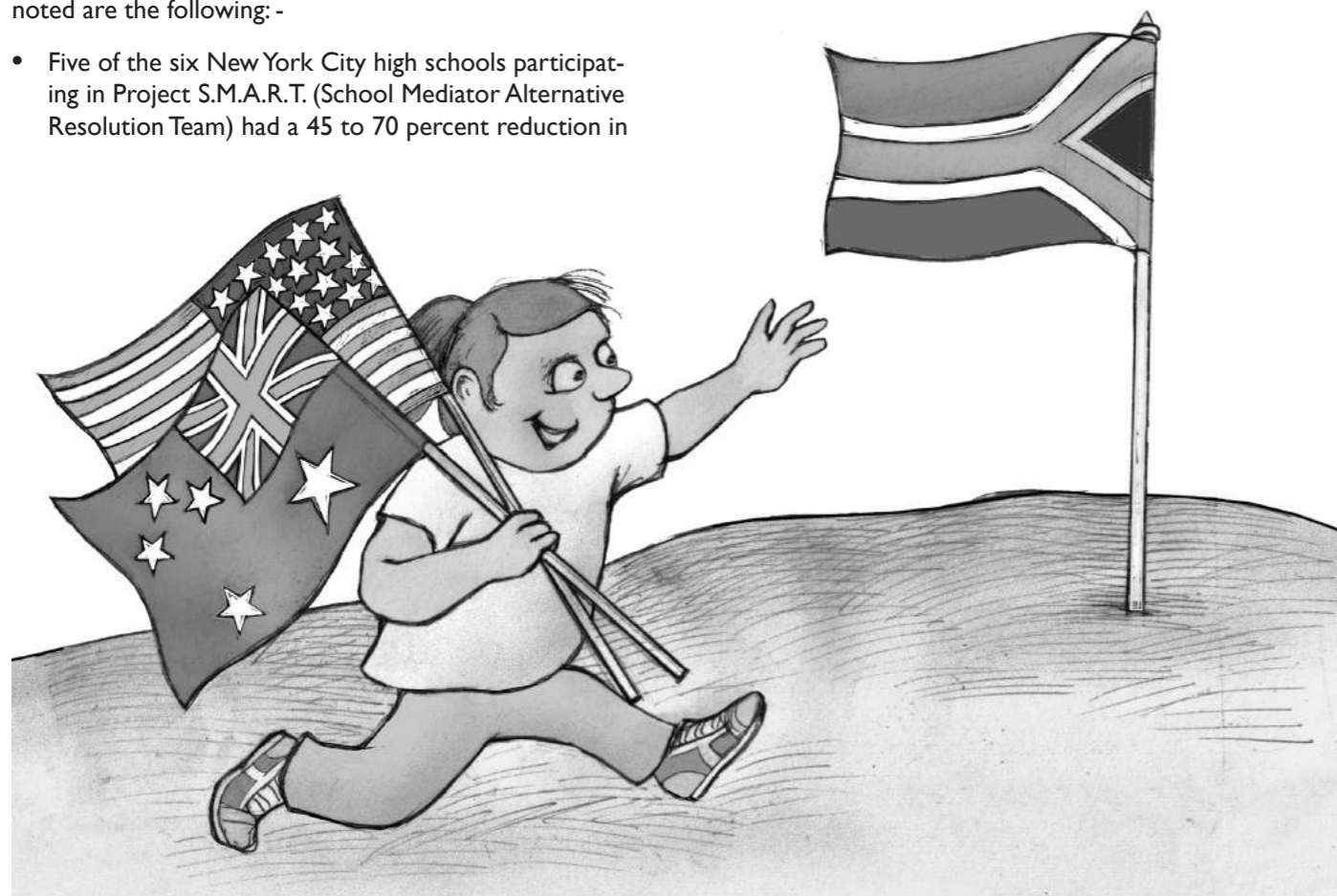
- Five of the six New York City high schools participating in Project S.M.A.R.T. (School Mediator Alternative Resolution Team) had a 45 to 70 percent reduction in

suspensions for fighting during the program's first year of operation.

- The Clark County Social Service School Mediation Program in Nevada, during the 1992-1993 school year, reduced conflict among learners in two participating elementary schools and helped prevent fights among learners. After the program, the number of teachers who spent less than 20 percent of their time on discipline increased by 18 percent. Similar results were reported for the 1993-1994 school year.
- Evaluations of the impact of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) in four multiracial, multi-ethnic school districts in New York City showed that: 84 percent of teachers who responded to a survey reported positive changes in classroom climate; 71 percent reported moderate or significant decreases in physical violence in the classroom; and 66 percent observed less name-calling and fewer verbal insults. More than 98 percent of respondents said that mediation gave children a significant tool for handling conflicts.

