



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Restorative Justice is a set of principles and practices, centered on community members holding people accountable for their actions while collectively repairing harm and strengthening relationships.

The term "Restorative Practices" (RP) is used by a number of practitioners to describe how the concepts of Restorative Justice are used to create change in school systems. Because retributive punishment is ingrained in the fabric of our society, implementing RP requires a significant culture shift.

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

The core belief of Restorative Practices is that people will make positive changes when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to or for them. Instead of the traditional student-teacher-administration hierarchy, Restorative Practices emphasize every school members' responsibility to the school community. A successful restorative system:

- Acknowledges that relationships are central to building community.
- Engages in collaborative problem solving.
- Builds systems that address misbehavior and harm in a way that strengthens relationships.
- Focuses on the harm done rather than only on rule breaking.
- Gives voice to the person harmed.
- Empowers change and growth.
- Enhances responsibility.

IMPLEMENTING RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS

The Restorative Practices "circle" is a critical way to emphasize community, relationship building, and build trust. Regularly sitting in circle affords school communities the opportunity to get to the root of unwanted behavior. Certain behaviors may actually be coping mechanisms for trauma, so if we address the root of a student's behavior, we can stop the cycle of harm. Circles typically use the following elements:

Chairs are placed in a circle with no additional furniture blocking any participants. A facilitator, the "circle

keeper,” can be a student or a teacher who makes introductory comments, including a discussion about the values and positive agreements that will govern that circle.

A talking piece, which has some significance to members of the circle, allows only the person holding it the right to speak. Participants can “check-in” to talk about how they are feeling physically, mentally, or emotionally and “check-out” to discuss how they

are feeling as the circle ends. Circles are used to help prevent conflict by building a sense of belonging, safety, and social responsibility in the school community.

Depending on the gravity of the harm, these conflict-resolution circles may include the person who caused harm, the person who experienced harm, the families and supporters of both parties, and a trained, neutral facilitator.

TRADITIONAL APPROACH

SCHOOL RULES ARE BROKEN.

JUSTICE FOCUSES ON ESTABLISHING GUILT.

ACCOUNTABILITY = PUNISHMENT

JUSTICE DIRECTED AT THE OFFENDER; THE VICTIM IS IGNORED.

RULES AND INTENT OUTWEIGH WHETHER OUTCOME IS POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE.

LIMITED OPPORTUNITY FOR EXPRESSING REMORSE OR MAKING AMENDS.

RESTORATIVE APPROACH

PEOPLE AND RELATIONSHIPS ARE HARMED.

JUSTICE IDENTIFIES NEEDS AND RESPONSIBILITY.

ACCOUNTABILITY = UNDERSTANDING IMPACT AND REPAIRING HARM.

OFFENDER, VICTIM, AND SCHOOL ALL HAVE DIRECT ROLES IN THE JUSTICE PROCESS.

OFFENDER IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HARMFUL BEHAVIOR, REPAIRING HARM AND WORKING TOWARDS POSITIVE OUTCOMES.

OPPORTUNITY GIVEN TO MAKE AMENDS AND EXPRESS REMORSE.

RP reduces out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, and has also been shown to improve student engagement and achievement.¹ A good general rule is that about 20% of a school’s restorative practices respond to

conflict while 80% are proactively creating shared cultures and building strong relationships. This approach cultivates a climate where destructive responses to conflict are less likely to occur.²