



Triangle Talks

Notes for Coordinator/Trainers
Handouts for pupils

References

This information has been adapted from original papers prepared by:

- Judith Brearly for the Scottish Marriage Guidance Council.
- Fiona Garwood - Family Mediation Scotland
- Hawkins P, and Shohet R. *Supervision in the Helping Professions*, Open University Press 1989 especially Chapter 9.

PEER MEDIATION

TRIANGLE TALKS TRAINING

Initial training

How to Structure the Hour:

Introduction

What are triangle talks?
Why can they be useful?
Why might they be difficult? 5-10 mins

How they work - summary using handouts

Timing
Roles
Inquiry on flipchart 5-15 mins approx
Avoid giving advice
Negotiate
Give useful feedback
Learn from each other
Effective

Practical

3 x 10-minute mini sessions 30 mins approx
Using own mediation case material
Keep it simple

Summary

More effective triangle talks 5 mins approx
Round up

Handouts Included:

Handout 1: The Meaning of TRIANGLE

Handout 2: Information for Peer Mediators

Information for Peer Mediation Trainers

INTRODUCTION

This brief training pack is to help you as a Peer Mediation Coordinator/Trainer, to teach peer mediators how to use triangle talks. It is important that the three peer mediators work well with each other, so careful selection of the group of three is essential and should not just be left to chance. By the end of this session, the peer mediators should feel confident that they can participate in a Triangle Talk. In this initial session it would be useful to come back into a large group to talk about their experience of this activity. Successful Triangle Talks promote the use of active listening, feeding back and summarising.

What are triangle talks?

Triangle Talks is where three people come together, using a structure to help each other to talk about their mediation practice. The cases discussed are confidential, and should not be discussed outside the room. You may want to talk about “party a” and “party b” to avoid identification of participants.

The purpose of the work in Triangle Talks is to give and receive peer group support for ongoing problems in your mediation practice. Attention will be given to particular and actual problems. At the same time, skills of listening can be tried out and developed for everyone involved.

Once the threesome has been decided, each one take turns to be:

- (a) Mediator
- (b) Consultant
- (c) Observer

Discussion Point

Before starting the talks, you can ask the group of mediators: *In what way do you think Triangle Talks be useful? You can do this in small groups and feed back to the large group or if the group is small you may prefer just to do it in one group.*

Keep in mind that Triangle Talks might be difficult if:

- There might not be enough challenging cases to talk about, if all the cases have been manageable.
- They might get too involved in the story
- They might not stick to their roles
- If the groups don't keep good track at time, then there might not be enough time for everyone to get a turn

TRIANGLE TALKS

(SEE ALSO HANDOUT 2)

Mediators

Ask the peer mediator to choose a real life mediation problem they are facing or an issue they have been concerned about that they would like some help to work things out in a safe place. The following questions may help them to talk about it:

- (a) What did you think the problem was?
- (b) What did the people in conflict or others think the problem was?
- (c) How far did their ideas match your own?
- (d) What did you do to explore a range of options in the session with the people in conflict?
- (e) What else did you try?
- (f) What do you wish you tried?

The **Mediator's** job is to try to explain the problem and to make use of the Consultant's questions to help think through possible options to deal with the problems.

The Consultant's Job

The Consultant's job is to aid the **mediator** in explaining the problem, by means of listening and careful questioning and with a minimum of advice, or solutions. With practice, the consultant's questions can help the mediator to think more clearly on the problem or dilemma being faced.

As a general guide, the better the question posed by the consultant, the longer the mediator will take to answer because they will have to think about the question in relation to the mediation session.

The discussion between mediator and consultant should help the mediator to:

- Understand more clearly what the issue is.
- Explore the range of possible options.

In some situations, the mediator may be able to select a course of action as a result of the consultation. In other situations, looking at the range of possible options may be helpful for the mediator in future cases.

The Observer's Job

The **Observer's** job is to note the communications between the Mediator and Consultant. (S)he has a helpful role in pointing out problems in the communication and helping the consultant and the mediator with it. For example, by making a suggestion to the Consultant to help him/her to do a better job, and for the Mediator to get more positive help. It might help to think about the following questions:

Observing the Mediator:

- How clearly does the mediator present the problem?
- Does (s)he see her/himself and their own feelings as being too involved?
- Does (s)he make use of help, or does poor communication get in the way?
- Does (s)he hand over or let the consultant take over this problem, or does (s)he take over this responsibility for working it through?
- Supposing you were the mediator, what would you be feeling about this session?

Observing the Consultant:

- Is the Consultant helpful, through listening and reflecting, in finding the problem and allowing it to be explored?
- Does (s)he give advice, take the problem away from the mediator or provide a solution without checking that the right questions have been asked?
- Supposing you were in the Mediator's shoes, would you feel encouraged to talk to the Consultant? If not, why not?

