
PROGRAM PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

Every school has a character all its own and certain ways of doing things. Although conflict resolution programs may be implemented in several ways, most successful programs take shape by beginning with a needs assessment and planning process. A key ingredient of successful conflict resolution programs is the underlying belief that conflicts can be resolved peacefully. The following outline describes five major steps for developing and implementing a conflict resolution program and provides suggested incremental activities to accomplish those steps. The sequence may be altered to meet the needs of the school and suit its existing structure.

Obtain Commitment to the Program and Establish a Planning Team

- *Establish a planning team.* Include broad representation of the school community, including parents, teachers, administrators, students and community members. With such broad representation the planning team can become a rather large group. One approach is to form a smaller “design team” who are responsible for program development based on input and feedback from the larger committee.
- *Gain administrative support.* Support from the administrative staff ensures time will be set aside in the school schedule for the conflict resolution program, particularly for the peer mediation component. Implementing a successful program requires time from both staff and students. In the case of staff, time must be set aside for an introductory course of the classroom curriculum, training in the mediation process, and training/supervising students selected to serve as conflict managers. Time is needed for students to receive training, participate in conflict management sessions, attend follow-up sessions and meet with the advisor on a regular basis. Initially, a conflict resolution program may appear to be a drain on precious time. However, once a program is up and running it will save time for students and staff — hours that can be reclaimed for teaching and learning.

Support is also needed from administrative staff to help secure initial funding for the program. Once a conflict resolution program is implemented, the cost is minimal. However, in the beginning there will be costs related to training staff members who can then provide orientation for other staff and train students selected to serve as conflict managers. Expenses also may include the costs of substitutes for staff to attend training and contracts for the services of consultants who provide training, assistance with program design or evaluation strategies and instruments. Finally, commitment from school administrators is important because they can serve as role models for staff in supporting the program.

- *Obtain faculty support and commitment to program.* It is equally important to gain staff support and commitment to the conflict resolution program. Many of the conflict resolution programs currently available recommend an introductory presentation be made to staff, students and parents before a school commits to undertake a program. In addition, agreement among staff to support and implement the program will have a positive effect on the students' view of the program.
- *Conduct a needs assessment.* Interviews, surveys, and focus groups conducted over a specified period of time can be useful in determining what the school community assumes about a conflict resolution program. If a decision is made to hold a series of focus groups, consider reaching out to the community-at-large and invite police officers, youth agency workers, the clergy and business leaders whose knowledge, opinions and resources could help to make the plan realistic and successful. By defining the needs of the school, everyone involved will have a more realistic idea of what a conflict resolution program can and cannot do for the school community. Selection of program strategies will likely depend on an accurate accounting of the types, severity and frequency of conflicts; how these incidents are handled; and the prevailing attitudes of staff, students, parents and the community toward conflict and conflict management. A valid assessment may also:
 - stimulate thinking, discussions and sharing of ideas about conflict,
 - help determine what to emphasize in the training of staff and students,
 - help determine the times, locations and levels of staff supervision of students,
 - provide a baseline for ongoing evaluation, and
 - support ongoing analysis of what is working well and what needs improvement.

- *Identify potential obstacles and strategies for overcoming them.* During the planning process it is helpful to spend time identifying where opposition may exist and developing strategies to counteract it. Problems often can be averted by careful preparation and contingency planning. List factors that are crucial to the program, yet potentially difficult for some reason. Estimate the chance of each obstacle occurring and its potential for derailing the program before deciding where to focus contingency plans. Remember, too, people make programs work. Establishing a support network is one way to guard against opposition. What can be expected from people in the school and community? What members can be depended on to provide feedback and support? Who will make the commitment? How much influence do they have with students, staff, and community members? Consider who might be main opponents. To what might they object, and how strongly? Who will adopt a wait-and-see attitude? Who won't care one way or the other? How can naysayers be convinced to support the program? How might apathy be turned into enthusiasm? Consciously addressing questions such as these enables the planning team to devise strategies to deal with serious roadblocks.

Be realistic about the contingency plans. There may be challenges that simply cannot be anticipated. However, with strategies in place for those most likely to happen and those that would be most damaging, a planning team can continue with confidence. Establishing a network of support people and including stakeholders early in the process sets the stage for a smooth transition from planning to implementation.

Design and Plan the Program

- *Develop belief statements.* Belief statements express fundamental convictions and tenets related to conflict and conflict resolution education. They provide the basis for gaining consensus within a school community regarding a conflict resolution program in the school.
- *Develop a mission statement.* The mission statement is a broad declaration of the purpose of a conflict resolution program. Usually expressed as a single, brief, general statement, the mission statement provides the primary focus of and commitment to the conflict resolution program. It would be wise to review the school's mission statement to determine if it is supportive of the conflict resolution program being developed.