Conflict resolution skills have also been taught all over New South Wales and Queensland in Australia to learners, educators and parents, transforming communities.

Conflict resolution skills have been found to be transferable: solving conflicts in the inner life, personal life, and family. It follows that this intervention has the potential to extend into the community, state, nation and international scene.



- Information (in broad, terms, not detailed) on each conflict and its progress must be given to CR educators weekly;
- Any serious conflict or bullying, which could be a physical danger to educators or learners must be notified to the CR educators immediately (this includes cases of abuse and neglect);
- On no account should CR mediators or CR class monitors put themselves at any risk;
- There is a risk that a pupil may reveal something important like neglect or abuse to a peer counsellor who may not realise it needs to be passed to a teacher.

Notes for Learner CR Mediators

Learner CR mediators will be trained for their role.

This is a responsible role, and must be taken seriously. The role should not be accepted unless the learner is willing to devote significant time and effort to it.

They should also be careful not to take advantage of the position of power. Any CR mediators that abuse their position in any way (for example by themselves bullying or intimidating learners) will be replaced immediately, and the reasons for this explained to the class and school.

All words and actions of CR mediators must be peaceful and non-violent, aimed at avoiding or resolving conflict.

The main tools that will be used by CR mediators in resolving conflicts will be: facilitating communication, negotiation, mediation, and helping the parties to develop and explore solutions (using critical, creative and lateral thinking).

A successful CR mediator will have developed skills that will be useful throughout his or her life, and in the finding and keeping of employment. Please use this opportunity wisely, and enjoy it!

The basic principles are:

Stay neutral

- Ensure fairness and justice.

Bring down the temperature

- Stress similarities and play down differences;
- Help those involved to depersonalise (by avoiding personal attacks, accusations and language);
- Use 'time out' where necessary.

Facilitate communication

- Help the learners involved to explain their problem clearly;

- Help learners to actively listen to the other learner(s);
- Help learners to understand the perspective of the other party.

Negotiation

Ask each learner involved to: -

- Explain what they think the problem is;
- Say what they want;
- Say what their limits are (what they will accept);
- Work out an agreement together;
- Check that those involved are happy.

Mediation

- Give each learner involved the opportunity to talk;
- Clarify what they are saying;
- Check that each understands the other's position;
- Help the parties to create ways of solving the problem;
- Test suggested solutions with the parties;
- Find a solution that everyone involved likes.

Ideation (developing and exploring solutions)

- Use fresh perspectives and ideas;
- Use critical, creative and lateral thinking.

Seek 'win-win' solutions

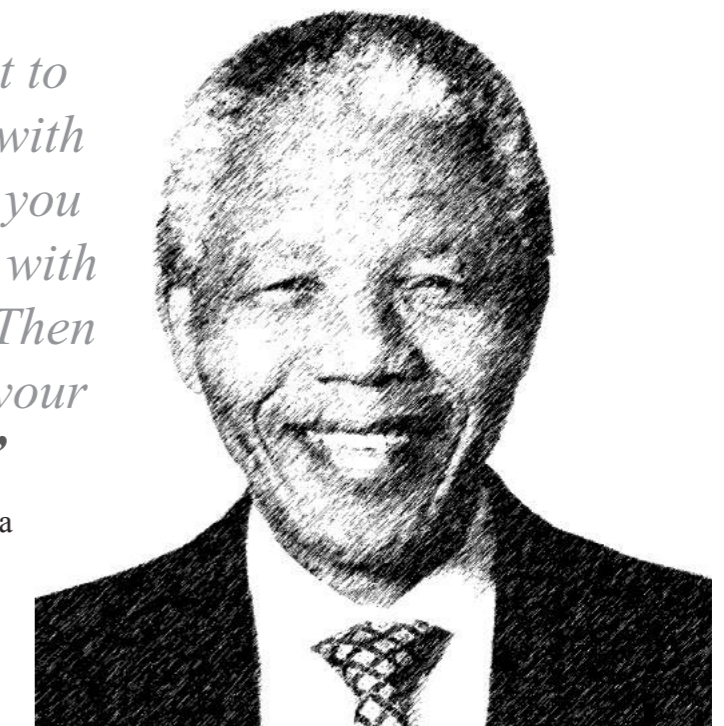
- Never make any learner feel resentful or hard done by.

Follow-up

- Always follow through by keeping in contact with the learners involved to check that they remain content and conflict-free, and keep class monitors in the picture.

"If you want to make peace with your enemy, you have to work with your enemy. Then he becomes your partner."

Nelson Mandela



ing learners can then mentor the incoming three learner members, using the benefit of their year of experience with the system.

