

What are Restorative Practices?

“Restorative practices are processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrong doing.”

[Http://www.iirp.edu/what-is-estorative-practices.hph](http://www.iirp.edu/what-is-estorative-practices.hph)

Whole School Approach



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Humans have a biological and psychological desire to live in community. While we could spend a great deal of time and space writing about the biology that supports that statement, the history of the development of civilization supports this claim. Civilization as we know it could not have been developed without a mechanism that allowed basic needs to be met through voluntary cooperation. We are biologically wired to voluntarily cooperate with our family systems and our community. Affect is an innate biological response-stimulus mechanism that predisposes people to cooperate with one another. It could be considered our first language. Affect allows community to develop. I am not likely to care about you until I know you, but when I connect with you community begins to form, *then affect encourages voluntary cooperation.*

In restorative practices, affect is used, modeled, and taught to help members of a community express their individual needs and emotional responses to their experiences.

That cooperation is limited to those with whom we have good relations. This is why developing good relationships is key. However, in a multicultural world, we often have conflict with those who apply their values differently. This leads to cliques or tribalism and ultimately, conflict. **The conversations that arise during community building circles is the first step to creating culturally aware and culturally competent communities.**

Many individuals who work with students develop and enjoy good relationships with students. Unfortunately, the conflicts that arise and often lead to suspension occur between students. Actively planning to extend this relationship building work to every member of your school community will reduce conflict and subsequently the need for exclusionary practices. This is accomplished by using circles. Members of the community (classroom or staff) sit in a circle, ideally with nothing to hide behind, and share their feelings, narratives, preferences, and values, about a topic. Most of human communication is non-verbal. Body language, facial expression and tone of voice have a significant impact on individual understanding. In this way, the community begins to learn about each other. This practice respects everyone's feelings and needs, then the class begins to bond. Using narrative based questions or prompts naturally lends itself to the display of affect. The conversation looks more like, "I feel happy when I am heard and my feelings and needs are treated as important", as opposed to, the more impersonal argument, "I think everyone should be heard." The difference here is not subtle. The first statement will bring people together and the second has the potential to divide them.

The use of restorative practices in the form of community building circles:

- Draws people into community
- Helps prevent conflict
- Models and practices social emotional skills
- Ensures a basic level of cultural competency
- Illuminates the needs of the whole child
- Elevates student voice and choice

Another tool of restorative practices is the use of affective statements and questions. These are statements that are used to increase the amount of affect exchanged between participants. They model the SEL pattern of sharing how you feel and identifying what you need. For example, "I feel frustrated when everyone is talking because I can't hear Sara, I need everyone to be quiet now." Or "I feel disrespected and I need quiet to feel respected." The value of using these kinds of statements reduces the typical reactions that occur when the teachers says, "You are being disrespectful and the student replies, 'No, I am not!'" Or the student feels the need to defend him or herself. In both of those last two scenarios conflict is often the result.

A student is repeatedly late to your class. You might say, "I am very discouraged and frustrated when you are late to class, because I want you to be here so you can learn and I am afraid you will become discouraged if you miss something important and fall behind." This is an affective

statement that tells the student what you feel and what you need. It also conveys your concern for his or her wellbeing. All of these steps build and deepen your relationship with the student.

Affective questions invite participants to share how they are impacted by a behavior. Thus, teaching the child how the behavior impacts others. It is tempting to tell a child how their behavior affects others, but research indicates that this does not work. In order to be impacted by affect, the person must see and hear the tone of voice displayed through authentic affect for cooperation to evolve.

Restorative Practices Continuum



Page 12 in *Restorative Practices Handbook*

The use of affective statements and questions:

- Promotes voluntary cooperation
- Models social emotional skills
- Promotes cultural competency
- Fosters inclusion and elevates student voice
- Helps community members understand the needs of others
- Helps prevent conflicts

Traditionally, behavior in classes has been governed by the adults. At times this has allowed for and supported various levels of cultural incompetency and power over policies. In a multicultural world where people come together with a variety of differing perspectives, top down created expectations can lead to harm. The harm does not have to be intentional for it to occur. It is a result of a form of ethnocentrism that stems from lack of knowledge and understanding of others as well as an ethnocentric application of personal values.

Co-creating classroom agreements in order to manage classroom behaviors allows everyone a voice in the process. Students and staff are asked what they need in order to feel comfortable and productive over the course of the year. Those needs are posted, and the classroom community is asked if they can agree to these requests in order to support their peers. Agreements are public and given verbally or with a talking piece. When agreements are not kept, the teacher or staff person prompts with, “Remember we agreed to do this for each other.”

