

What Are Restorative Practices?

Now a common practice in many schools across the nation and world, Restorative Practices promote building respectful and trusting relationships as the foundation for teaching and learning while providing meaningful opportunities for students to develop self-discipline and positive behaviors in a caring, supportive environment. It views conflict primarily through the lens of the harm caused to people and relationships, and emphasizes the priority to meet the needs of those affected by this harm.

A restorative approach sees conflict or misbehavior as an opportunity for students to learn about the consequences of their actions, to develop empathy with others, and experience how to make amends in such a way as to strengthen the community bonds that may have been damaged.

Restorative Practices Principles at a Glance

The following principles reflect the values and concepts for implementing restorative practices in the school setting.

Acknowledges that relationships are central to building community.

Ensures equity of voice amongst all members of the community. Everyone is valued, everyone is heard.

Sets high expectations while offering supports, emphasizing doing things “with,” not “to” or “for”.

Builds systems that address misbehavior and harm in a way that strengthens relationships and focuses on the harm done rather than only rule-breaking.

Engages in collaborative problem solving.

Enhances responsibility and empowers change and growth in all members of the community.

Restorative Questions

When responding to conflict, a restorative approach consists in asking the people involved these key questions:

What happened, and what were you thinking at the time of the incident?

What have you thought about since?

Who has been affected by what happened, and how?

What about this has been the hardest for you?

What do you think needs to be done to make things as right as possible?

Figure 1

Misbehavior defined as breaking school rules or letting the school down.	Misbehavior defined as harm (emotional/mental/physical) done to one person/group by another.
Focus is on what happened and establishing blame or guilt.	Focus on problem-solving by expressing feelings and needs and exploring how to address problems in the future.
Adversarial relationship and process. Includes an authority figure with the power to decide on penalty, in conflict with wrongdoer.	Dialogue and negotiation, with everyone involved in the communication and cooperation with each other.
Imposition of pain or unpleasantness to punish and deter/prevent.	Restitution as a means of restoring both parties, the goal being reconciliation and acknowledging responsibility for choices.
Attention to rules and adherence to due process.	Attention to relationships and achievement of a mutually desired outcome.
Conflict/wrongdoing represented as impersonal and abstract; individual versus school.	Conflict/wrongdoing recognized as interpersonal conflicts with opportunity for learning.
One social injury compounded by another.	Focus on repair of social injury/damage.
School community as spectators, represented by member of staff dealing with the situation; those directly affected uninvolved and powerless.	School community involved in facilitating restoration; those affected taken into consideration; empowerment.
Accountability defined in terms of receiving punishment.	Accountability defined as understanding impact of actions, taking responsibility for choices, and suggesting ways to repair harm.