

Mediation Techniques for Children In Armed Conflict Situations

Yvonne Vissing, PhD
Salem State University
yvissing@salemstate.edu

Mediation as a communication strategy

Agenda

- **The psycho-social impact of mediation**
 - **The Mediation Process**
 - **Types of communication strategies**
- **Importance of Children in Armed Conflict Mediation Strategy**

Mediation as a Human Rights Vehicle

How do we solve conflicts and get people to work together?

A human rights approach is necessary.

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- Geneva Convention (1949)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- Other organizational position statements

Importance of Children in Armed Conflict Mediation Strategy

Geneva Academy (2024) reports that there are over 110 armed conflicts occurring around the world, from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin and South Americas, and the Middle East.

- Death
- Disability & Illnesses
- Orphaned
- Family Separations
- Abandonment
- Developmental delays
- Lack of food, water, medicine
- School, social service lack
- Emotional Trauma
- Loss of home, community, friends, possessions, pets, etc.
- Physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect
- Fear, safety concerns
- Insecure futures
- Regression & Reaction
- Lack of sleep, play, normalcy

Children have a Right to Justice

When children are the innocent or intentional victims of conflict, a society has a responsibility to protect and defend them. This is especially true in nations that have ratified human rights treaties like the CRC.

In the first instance, violence towards them should be prevented, but when it is not, there needs to be restorative justice implemented. This may not be done without legal action or force.

Mediation provides a nonviolent strategy to assist groups to find a solution for how they are going to address the violence that children in armed conflict situations experience.

The psycho-social impact of mediation

George Herbert Mead (1934) and Frank Tannenbaum (1938) identified that how people in conflict situations are labeled influences how other people perceive them, and how they perceive themselves. Positive labels vs negative labels impact how people see themselves – and how others see them.

Edwin Lemert (1951; 1967) expanded the impact of labeling in what he called primary and secondary deviance. This concept is relevant to mediation in the following way. A primary action will be met with a certain type of response by others. Depending upon how that action is perceived, there may be subsequent behaviors that are far more problematic and dangerous than the initial action. Basically, the way the initial communication is handled impacts subsequent actions. If the first act was handled well, subsequent negative actions may not occur.

When violations have occurred, it is important to address them quickly and directly so that future problems do not occur. Mediation can be a buffer to stop the escalation of future problems.

