

Restorative Practice

A pro-social approach to resolving conflict

Restorative Practice is a positive approach that works with students, rather than doing things to them or for them.

Conflict is an inevitable part of life. How we work to resolve conflict impacts on a school's climate and culture and ultimately on students' social and academic outcomes. Schools need to be safe places where young people can learn and thrive in a supportive, enriching environment.

A restorative approach focuses on building and maintaining positive relationships across the whole school community. It aims to create an ethos of respect, inclusion, cooperation, accountability and responsibility.

Understanding Restorative Practice

Restorative Practice is a teaching and learning approach that promotes self-regulation and encourages behaviour that is supportive and respectful. It puts the onus on individuals to be truly accountable for their behaviour and to repair any harm caused to others as a result of their actions. When schools are restorative they:

- value quality relationships
- model empathy and respectful relationships
- value student voice and utilise collaborative problem solving
- view inappropriate behaviours as opportunities for learning
- apply procedural fairness
- recognise the importance of repairing damaged relationships
- separate the 'deed' from the 'doer'
- use active listening and positive language and tone
- avoid scolding, judging, lecturing or blaming
- foster self-awareness in the student
- implement consequences that are proportional and fair
- remain future focused.

A continuum of strategies

A restorative approach offers a continuum of strategies from informal conversations through to formal community conferencing and may include:

- positive classroom management strategies
- logical consequences
- collaborative problem-solving
- trained peer support teams for the playground

- structured one-on-one conversations
- mediation
- conferencing
- circle time.

Key elements

There are some key elements which underpin any restorative encounter:

- honesty and sincerity
- positive regard for individuals
- empathy
- individual responsibility
- shared accountability
- an optimistic view of personal growth and change.

Schools that work restoratively find that relationships are stronger and learning is more effective. Restorative dialogues can provide important 'teachable moments' and opportunities to understand the impact of behaviour of self and others.

Questions that promote discussion about consequences and encourage personal reflections have the potential to elicit empathy, remorse and learning. When working restoratively with young people or colleagues, it is important to:

- ask specific questions that encourage reflection and problem-solving
- use active listening skills
- avoid interrogation or asking "Why?", which can cause a defensive response
- recognise that in some situations there are no 'quick fixes' and it may require further intervention or support to see positive behaviour change.

Effective restorative questions

- **What happened?** Value the student's voice and perspective. Focus on the timeline of events without blame. Understand and identify triggers.
- **What were you thinking about at the time?** Develop emotional literacy by linking thoughts, feelings and actions.
- **What have your thoughts been since?** Assess reflection following the incident when emotions have de-escalated.
- **Who has been affected by what happened?** The key question to trigger empathy and remorse. Think beyond those directly involved to see the 'ripple effect' of actions and consider the personal impact.
- **In what way have they/you been affected?** Name or describe the impact and acknowledge the consequences.

- **What do you think you need to do to make things right?** Devise agreed, realistic and meaningful resolutions to heal the harm.
- **If the same thing happened again, what would you do differently?** An opportunity for learning and verbalising alternative strategies.

Restorative Practice is more than a series of questions. It is a non-punitive approach which accepts that we all make mistakes and have the ability to 'fix' the problem together and learn from our experiences.

Restorative Practice is inclusive and concerned with maintaining and building connectedness between students, parents, teachers and the community. It is an essential component of wellbeing.

Further information

Research from the United Kingdom by Belinda Hopkins

<http://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/projects/restorativeapproaches/RA-in-the-UK.pdf>