Also for the Observer to think about:

If possible, keep a note of the key questions asked by the Consultant, i.e. those which caused the mediator to think hard or helped to find the problem.

The Observer should also keep an eye on the time, on behalf of the group. This means ensuring that there is enough time for feedback and discussions of the process, in addition to actual presentation and work on the problem.

Suggested time: 15 minutes per consultation, which allows 10 minutes for the Mediator and Consultant together and 5 minutes for the Observer in feedback. If it everyone sticks to this time, all three people can each have the time to share their experiences of being a mediator. This is a really good way of learning from each other.

You may find you don't need this long, try starting with the suggested time and work out what time works for you.

Handout 1: The Meaning of TRIANGLE

Tip to help you remember how triangle talks work.

T Timing

R Roles

I Inquiry

A Avoid giving advice

N Negotiate

G Give useful feedback

L Learn from each other

E Effective

Why “TRIANGLE Talks”?

One of the good things about triangle talks is how they are set up. The main points to bear in mind are:

1. **Timing.** Keeping to the agreed time helps to focus minds and ensures that everyone has a fair share of the time to talk about their mediation practice. Triangle Talks are designed to work with each person sticking to their job for an agreed amount of time
2. **Roles.** Sticking to the 3 roles is part of the structure. For example, if the Consultant comes out of their role and shares his or her problems, then the structure is lost and the Triangle Talks won't work.
3. **Inquiry.** The key to successful Triangle Talks is the nature of the questions asked by the Consultant. Sometimes one question can help the Mediator explore options and think about a course of action to try at the next mediation session or for a similar case in the future.
4. **Advice.** It is not the Consultant's job to give advice.
5. **Negotiate.** Who will be the first in the triangle to be the Mediator? Can you agree to take it in turns?
6. **Give useful feedback.** Try to make any feedback as positive as you can, this may not be possible and you may have to learn to point out where something could have been managed in a different way.
7. **Learn from each other.** Only minimal case details are necessary. Mediators are often tempted to explain a lot of background to the Consultant. **It is better to concentrate on the problem rather than the story.** Consultants can ask for factual details if this is needed.
8. **Effective.** As a mediator you have to be able to manage the time in a mediation session. Just like it takes time to learn to be a mediator, it takes time and practise to get the best out of Triangle Talks. You will get the best from Triangle Talks if you follow the structure.

Handout 2: Information for Peer Mediators

TRIANGLE TALKS

Triangle Talks is where three people come together, using a structure to help each other to talk about their mediation practice.

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Once the threesome has been decided, each one take turns to be:

- (a) “Mediator”
- (b) “Consultant”
- (c) “Observer”

(a) As “**Mediator**” you are asked to choose an actual mediation you have worked on or are currently working on, one in which help would be welcomed. The following questions may help you:

- What was the problem?
- What did the people in conflict think the problem was?
- How far did their ideas match your own?
- What else had been (if anything) done before trying mediation?

It is the task of the **Mediator** to try to explain the problems.

(b) The **Consultant’s** task is to help the mediator explain the problems by listening and by careful use of questions. The consultant should try not to give advice or solutions.

(c) The **Observer’s** task is to note the communications between the Mediator and Consultant. (S)he has a helpful role in pointing out problems in the communication and helping the consultant and the mediator with it. For example, by making a suggestion to the Consultant to help him/her to do a better job, and for the Mediator to get more positive help. It might help to think about the following questions:

Observing the Mediator:

- How clearly does the Mediator present the problem?
- Does (s)he make use of help, or does poor communication get in the way?
- Does (s)he see her/himself and their own feelings as being too involved?
- Does (s)he hand over, or let the consultant take over this problem, or does (s)he keep responsibility for working it through?
- Supposing you were the Mediator, what would you be feeling about this session?

Observing the Consultant:

- Is the Consultant helpful, through listening and careful questioning, in finding out the problem and allowing it to be explored?
- Does (s)he give advice, take the problem away from the mediator or provide a solution without checking that the right questions have been asked?
- Try to think if you were in the Mediator's shoes: would you feel encouraged to talk to the Consultant? If not, why not?

If possible, the **Observer** should keep a note of the key questions asked by the Consultant, i.e. those which caused the mediator to think hard or helped to find the problem.

The Observer should also keep an eye on the time, on behalf of the group. This means ensuring that there is enough time for feedback and discussions of the process, in addition to actual presentation and work on the problem.

Suggested time: 15 minutes per consultation, which allows 10 minutes for the Mediator and Consultant together and 5 minutes for the Observer in feedback. If it everyone sticks to this time, all three people can each have the time to share their experiences of being a mediator. This is a really good way of learning from each other.

You may find you don't need as long as an hour, try starting with the suggested time and work out what time works for your group.