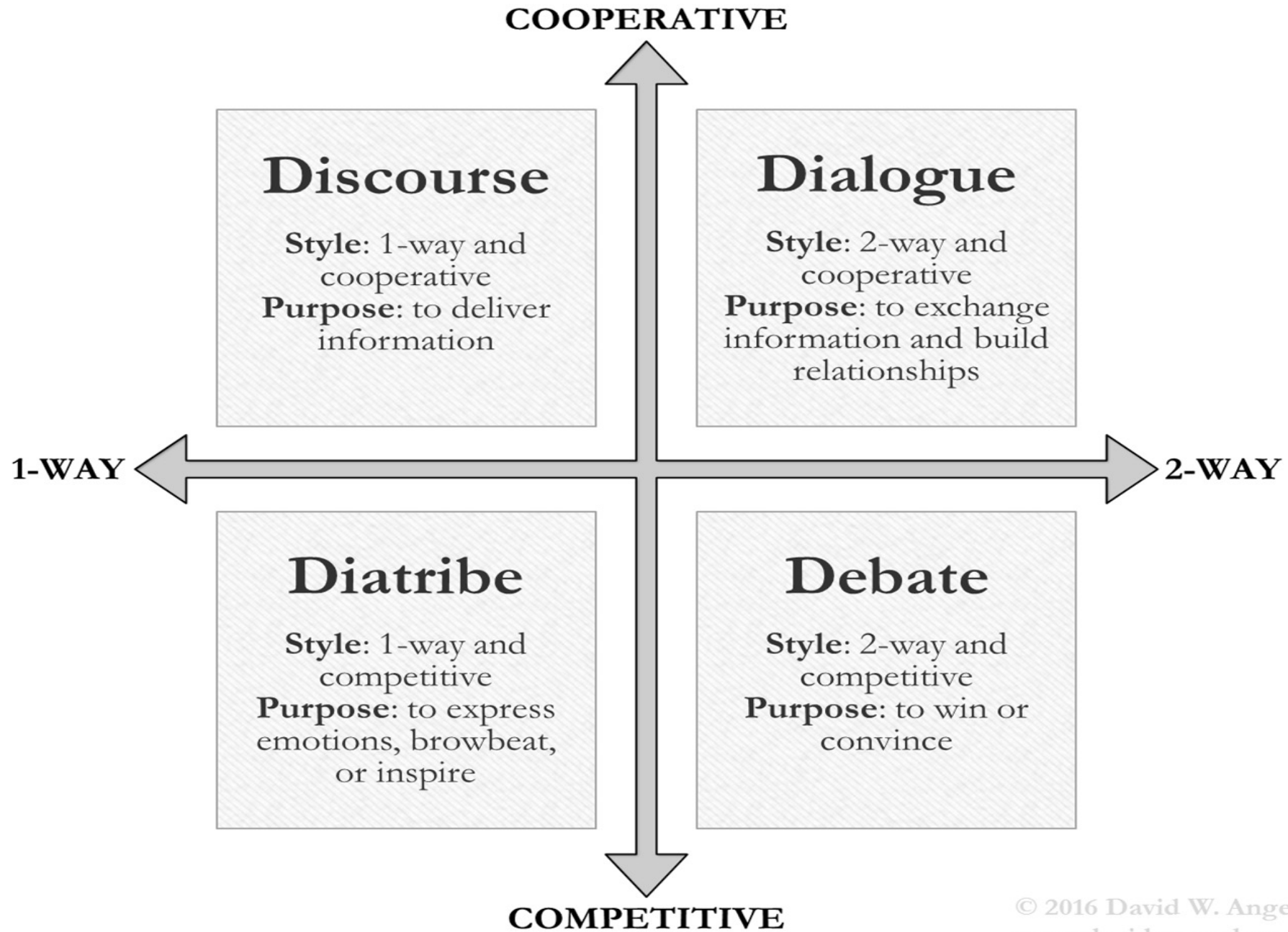
But this means that the mediation strategies must be implemented in a timely and effective way.

The Mediation Process

1. Conflict has occurred in which someone's rights have been violated.
2. A group of people or an individual person needs or requests justice.
3. A qualified mediator is identified to work on the issue.
4. The mediator reviews materials around the case.
5. The mediator devises an initial strategy for how to address the case.
6. The mediator meets with each party individually to understand their perspective.
7. The mediator synthesizes the information to understand the entire situation and devises a strategy for how they want to proceed when the two parties meet together with the mediator.
8. A group meeting between the two parties and the mediator occurs.
9. The mediator provides a fair and just opportunity for each party to share their views.
10. Each party has an opportunity to question each other and to share their ideas about what could be done going forward.
11. The mediator uses interaction skills to try to move understanding and resolution forward.
12. An agreement is reached by all parties committing to the action plan.

Types of communication strategies

- There are many different ways to approach a mediation.
- All of them require that good research is conducted. A mediator must be a qualified researcher.
- A mediator must be neutral.
- Even though a mediator is required to be neutral, neutral does not mean non-directed.
- An effective mediator must be a good communicator and know different interaction strategies.
- There are mediations that focus on what has happened in the past as the two parties are upset about some contentious act(s) and they are seeking *restorative justice*.
- There are mediations that concern over *future actions*. The parties may disagree about how to put into place a plan for possible upcoming actions; while both may agree that something needs to occur, what exactly that is may be far apart in the minds of each party.
- Other times people are seeking *greater understanding* about what happened. Knowing why may bring peace of mind or enable people to figure out new strategies for doing something.
- Decide whether to use a one-way or two-way interaction style.
- Decide whether to use a cooperative, competitive, or compassionate approach.