- *Set goals and objectives.* Goals are broad statements of the desired outcomes of the conflict resolution program. Given that goals tend to be broad statements of purpose, most programs have only one or two goals. Objectives, on the other hand, will provide specificity and articulate what the program is intended to accomplish. By stating *measurable* objectives a planning team has a way to assess the progress toward achieving them. The goals and objectives thus provide the framework for the evaluation of the program. With a clear statement of goals and objectives, the stage is set for evaluation of outcomes. Program personnel will be better able to convey what they hope the program will accomplish when communicating with outside audiences such as the media or funding agencies.
- *Develop policies and procedures.* Review the school's code of conduct to determine if conflict resolution is a stated option and review the school's disciplinary policy to determine if it is consistent with the beliefs of the conflict resolution program. The planning team may find the policy needs to be amended or rewritten to accommodate new conflict resolution concepts and eliminate inconsistency.
- *Prepare a program evaluation plan.* A well designed evaluation plan provides the necessary documentation to encourage program improvement, develop community support, and determine if the program merits continued funding and staffing. Yet, a common mistake in instituting a new program is to put off plans to evaluate it. More and more, individuals who make judgments about the quality and worth of educational programs (business leaders, researchers, school/district administrators, officials responsible for distributing government funds, grant review committees of foundations) desire to see program evaluation routinely built into educational projects and processes. The evaluation plan makes clear, right from the beginning, what the program hopes to accomplish. Taking time at the beginning of the program to establish the criteria for success and the means of measuring them provides constant focus for all involved and helps to maintain the integrity and quality of the program. As an added benefit, a plan for evaluation signifies a commitment by the staff and may very well invite support from skeptics as the goals and objectives of the program are realized.
- *Identify and develop funding sources.* Any new program will involve some expense. The planning team will need to determine costs and preferably will secure funds before moving into implementation. One strategy might be to, as realistically as possible, anticipate expenses the first two or three years of the program. Then identify prospective resources including plans for obtaining the funds. When

considering where the resources will come from, posing the following questions may be helpful:

What funds are available to implement the program?

Which of these funding sources will you target, and why?

How many funding sources will you approach at once? What is the timeline for the approach?

For each targeted source, what is your strategy for obtaining funds?

Is there sufficient time to seek out funding sources and submit applications?

- *Preview and select program and curriculum resource materials.* Once the goals and desired outcomes have been clearly identified, the planning team is ready to examine the various programs and curricula available to address the desired program outcomes. There is a wide range of materials available. Using the selection criteria found in this guide or other resources, the planning team should conduct a written assessment to determine how well the materials being previewed match the school's needs and resources. Additionally, it might be helpful for the team to contact individuals who have used the programs to gather information about what has worked, what has not worked, and why.
- *Select staff development provider/trainer.* The planning team should consider costs, type of training, scheduling options, content, experience and qualifications of the trainers when deciding who will provide the training for the school community. Additionally, the team will need to determine the extent of technical support provided by the trainer while the program is being implemented.

Provide Professional Development and Training Opportunities

Once commitment has been established, training sessions in conflict resolution, mediation, and bias awareness should be made available to administrators, coordinators, staff, students and parent groups.

- *Plan professional development and training opportunities for teachers and other staff.* Include an introductory course and ongoing support for classroom and schoolwide implementation of the program. Topics should include conflict resolution theory and skills, mediation skills and bias awareness.
- *Plan training for student mediators.* Training for students will vary depending on the school's schedule and the age or developmental level of the students. The length of the sessions and time span will be determined by the trainers in collaboration

with school staff. Peer mediation training requires a minimum of 12 to 20 hours with periodic follow-up training (2 to 10 hours) for advanced skill development.

- *Plan training/orientation for administrators, coordinators, board members and others.* Provide an introduction to the concepts and skills of conflict resolution and bias awareness to develop understanding of how individuals can use their leadership roles to help achieve effective implementation and support of the program.
- *Plan parent/family training.* Helping parents develop better ways of dealing with conflict and prejudice at home reinforces the principles and skills students learn at school, enhances communication between parent and child, and prepares parents to become more effective leaders in their children's schools.

Develop A Promotional Campaign

- *Design and implement the initial campaign.* The entire student body should be aware of what is happening. Opportunities for students to receive information about the program and view demonstrations of how the mediation process works should be provided. Also consider distributing fliers to advertise and explain the program or placing information posters in high-visibility areas of the school such as classrooms, hallways, and lunchrooms.
- *Conduct ongoing promotional efforts.* To sustain awareness levels within the school community, skits and demonstrations of the mediation process could be presented at student, faculty, and parent gatherings throughout the year to highlight the various ways conflict resolution skills can be used in school and home situations.

Complete an Action Plan

- *Develop an action plan.* Outline the tasks required to select and implement a conflict resolution program. Prepare and distribute the plan, identifying the person(s) responsible for each task, the timeline for completion and the resources necessary to carry out the program.

Conflict Resolution Program Planning and Implementation Checklist

Commitment to Program and Planning Team

Establish a planning team
 Obtain administration & faculty support and commitment to program
 Conduct a needs assessment
 Identify potential obstacles and strategies to overcome them

Design and Plan Program

Develop belief statements	Prepare an evaluation plan
Develop a mission statement	Identify and develop funding sources
Set goals and objectives	Preview/select program/curriculum resources
Develop policies and procedures	Select staff development provider/trainer

Provide Professional Development

Introductory presentation	Student, family and community orientation
Teacher and support staff inservice	Parent workshops
Administrator/coordinator training	Student workshops
Peer mediation training	

Develop A Promotional Campaign

Initial campaign
 Ongoing promotional efforts

Complete An Action Plan

Outline tasks
 Identify person(s) responsible
 Develop a timeline
 Identify resources

Consider This!

Sample questions to address when establishing the peer mediation component of a conflict resolution program

What do we want the program to accomplish?	Who will be in charge of the program?
What kinds of conflicts will the mediators handle?	When and where will mediators work?
Should mediators work only with peers in the same grade level?	What will be the process for referrals?
How many contacts should mediators have with the same student(s)?	How will mediators be chosen?
What kinds of recognition will be offered for service as a mediator?	How long should a student mediation session last?
What information should be recorded on mediation forms and where will the forms be kept?	Who should get the information recorded on mediation forms and who will have access to the information?
What other kinds of recordkeeping are needed for the program?	Will there be any follow-up after student mediations? By whom?
How will information about the program be advertised?	How often and for what purpose should mediators meet as a group?