

“Medford High’s Peer Mediation Program”

By Maya Gomez

In today’s society, when a person breaks a law or violates a school’s code of conduct we focus on the punishment rather than the problem. We are controlled by a punishment or rule that knows nothing about the personal situation. Restorative Justice provides an alternative to this method. It is a theory about repairing harm caused by criminal behavior. There are three main components to this theory. The first one is accountability, this means that the people involved need to realize what they did incorrectly. The second is community safety, this allows the victim and the wrongdoer to rebuild their relationship in the community. It also is about making sure that everyone else is safe by avoiding future conflict. The last component is competency development this addresses underlying factors and build strengths. The focus of restorative justice is not on the blame but exploring how to address the problem in the future. People use this theory by having all parties affected negotiate the problem and find a resolution, by themselves. These resolutions include mutually desired outcomes. They also lesson the factor of implicit bias in disciplinary actions. There are two different ways restorative justice can be used, in schools and in the legal system.

In schools, peer mediation can be used. This is when all parties involved in the conflict meet and find a resolution together. The students have to realize they made a mistake, so they can also have an input in the situation’s outcome. All parties involved and a mediator meet in a room and discuss a resolution, the students will have an opportunity to talk about all sides of the conflict. If everyone listens and understands all sides of the conflict then they can find an outcome that all parties agree on. These outcomes could be alternatives to suspension and could be doing extra work or community service. The emphasis of peer mediation is on making sure everyone understands the conflict and it doesn't happen again. Schools in Medford could start using peer mediation to resolve everyday conflicts.

In the legal system, restorative justice can be an alternative to using criminal justice. Our country has the largest prison population in the world. Here are two million people currently in jail. Last year a church in Arlington used restorative justice when a sign on their property was vandalized. They held a restorative justice circle with all parties involved and a circle mediator. They found an alternative punishment instead of jail or a fine. This worked very well for this church and it could also work for you.

What you can do to involve this in your life is promote awareness and share this new method of problem solving. Ask about using this alternative to solve a conflict. Restorative Justice is a different way of thinking of the punishments around you. If we can do this, we can help make our community and our schools run more positively.

I have been working for most of this school year on trying to start a peer mediation program of our own. The assistant principal Mr. Blauch is the main person that helped this project get started. I have built a team of 8 students who want to become peer mediators. We will participate in a short training after school. Peer mediation expert, Gail Packer, gave a brief talk to the group about the process of peer mediation and its importance. This group will be used to mediate conflicts in the school. This will be a good resource for the school to use for student input as well as students coming to peaceful resolutions to their problems.