One-Way Communication Styles

Discourse

- **Discourse is a cooperative, one-way conversation. The goal to deliver information from the speaker/writer to the listeners/readers.**

Diatribes

- **Diatribes is a competitive, one-way conversation. The goal is to express emotions, browbeat those that disagree with you, and/or inspires those that share the same perspective.**

Two-Way Communication Styles

Debate

- Debate is a competitive, two-way conversation. The goal is to win an argument or convince someone, such as the other participant or third-party observers.

Dialogue

- Dialogue is a cooperative, two-way conversation. The goal is for participants to exchange information and build relationships with one another.

**WHAT ARE YOU
GOING TO DO?**

**HANDLING THE
EMOTIONS –
THEIRS, YOURS,
THE VICTIMS, THE
PERPETRATORS,
AND THE PUBLIC**

**WHAT IS THE BEST
INTERACTION STRATEGY TO
ACHIEVE POSITIVE
OUTCOMES?**

**WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES
TO ACHIEVING THE POSITIVE
OUTCOME – AND HOW CAN
YOU OVERCOME THEM?**

PRACTICE WITH EXAMPLES

UKRAINE

Children are captured and removed from their parents and transported to Russia to live and be “socialized”.

ISRAEL-GAZA

Children in Gaza are suffering from malnutrition due to inadequate food, water, and medical care being available.

SUDAN

Rape of children, deny humanitarian access access to basic necessities, and violations of children’s economic and social rights.

Approaches

LAW

This is a typical approach to conflict resolution. It is dependent upon the existence of laws and interpretation of them. This has the potential of a win-lose outcome.

Clinical Sociologists

This is a humane approach that seeks to help parties understand each other and find a common ground to move forward to a mutually acceptable resolution.

Force

Violence and coercion may give one side a “win” but it will not be acceptable to the other side. Future conflict is inevitable and predicable.

References

- Angel, David. 2016. Four types of conversations. Medium <https://medium.com/@DavidWAngel/the-four-types-of-conversations-debate-dialogue-discourse-and-diatribes-898d19ecccoa>
- Aptel, C. (2018). The Protection of Children in Armed Conflicts. In: Kilkelly, U., Liefaard, T. (eds) International Human Rights of Children. *International Human Rights*. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-3182-3_17-1
- Fritz, J. M.. (2021). Clinical Sociological Contributions to the Field of Mediation. Springer. 10.1007/978-3-030-54584-0_11.
- Haer, R. (2019). Children and armed conflict: looking at the future and learning from the past. *Third World Quarterly*, 40(1), 74–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1552131>
- International Committee of the Red Cross. (2003). Legal protection of children in armed conflict. https://www.icrc.org/sites/default/files/document/file_list/children-legal-protection-factsheet.pdf
- Kadir, A., Shenoda, S., et al. (2018). The Effects of Armed Conflict on Children *Pediatrics* (2018) 142 (6): e20182586. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2018-2586>
- McCuaig, K and Akbari, E. (2024). The lasting scars of war: How conflict shapes children's lives long after the fighting ends. *Phys Org* and *The Conversation*. Oct, 16. <https://phys.org/news/2024-10-scars-war-conflict-children.html>
- Miller, J.S. (1991). Clinical Sociology and Mediation. In: Rebach, H.M., Bruhn, J.G. (eds) Handbook of Clinical Sociology. Springer, Boston, MA. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-3782-3_15
- Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. United Nations. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>
- Sever FL. (2022). Wars and Children. *Turk Arch Pediatr*. 2022 May;57(3):253-254. doi: 10.5152/TurkArchPediatr.2022.180422. PMID: 35781227; PMCID: PMC9131822.
- Shonk, K. (2023). 5 common negotiation mistakes. Harvard Program on Negotiation. <https://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/negotiation-skills-daily/5-common-negotiation-mistakes-and-how-you-can-avoid-them/>
- Wallensteen, P., & Svensson, I. (2014). Talking peace: International mediation in armed conflicts. *Journal of Peace Research*, 51(2), 315–327. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343313512223>

For more information, contact:

Yvonne Vissing, PhD

Director, Center for Childhood & Youth Studies

Sociologist and Professor of Healthcare Studies

Salem State University

Salem, Massachusetts USA

yvissing@salemstate.edu