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What is Words Work?

Words Work is a turn-key curriculum educators and advocates can use to build youth leadership, relationship, and communication skills. With these skills, youth will become comfortable with recognizing and effectively resolving conflict in the situations they face at school, at home, and in the community.

The goal of the Words Work curriculum is to provide youth the tools to become leaders and productive citizens of the future.

The Words Work curriculum is geared toward youth in grades six to eight. Through ten 45-minute sessions, educators will guide youth through interactive lessons that focus on relationships, problem-solving, communication, and leadership skill-building. Two leading conflict resolution education organizations, the Conflict Resolution Unlimited Institute and the Middle Atlantic Region of American Friends Service -- Help Increase the Peace Program, provided the lessons that are the foundation of the curriculum.

Why Do We Need Words Work?

Research strongly suggests that youth who learn social skills develop healthier relationships and higher self-esteem. Listening, problem-solving, cooperation, and appreciation of differences are valuable lessons for all ages. These skills lead to competence and confidence in resolving problems and engaging peers and others.

The middle-school years are marked by transitions and opportunities for youth. The Words Work curriculum provides invaluable skills and concepts which empower youth to develop constructive relationships with peers and others.

Through funding by the JAMS Foundation, the curriculum is available free of charge.

Words Work is a simple, practical, and user-friendly supplement to after school programs serving middle-school-aged children. The Words Work curriculum teaches kids to use communication skills to prevent and manage conflict.



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Curriculum

The Words Work Curriculum consists of the following components:

- Introduction
- Part One: Breaking the Ice and Creating a Community
- Part Two: Communication: Telling It, Hearing It, Talking It out!
- Part Three: Relationships, People and Behavior, Think about It!
- Part Four: Leadership, Group Decision-Making, Using Skills and Reaching Goals
- Part Five: Problem Solving and Working Together
- Appendix A: Words Work Supplementary Teaching Materials
- Appendix B: Words Work Teaching Points

To request a complimentary printed copy of the curriculum, please contact us or visit the ABA Store. Download your free copy [here](#).

Mail

ABA Section of Dispute Resolution
740 15th St. NW
Washington, DC 20005

Phone

(202) 662-1680

Fax

(202) 662-1683



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Committee

In addition to our program partners CRU Institute and MAR; a dedicated team of American Bar Association Dispute Resolution Section members helped form *Words Work*. Their names and biographies are listed below. We would like to thank each committee member for their participation and guidance in the development of this program.

Timothy Hedeem, Ph.D, is Associate Professor of Conflict Management at Kennesaw State University. He provides mediation services through court and private programs, delivers trainings in the areas of conflict resolution and communication, and conducts research and evaluation on dispute resolution. He serves on the editorial board of *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, on the Section Council of the American Bar Association Section of Dispute Resolution as Associates Liaison, and is former chair of the board of directors of the National Association for Community Mediation. He is a senior consultant to the Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education.

Tricia Jones (Ph.D., Ohio State University, 1985) is a Professor in the Department of Psychological Studies in the College of Education, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA. Her teaching and research interests are in interpersonal, group and organizational conflict processes with special emphasis on conflict resolution education and social and emotional learning programs in K-16 institutions. Dr. Jones is the past-President (1996-1997) of the International Association of Conflict Management. Dr. Jones is the recipient of the 2004 Jeffrey Z. Rubin Theory to Practice Award from the International Association for Conflict Management.

Robyn Mitchell is the past chair of the ABA Section of Dispute Resolution and Senior Vice President, Director of Regulatory Risk & Compliance Management, RBS Lynk Incorporated. Robyn previously served as an Assistant General Counsel for Bank of America, managing litigation and other legal matters in 13 states, including Georgia. Prior to entering the corporate sector, Robyn was a shareholder with the Miami law firm of Adorno & Yoss, P.A. In the public sector, Robyn served as Trial Attorney, United States Department of Justice; and later as an Assistant United States Attorney assigned to the Presidential Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force for the Northern District of Georgia. Robyn received her Juris Doctors Degree, with honors, from Howard University School of Law in 1981, and her Bachelor's of Science Degree, cum laude, from Alabama State University in 1978.