Where possible, the conflict resolution mediators should include a broad mix of learners; mixed sex, race, religion, culture etc. Whilst the members will be chosen by the school authorities, care should be taken not to choose those regarded as 'model learners'. Remember that the team should be seen by learners as 'role models', rather than by teachers as 'model learners'. Converted/harnessed devils will make better 'devil's advocates' than consistent angels!

Desirable qualities for mediators include: -

- Considered 'cool'; i.e. respected by fellow learners;
- Leadership qualities;
- Wide experience of life;
- Analytical skills;
- Creative and lateral-thinking;
- Empathy, compassion and understanding;
- Good communication skills;
- Diligent and hard-working.

Chosen mediators will need to be trained in mediation, and to undertake conflict resolution skills training. In the first year of introduction, if possible, a broad training should be given to educators, mediators and class conflict resolution monitors (see below) before implementation of the programme.

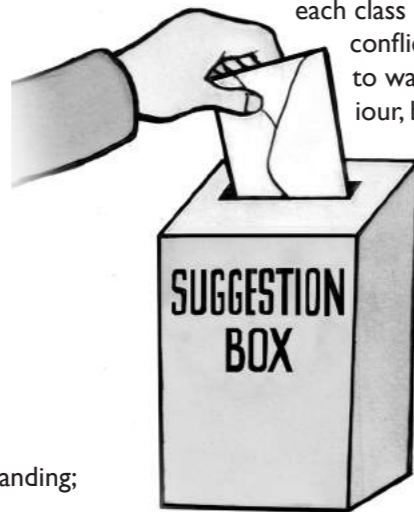
Select class conflict resolution monitors

Each class should nominate three CR (Conflict Resolution) monitors. The role of these CR class monitors will be to: -



- Monitor any potential class conflicts;
- Act as a first stage for advice on class conflicts and potential conflicts;
- Liaise with the school conflict resolution mediation programme about any concerns;
- Be a point of contact for the educator in relation to potential class conflicts.

It is recommended that the school conflict resolution mediators meet class CR monitors once a week to discuss each class situation and to receive any school updates on conflict resolution (especially any potential problems to watch for). School-wide issues such as gang behaviour, bullying etc. should be discussed at these forums.



The school should decide whether an educator observer should be present at these meetings. On the one hand it is good to give the learners responsibility, but on the other hand, the school should guard against any possibility of the conflict resolution mechanism turning into a vigilante action force!

Suggestion boxes be placed around the school so that children who are upset and don't want to approach a conflict resolution learner or educator directly, can still use the service by sending a note.

Establish the school conflict resolution system

For example: -

- School governors support is needed, and awareness training/briefing given;
- Weekly meeting of CR educators and CR mediators;
- Weekly meeting of CR mediators and class CR monitors;
- CR educators, mediators and class monitors should be identified by badges or ribbons, so they can be easily recognised by learners who need their help or support;
- CR monitors to have the power to issue 'notices to meet' to individuals involved in conflict (or with potential conflict problems);
- Above notice to request meeting within 1 week (if not, individuals are summoned to meet CR educators);
- Individual learners with conflict problems (including bullying) can request meetings with either their class CR monitor or the CR mediators;
- CR mediators' powers to be determined (e.g. to discuss conflict with individuals involved, seek common agreement of causes, conflict mapping, conflict resolution option setting, setting review dates etc.);
- It is suggested that three CR mediators are allocated to deal with each case (the CR mediators can allocate most appropriate members, but needs to take account of any objections from individuals with conflict);

Curriculum

This conflict resolution programme will fulfil important aspects of the curriculum, for example:

Foundation Phase

(Grades: 1 to 3, Ages: 7 to 9 years)

Foundation of social relations – the aim is for children to grow and thrive, physically, mentally, emotionally, morally and socially.

The aim is for the 'holistic development' of children. This includes critical and creative thinking, an unbiased approach, and participation and ownership.

The aim is for children to develop into citizens who can play a constructive role in a democratic, non-racist and equitable society.

Intermediate Phase

(Grades: 4 to 6, Ages: 10-12 years)

At this phase there are moves towards individual areas of learning, with cross-curricular themes or topics. In this phase, learners are beginning to understand detailed relationships between materials, incidents, circumstances and people, and are able to infer the consequences of such relationships.

Senior Phase

(Grades: 7 to 9, Ages: 13-15 years)

At this phase, learners should be able to engage in open argument and are willing to accept multiple solutions to single problems. Critical thinking skills are implied.

