In South Africa violence is often seen as the obvious means of conflict resolution.

Children need to be taught how to solve disputes without resorting to the use of violence. They need to be given the skills and strategies that will help them resort to more constructive means of solving inevitable daily problems.

New seeds need to be sown in the minds and hearts of learners, and who better to sow them than their peers?

Often adult advice is scorned or ignored, but the influence of an admired peer is very effective in guiding children towards a more positive approach to conflict. This in turn creates a safer and more stable learning environment in schools.

With this in mind, the GM South Africa Foundation introduced Peer Mediation as one of its seven Peace Promoting Schools projects.

**Goals and objectives of the programme**

The overall purpose of the Peer Mediation Programme is to train learners to facilitate mediation of conflict situations amongst their peers. This training helps learners to: (a) deal with their own conflict situations constructively, and (b) assist other learners to resolve their conflicts peacefully.

In Peer Mediation, learners are trained to:

- View conflict as a normal, natural part of life.
- Understand that conflict can be regarded as a positive opportunity for growth and development.
- Encourage learners who are in conflict to voluntarily make use of the Peer Mediation process.
- Provide an opportunity for each learner involved in a specific conflict to tell their side of the story.
- Resist offering suggestions, but instead to help learners identify their own solutions to the conflict at hand.
- Give each learner a chance to discuss and agree to a common solution.
- Keep the results of the mediation process confidential.

**Programme background**

The Peer Mediation Programme was initiated in 2006 in one Port Elizabeth school. By 2007 the programme had been extended to some twenty five schools.

Since then Peer Mediation has been implemented in at least fifty schools in Port Elizabeth and fifteen schools in the Cradock district.

But the project has not been confined to the Eastern Cape. In 2011 more than six hundred teachers in Gauteng participated in a two day Peer Mediation orientation workshop. A review of the Gauteng initiative suggests that many Gauteng teachers have implemented aspects of the programme in their schools.

The programme continues to be implemented in Port Elizabeth schools.
Programme structure and content
There are ten modules of two hours each in this programme. Interaction and participation is strongly encouraged.

The modules are structured as follows:

- Module 1 is an Introduction to Peer Mediation
- Module 2 is Peer Mediation in action
- Module 3 deals with the role of the peer mediator
- Module 4 explores active listening
- Module 5 examines the concept of speaking assertively
- Module 5 is about understanding conflict
- Module 7 looks at approaches to conflict
- Module 8 is about getting a grip on anger
- Module 9 focuses on generating options
- Module 10 outlines skills for interacting with others

Partners and stakeholders
In this initiative the Foundation has teamed up with the Port Elizabeth District Office of the Department of Education as well as participating schools and community members.

Guidelines and support
The following resources are available to assist schools and organisations in implementing the Peer Mediation Programme:

- A detailed facilitator manual.
- A supporting DVD which reinforces some of the principles taught in the programme.
- A structured approach assists facilitators in minimising preparation time, allowing them to fit the programme into their busy schedules.

A key aspect of the Peer Mediation Programme is that facilitators are as enriched in this process as the learners. This promotes the development of a mutually beneficial relationship between facilitator and learners.

Feedback from participants and facilitators:
We have been taught that when you see other children fighting you don’t have to take sides but you must stop them. You must first learn what caused the fight from both sides and then we were also taught how to behave well. Peer Mediation has changed my life. I was a fighter, now I’m a fixer. I fix instead of running away. Peer Mediation is about listening with your heart and trying to find a solution that will make both parties happy. Once you have mastered the 5 steps of Peer Mediation it is difficult to live without it. You just use it automatically.

For further information, kindly contact the GM South Africa Foundation as follows:

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