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Gail Nugent has sixteen years of experience mediating disputes of all kinds, facilitating meetings, conducting training in conflict resolution, and designing conflict management systems. She has mediated well over 2500 disputes in a broad range of areas, including employment, business, community, special education, vocational rehabilitation, and family matters. She has also conducted over 150 complex multi-party mediations and facilitations for public and private agencies, school districts, churches, and community organizations. She was formerly the Director of two non-profit organizations serving the community, which addressed community dispute resolution. Ms. Nugent's has earned her master's degree in Social Work from the University of California, Los Angeles with a specialization in the area of program administration and community organization. She has served on the Board of Directors of the California Dispute Resolution Council and the Southern California Mediation Association. She is currently the president of the San Diego Chapter of the Association for Conflict Resolution. In 2000, the Southern California Mediation Association recognized her with its Peacemaker of the Year award.

Linda Toyo Obayashi is a mediation officer at the World Bank and is in private mediation practice in Baltimore, Maryland. She is admitted to the bars of Maryland, District of Columbia, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, and practiced law for ten years before transitioning to the field of alternative dispute resolution. Toyo has been trained in various methods of mediation, negotiation, facilitation, and conflict resolution and has mediated hundreds of employment, corporate, commercial, real estate, lemon law, and domestic cases for various courts, agencies, and in her private practice. She has served as a speaker, trainer, coach and consultant to various public and private institutions. Toyo is the immediate past President of the Maryland Chapter of the Association for Conflict Resolution, and served with the Maryland Mediation and Conflict Resolution Office (MACRO), Mediator Excellence Council. She is on the American Bar Association, Dispute Resolution Section Council. The Daily Record named her as one of Maryland's Top 100 Women, 2003.



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Michael Palmer has worked as a mediator and conflict management consultant since 1992, providing services to individuals, corporations, schools, colleges, medical care facilities and government agencies. He also serves as a legal expert in USAID-funded Rule of Law projects in countries with developing economies. Mike holds Ph.D. and J.D. degrees from the Freie Universität in Berlin, Germany and Georgetown University Law Center and has taught jurisprudence, philosophy, social ethics, and dispute resolution at the university level in Germany and the United States. He has conducted numerous workshops on the management of disputes in educational, legal, medical, and workplace settings in addition to a conflict management course at Middlebury College. Mike has written extensively on conflict education. His articles include "Negotiating With School Professionals," "Bullyproofing Your School," "When Playful Teasing Turns Mean," "A Tale of Two Colleges," and "The Magic of Mediation." He is currently at work on a book on teaching negotiation and conflict management in high school and college.



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Frequently Asked Questions

What is Words Work?

The Words Work curriculum teaches middle-school aged youth leadership, relationship, and communication skills. Funded by the JAMS Foundation, Words Work is a simple, practical, and user-friendly supplement to after school programs. The Words Work curriculum teaches kids to use communication skills to prevent and manage conflict.

How Can Words Work Benefit Middle-School Aged Youth?

The middle-school years are marked by transitions and opportunities for youth. Research strongly suggests that youth who learn social skills develop healthier relationships and higher self-esteem. Listening, problem-solving, cooperation, and appreciation of differences are valuable lessons for all ages. These skills lead to competence and confidence in resolving problems and engaging peers and others.

What is in the Words Work Curriculum?

The curriculum is divided into five parts, each focusing on a core element of communication and problem-solving: Breaking the Ice, Communication, Relationships, Leadership, and Problem-Solving. Within each of the five parts there are one or more sessions with exercises designed to develop communication and problem-solving skills.

How Can the Words Work Curriculum Be Used?

The exercises in each of the ten sessions are designed to build on each other so that the students learn basic communication skills in the first series of lessons and build to more complex problem solving and group dynamic skills by the end of the curriculum. The exercises can be used in a series of trainings or only one or more of the sessions can be used.



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Who Can Teach the Words Work Curriculum?

The sessions were designed with the assumption that the facilitator of the curriculum would be someone with knowledge of middle school aged youth and preferably communication and conflict resolution skills and theory. Mediators, teachers, lawyers, facilitators, youth counselors, social workers, and religious leaders are all ideal presenters of this curriculum. This Facilitator's Manual provides facilitators with all the materials and instructions needed to present each exercise.

What is best age group to present Words Work to?

The curriculum has been created for middle school aged youth. Some session content is more appropriate for 13 and 14-year-olds and may be harder to grasp for 11 and 12-year-olds. Our pilot evaluation data recommends focusing on this older demographic if possible since it may require additional effort for 11 and 12-year-olds to focus on some topics.