Learning Areas

Out of the eight Learning Areas adopted by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the following lend themselves well to this programme: -

- **Life Orientation**
 - Enhances the practice of positive values, attitudes, behaviour and skills in both the individual and the community;
 - Works for the transformation of society in the interests of promoting a human rights culture, underpinned by the striving for a fully inclusive, egalitarian society free of all unjust discrimination, as underpinned by the Constitution; a unified, co-operative society in which diversity is cherished; individuals' appreciation of their own beliefs, values and practices, and, at the same time, respect for the rights of others to do likewise;
 - Promotes the achievement of individual learners' potential by strengthening and integrating their sense of self-worth; their capacity to develop healthy relationships; their ability to make responsible and informed decisions; their independ-



ent, critical and creative thinking; their survival and coping skills; their commitment to life-long learning; and their pleasure in the expression and coordination of their intellectual, physical, spiritual, emotional and moral powers, et cetera;

- Encourages a healthy lifestyle through the actions and values expressed in above paragraph, including the care for and responsibility towards the self and the social, natural and material environments.

Life orientation is fundamental in the empowerment of learners to live meaningful lives in a society that demands rapid transformation. Many of the individual outcomes under each of these learning areas are met by this programme.

• Language, Literacy and Communication

- Empowers learners to develop coherent, meaningful and logical ideas;
- Negotiates meaning and understanding;
- Thinks and expresses their thoughts and emotions logically, critically and creatively; respond with empathy to the thoughts and emotions of others;
- Interact and participate socially, politically, economically, culturally and spiritually;
- Understand the relationship between language and power, and influence relationships through this understanding;
- Develop and reflect critically on values and attitudes.

Literacy includes alternative and augmentative methods of communication and language.

• **Social Sciences**

- Participate actively in promoting a just, democratic and equitable society;
- Address social and environmental issues in order to promote development and social justice;

Social Sciences comprise the study of relationships between people, and between people and their environment.

• **Arts and Culture**

- Nurturing and protection of freedom of expression;
- Affirmation of all cultural expressions (fostering cultural diversity and understanding).

Arts and Culture includes broader aspects of culture, such as behaviour patterns, societal organisation and power relations.

• **Natural Sciences**

- Enable learners to make sense of their natural world;
- Contribute to the development of responsible, sensitive and scientifically literate citizens who can critically debate scientific issues and can

participate in informed ways in democratic decision-making processes;

- Are essential for conserving, managing, developing and utilising natural resources to ensure the survival of local and global environments;
- Contribute to the creation and shaping of work opportunities.

The Natural Sciences Learning Area is committed to broadening access to material, resources, knowledge acquisition and conceptual development; redressing past imbalances; and contributing towards socio-economic development and a better life for all.

Critical Outcomes

The programme will also help to meet six of the seven critical outcomes: -

1. Identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking;
2. Work effectively with others as members of a team, group, organisation and community;
3. Organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively;
4. Collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information;
5. Communicate effectively using visual, symbolic, and/or language skills in various modes;
6. Demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

Constitution

This programme will include various objectives that support important constitutional aims.

Examples are given below.

Preamble

- Healing the divisions of the past;
- Uniting SA's people in their diversity;
- Laying the foundations for a democratic and open society;
- Reflecting social justice.

Chapter I

- The founding values of our state;
- Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms;
- Non-racialism and non-sexism.



School Conflict Resolution Mediation Programmes

Introduction

This conflict resolution programme includes a system of Peer Mediation. This is a specific form of conflict resolution that uses learners as neutral third parties to resolve disputes.

This system is in a sense akin to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in that it seeks a shared truth using an independent, non-judgemental system. However, the difference is that the conflict being examined is a current one. So, the school mediation programme will go one step further in exploring common ground in order to mediate a shared solution to the conflict.

The components of the Mediation Programme include: -

- Professional development for teachers and other staff;
- Parent awareness;
- Learner mediator training;
- Conflict resolution skills training for all learners.

This manual includes sufficient information to enable teachers and other school staff (e.g. administrators) to carry out a pilot school mediation programme, which can subsequently be adapted to meet the school's own particular needs and systems.

The following are included: -

- Suggested methodology for schools and educators;

- Notes for learner mediators and class monitors;
- Notes for parental awareness.

Plus conflict resolution skills training for learner mediators and other learners.

It is a known fact that learners are frequently hostile to, or wary of, figures of authority. But they often respect older/more experienced learners, who they see as 'role models'. Thus, they are likely to be more open/honest and receptive in mediation by fellow learners.

Peer mediation has already been introduced in the USA where it was found to reduce the amount of time teachers have to spend on resolving disputes, whilst providing learners with the opportunity to talk over their difficulties with others, simultaneously providing mediators with valuable life skills.

Suggested Methodology for Schools and Educators

Select educators with overall responsibility for conflict resolution

A team of two or three educators is suggested.

One of these should be the Head or Deputy Head – with the authority to take decisions on conflict resolution for the school.

Select the learner conflict resolution mediators

This should include a team of six learners, preferably with three learners from the most senior year and three from the next year down. This will enable continuity as the learners from the last year leave school. The three remain-