Classroom Agreements

- Teach responsibility
- Give voice to each individual's needs
- Promote and help students practice personal accountability

Once community is established within a group, the group can begin to repair minor harms that occur. This works best when members of the group have done enough community enhancing work that empathy for one another has been developed. Minor harms are addressed in circle or in informal conferences. These circles and their bigger brother the formal conference rely on affect and empathy. Those who have been harmed will share how they have been affected by the actions of another. The person who is responsible for the harm will also share how s/he was affected. I won't go into the whole process here, but the group, both the harmer and the harmed will come to an agreement concerning what must happen to repair the harm and restore or bring the community to balance.

Problem Solving Circles

- Teach students how to resolve problems without conflict
- Strengthen Community
- Give everyone a voice
- Help students identify and advocate for their needs
- Teach personal responsibility

Needs Values Conflict

- All behavior from birth to death is an attempt to get one of our needs met. No matter where we are or where we were born, we all share the same needs; water, food, shelter, safety, a sense of belonging, and the ability to develop esteem by having something positive to offer the community.
- Values, while often thought of a fixed concept, are adapted by an ethnicity, a group, members of a geographical location etc. to support how that community gets its needs met. For example, a 9th grader who leaves school in the middle of the day to join a fight on the street corner does so out of loyalty and that application of loyalty and is likely supporting the needs of safety and belonging. You will not punish anyone out of how they are applying their values or how they are getting their needs met.
- Conflict occurs under two conditions; when someone's needs are not being met or when the individual believes his or her needs will not be met in the future.

- When a behavior is disruptive to the school community look for the need that is driving that behavior and try to understand the value that is also supporting the perpetuation of the behavior and help individual(s) involved meet his/her needs without the disruption to the community.

It is important to note, **Article 12 from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (1991)**. Article 12 subsection 1 reads, “Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child.” (p.5) Circles make this practice explicit. Unlike academic discussions which may require a student to know the ‘right’ answer, the questioning techniques in circles works to develop an understanding of the individual child; his/her values, needs, preferences and the way in which the child makes sense of others behaviors and their unique applications of those values.

Build Support Systems for Students Whose Behaviors Negatively Impact the Community

These systems include appropriate spaces that are designed to promote positive affect where support personnel work with students.

https://designingjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Creating_Restorative_Spaces_In_Schools.pdf

Changing the title of In-School-Suspension workers to Restorative Specialists as well as changing the name of the in-school-suspension room to something like Restore, Reconnect, and Reset Room. (RRR)

Strengthen SSST in each school. Create clear guidelines for next steps when interventions at the school level are not producing positive results for the student. Students who continue to struggle after social/emotional, restorative, and academic school-based plans have failed to work, can be referred to YFCE where the department will offer and/or search for more effective supports.

When students have been disengaged, suspended, or return from incarceration, reentry circles like the ones held in Oakland and San Francisco will be offered through YFCE.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiLtFVHR8Q0>

Formal Conferencing to Repair Serious Harm

As the community grows stronger, when more serious harms occur, a formal conference can be held. A formal conference also includes the person or persons who have been harmed and the person who is responsible for the harm as well as both parties’ family and/or support person. The facilitator of the conference is not there to lecture, judge, or decide who has been bad or good or mete out the consequences. The facilitator follows the process and supports the group as those affected come to a decision about what must happen in order to repair the harm and restore the balance within the community.

The process for both minor harms and more serious harms include the following questions: What happened? What did you think when you realized what had happened? How were you affected? Who has been affected by what has happened? In what way have they been affected? What has been the hardest thing for you? What do you need to do to make this right? The answers to these questions allow everyone to be heard and supports a clear understanding of everyone's feelings and needs.

Traditional vs. Restorative Justice

Traditional asks...

- ▶ What rule was broken?
- ▶ Who did it?
- ▶ How should we punish them?

vs.
vs.
vs.

Restorative asks...

- Who has been hurt / affected?
- What are their needs?
- Who is obliged to meet those needs?



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This outline of processes and tools represent the basic framework of restorative practices. There are additional skills that support these practices. I encourage you to attend and also send your staff to the two day Introduction to Restorative Practices, the Tier Two Follow-up training and for those who will be tasked with handling more serious harm, the two day Conferencing to Repair Harm training offered by the district to help you develop these skills.

Cameo Thorne
Restorative Practices Project Director
New Haven Public Schools

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