How Do I Get Started Teaching the Words Work Curriculum?

Download the curriculum from the Words Work webpage. The curriculum will provide a step-by-step outline of each session and the materials required to accomplish each session. Our pilot sites recommend co-presenting the sessions to encourage participation and retention of session objectives. You should also consider location, support, and resources available to you as you prepare to present Words Work.

Who Wrote Words Work?

Two leading conflict resolution education organizations, the Conflict Resolution Unlimited Institute and the Middle Atlantic Region of American Friends Service Committee collaborated with the Section of Dispute Resolution to provide the lessons that are the foundation of this curriculum. The JAMS Foundation provided a grant that made this curriculum possible.

How is Words Work different From a Peer Mediation Program?

The Words Work curriculum has been designed to help students develop communication, relationship, leadership, and problem-solving skills for use in their daily lives. Words Work is not a peer mediation or a conflict resolution program. Students who have completed a Words Work curriculum may be interested in participating in peer mediation programs. For extensive information on peer mediation and conflict resolution programs, please visit:

<http://www.creducation.org/>.



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Feedback

For specific comments or questions about the Words Work curriculum please contact Gina Viola Brown at Gina.Brown@americanbar.org or (202) 212-9314.

We welcome your detailed feedback on Words Work. If you have used the Words Work curriculum, we would appreciate you taking a few minutes to fill out an [Online Feedback Survey](#).



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Links & Information about the Partner Organizations

JAMS Foundation

The JAMS Foundation offers financial assistance for conflict resolution initiatives with national or international impact and share its dispute resolution experience and expertise for the benefit of the public interest. The JAMS Foundation funded the Words Work curriculum. More information about the Foundation see their web site at <http://www.jamsadr.com/JAMS-Foundation/JAMS-Foundation.asp>.

Conflict Resolution Education

The Conflict Resolution Education Connection is a web site devoted to the promotion of conflict resolution education throughout the world. For more information about the Conflict Resolution Education Connection please see <http://www.creducation.org/>.

CRU Institute

CRU Institute is a nonprofit organization created for the purpose of teaching mediation concepts and skills to youth and adults. Experience in mediation and training make CRU Institute a unique organization. Since 1987 CRU Institute trainers have conducted Student and Faculty Mediation Training at hundreds of schools throughout the United States and in Canada & Singapore. CRU Institute materials are being used by schools in the United States and numerous other countries.

Nancy Kaplan, MSW is the Executive Director of CRU Institute, a non-profit organization that teaches mediation skills to students, faculty and parents. Ms. Kaplan founded CRU Institute in 1992 and has been the Director since its inception. In addition to developing CRU's peer mediation curriculum and original DVDs, Ms. Kaplan has trained peer mediators in numerous schools throughout the United States and in Canada and Singapore. She has been a mediator for over thirty years and is a former board member of the Academy of Family Mediators. She also served as co-chair of the Education Section of ACR. Ms. Kaplan has mediated hundreds of divorces and conducted mediation training for attorneys, mental health professionals, and managers in the workplace. In her "off hours" she uses her mediation skills with her husband and eight children. CRU Institute is based in Seattle, Washington and their web site is www.cruinstitute.org



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The Middle Atlantic Region of the American Friends Service Committee

The Middle Atlantic Region of the American Friends Service Committee (MAR) works on issues related to criminal justice, economic justice, social justice, and peace building. Help Increase the Peace activities can be found in the HIP Manual, published by MAR. HIP is just one tool the Youth Empowerment through Conflict Resolution (YEtCR) project uses to promote mediation and conflict resolution. Both the MAR regional office and the YEtCR project office are located in Baltimore, MD. More information about YEtCR and the rest of MAR's programs can be found at <http://www.afsc.org/midatlantic>.

The American Bar Association Section of Dispute Resolution

The Section of Dispute Resolution, established in 1993, is one of the ABA's newest and fastest growing Sections with over 18,000 members. The Section's objectives include maintaining the ABA's national leadership role in the dispute resolution field; providing information and technical assistance to members, legislators, government departments and the general public on all aspects of dispute resolution; studying existing methods for the prompt and effective resolution of disputes; adapting current legal procedures to accommodate court-annexed and court-directed dispute resolution processes; and activating state and local bar involvement in dispute resolution. The Section offices are located in Washington, DC and its web site is www.abanet.org/dispute.