

Family Problem Solving

Conflict Mediation Training for Parents

Excerpts from Training Manual

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ABOUT CRU *INSTITUTE*

CRU *INSTITUTE* was founded for the purpose of helping young people learn and use alternative dispute resolution skills at school as well as in their daily lives.

Experience and training make CRU *INSTITUTE* a unique organization. Since 1987, our trainers have conducted Student Mediation Training Programs at hundreds of schools throughout the United States. Today, the majority of these schools train their own students and continue the Student Mediation Program.

CRU *INSTITUTE* trainers are professional mediators who have conducted mediation training since 1980 for attorneys, mental health professionals, educators, and business people. They developed the School Mediation Program curriculum as an interesting, exciting way to teach young people the sophisticated mediation techniques used by adult mediators.

CRU *INSTITUTE* will continue to promote mediation as a conflict resolution skill with universal applicability. The ability to effectively deal with conflict is a life skill that everyone should possess. It is our goal to bring an understanding of the mediation process and techniques to as many young people as possible.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this manual is to introduce conflict mediation skills to parents. Since 1987, CRU Institute trainers have been training students in elementary, middle and high schools to be mediators. These young people have acted as mediators for other students in dispute. As our program developed, it became apparent to our trainers that mediation approaches to conflict needed to be a school wide community project. We, therefore, developed manuals that teachers can use in their classrooms so that all children in school can understand and be able to use conflict mediation. Now, we have developed *Family Problem Solving*, teaching parents to resolve conflicts at home using conflict mediation skills.

The manual is divided into four sessions, each about one and one half hours long. Areas covered in the sessions are:

Session One

**Introduction to Conflict Mediation How
to use communication skills**

Session Two

**Review of the process, seeing things from
different points of view, and conflict
mediation techniques**

Session Three

**More conflict mediation techniques and
dealing with difficult situations**

Session Four

**Being Your Own mediator,
Using Med-Arb, and
Running Family Meetings**

Also included in the training are several sessions of role play so that the parents can practice their new learned skills with their children, whom they are encouraged to bring to the training. Each parent receives a refrigerator magnet showing the Family Problem Solving Process. In addition, each parent receives a booklet summarizing the various conflict mediation skills taught in the program.

The most successful parent trainings have been organized by schools or community service groups. It is helpful to provide child care for very young children (under 4 years) while their parents participate in the class. It is also advisable to offer food. In some areas, having the training in daylight hours is mandatory as parents will not venture out after dark. However, if your population includes many parents who work during the day evening sessions might be preferable.

Family Problem Solving can be presented by one person. In these four sessions totaling less than eight hours, parents can become a part of the very effective life skill which has helped so many young people conduct more successful lives.

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Review and Consultation

Objective	Materials	Approximate Time
To share information about how parents can use mediation in their families.	Writing board	20 minutes

Lead a discussion with the group encouraging parents to give examples of how they have used mediation approaches and techniques (especially those learned in Family Problem Solving) at home or in their daily lives and what the results have been.

Help parents be specific about the particular process and techniques they have used and how well these approaches have worked.

Solicit information from the children in the group about their experiences when their parents have used mediation and how that approach differed from the usual one.

Make suggestions as to how parents might have used more effective techniques or approaches if they have experienced difficulty.

Write helpful suggestions on the board.

Small Group Role Play Practice

Objective	Materials	Approximate Time
To give parents the opportunity to experience and practice mediation	One Family Problem Solving refrigerator magnet for each parent	20 minutes

Training Guide

Mediation skills and techniques are best learned by experiencing the process. Parents have learned the basic process. Here they need to practice the specific mediation techniques that have been presented. When setting up these role plays, be sure the disputants act in ways that will give the mediators the opportunity to practice their newly learned skills.

Procedure

1. Tell the parents that you would like to have them practice the mediation process and new techniques.
2. Suggest that they divide into family groups so that they can practice the process and skills with their own children. If some parents have not brought at least two children to the training, family groups may combine to do the role plays.
3. Tell the role play groups to choose two people (preferably children) to make up a dispute typical of what happens at their home. Advise the disputants to create situations that will allow the mediators to use their techniques

NOTE: Suggest options for disputes if necessary (see next page)

4. The parents will act as mediators either as sole mediator or in partners. They will use the Family Problem Solving refrigerator magnet as their guideline for the mediation.
5. Give the group about ten minutes to try the first mediation. Walk around to each group and comment on the process. After ten minutes, instruct the groups to change mediators and disputants and make up a new situation.

Suggested Conflicts for Small Group Role Play Practice

Ask the role play disputants to act in ways that will require the mediators to use techniques discussed in this session.

If participants have difficulty thinking of typical disputes, suggest one of the following:

TV DISPUTE: Two children are arguing over which TV show to watch.

NAME CALLING: One child calls another child a name. Both are angry, but the one who calls the other a name is much bigger and stronger.

CLOTHING DISPUTE: One child lends a sweater to another and it gets torn.

TOYS: Two children want to play with the same game or toy and they won't stop arguing.

DISHES: Two children argue over who should do the dishes. Each says that it's the other's turn to do them.

OWNERSHIP: Two children argue over a toy. Each says that the toy belongs to them.

CLEAN UP MESS: Children who share a room are asked to clean it. Each refuses and says that the other has made the mess.

GAMES: Children argue over who should go first in a game.

PRIVACY: An older child complains that a younger child goes into her room and takes her "stuff" (make up, books, work out equipment, clothes).

Using Med-Arb

Objective	Materials	Approximate Time
To teach parents the problem solving approach of mediation combined with arbitration.	Writing board	10 minutes

Training Guide

When parents first become acquainted with the mediation approach, they may feel that they will lose control of their children by giving up all authority. It is important for parents to understand that mediation can be combined with other approaches to problem solving such as arbitration. If a problem is not resolved in mediation, arbitration may be used by the parent. In addition, there are some situations where arbitration is the conflict resolution method of choice.

Teaching Points

- Med-Arb is an effective alternative used by parents to help children resolve conflict.

Procedure

1. Discuss with the group that parents cannot always be mediators and that they must sometimes arbitrate: make decisions for their children.
2. Emphasize to the parents the importance of being sure the children in the dispute know at the beginning of the mediation that you, as a parent, will be arbitrating if they cannot reach an agreement.
3. Tell the parents to be sure to allow time in the mediation for the children to make their own agreement. Use “What will happen if...?” to encourage them to consider what the alternative will be if they cannot agree.
4. Advise the parents that when agreement seems impossible or when an extremely unfair agreement (in your judgment) is reached, tell the children that you will make a decision for them and proceed to arbitrate.
5. Review with the parents the advantages of mediation over arbitration. (e.g. mediation helps children take responsibility for their own problems. Mediated disputes are more likely to be adhered to than those imposed upon the disputants by arbitration.) However, point out that where no agreement, or no fair agreement is possible, arbitration may bring the matter to conclusion.