

## **Restorative Circles**

Restorative Practices - Restorative practices cultivate a culture in which everyone feels like they belong. They build a particular sense of community in which every member--students, teacher, parent volunteers, aides--feel that they are seen, heard, and respected.

Restorative Practices focus on repairing the harm done to people and relationships rather than on punishing offenders.

Goals of Restorative Practices:

- Foster participation
- Foster cooperative community

Examples of Restorative Practices:

- Restorative Conferences / Meetings
- Restorative Circles

### **Restorative Circles**

- A. By fostering inclusion, community, accountability, responsibility, support, nurturing and cooperation, circles restore these qualities to a community or classroom and facilitate the development of character
- B. A circle is a symbol that implies community, connection, inclusion, fairness, equality and wholeness. Meeting in a circle establishes a level playing field for all participants.
  - a. Equality - everyone has equal seating
  - b. Safety & Trust - You can see everyone in the circle - so nothing is hidden
  - c. Responsibility - Everyone has a chance to play a role in the outcome of the circle
  - d. Facilitation - the circle reminds the leader to facilitate rather than lecture
  - e. Ownership - Collectively, the participants feel the circle is theirs
  - f. Connections - These are built as everyone listens to everyone else's responses
- C. The restorative questions separate the students' behavior from their intrinsic worth as a person - allowing them to admit their mistakes, right their wrongs, and be reintegrated into a community.
- D. 80% of circles should be proactive / 20% of circles may be responsive - the more you hold productive proactive circles, the less responsive circles you will need to hold

When you create an environment where people can communicate, you create an environment where people don't get triggered to react without thinking.

### **Types of Restorative Circles**

1. Sequential go-arounds - (Round Robin) - very structured; choose direction before the first person speaks
2. Non-sequential circles - can be highly or freely structured; no fixed order; can use talking stick; leader may recognize student if multiple speak at once; raising hands or not; decide if the group needs more structure or can handle civil conversations
3. Fishbowls - inner AND outer circles.

- a. The students in the inner circle are observers and then they will switch. The activity ends with one large circle discussing how things went.
- b. One empty chair in the inner circle. Outside circle is observing but one person at a time can sit in the chair to say something and then return to their outside circle seat
  - i. Good for brainstorming how to resolve a problem
  - ii. Person who presented the problem sits on the inner circle but cannot comment or judge the suggestions until the end
  - iii. Person can either write down suggestions or appoint a scribe to do so

### **Physical Setting:**

Structure of the circle:

- The physical arrangement is important and greatly affects the quality of the circle. Arrange the classroom or other space so that students can be in a circle. The operational definition of the circle shape is that everyone can see every face without having to lean far forward.
- Talking pieces to add/pass around the circle are not required but are useful in helping others speak freely. E.g. squishy toy/ball
- Focus the Circle with High-Quality Prompting Questions. They are relevant: questions about something that is real and meaningful to the lives of students.
- The center of the circle is an important element. While it can be left clear, it is often more powerful when something is placed in the center to provide focus.
- The guidelines are nearly universal in circle culture.
- Agreements are also Cornerstones of Trust. In addition to the guidelines, each classroom makes its own agreements. Agreements are negotiated by the class.
- The sequence of events is important. If you establish a Circle Pattern from the beginning, and use it consistently, students will know what to expect

### **Guidelines of the Restorative Circle:**

- *Purpose:*

Explain that circles are a way to

- get to know each other, support each other, allow everyone to be seen and heard
- Come together to discuss how to make things better for everyone
- *Expectations:*
  - Take the circle seriously
  - Participate
  - Not tease or laugh at each other
  - Make it a safe place to share ideas
  - Give the speaker your full attention

## Restorative Circles

### **3 Main Areas of Focus:**

- Think about what is happening in the class that isn't working and provide a safe opportunity for people to take responsibility for what they were doing to contribute to that behavior.
- Ask what kind of atmosphere students and teachers ideally want in the classroom.
- Reflect and think about what each person is going to do to help attain that ideal.

### **Circle Design:**

1. Welcome: Acknowledge the set up of the room or invite the class to bring their chairs to set up the circle. Explain that WE are going to do something different today.
  2. Introduce the Restorative Circle - an opportunity to allow everyone in this class to be seen and heard; an opportunity to learn how to better communicate with each other
  3. State the Goal: To work together to create a calmer, safer, more enjoyable environment in 4th grade
  4. State the Expectations:
    - Take the circle seriously
    - Participate
    - Not tease or laugh at each other
    - A safe place to share ideas
    - Give the speaker your full attention
- Explain a few guidelines:
    - Introduce the 'talking piece' and explain that only the person holding it can speak
    - Sometimes we will go 'round robin' where we will answer in order and everyone will participate. Other times we will have an open circle where anyone can request the 'talking piece'. If given the 'talking piece', it will be your turn to speak.
    - Speak clearly and to the point. If someone is talking too long, I may have to interrupt. If necessary, I will do that as politely as possible.
  - State that the circle will now begin. State that we will begin with a Round Robin question. (Ask an Ice Breaker easy question to help them get comfortable)
    - What hobby or interest do you have?
  - Ask an Ice Breaker medium question next. State that this question will be 'open' and anyone can raise their hand to speak.
    - What is a quality that makes a good friend?
  - Ask "Meatier" question (Round Robin)
    - Without mentioning specific names of students or teachers, what is something that is not working for you in 4th grade?
  - Continue with other restorative questions and allow time for all students who wish to participate. You can do these either Round Robin or in open format.
    - What kind of atmosphere would you like to see in 4th grade? (encourage discussion about all places in EBE - not just in the classroom)

- Reflect and discuss what you can do to bring about this atmosphere?
- Closing: Reflect on the Restorative Circle
  - Round Robin: What did you like about this circle?
  - Open: Do you have any concerns about what we discussed today?
- Calmly dismiss the circle. If it's the second group, have them return the chairs.

**Notes:**

- Be aware of your tone of voice and word choice.
  - Do you sound restorative or punitive?
  - Are you being judgemental?
- Do you have buy-in to the restorative circle, or at least a willingness to try?
  - If you don't, then your students won't either
- Are you willing to consider that you might be adding to the situation and make some changes?
- Accept that if this is your first circle, it likely won't be perfect. The more circles you hold, the easier and more successful they will be.

**For further consideration..**

Below are the standard restorative questions used during Restorative Conferences. If during your circle, a student acknowledges their contribution to the challenges in 4th grade, you may want to choose one of these questions as a follow-up.

To the person with challenging behavior...

- What happened?
- What were you thinking about at the time?
- What have you thought about since?
- Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
- What do you think you need to do to make things right?

If during your circle, a student mentions how they were harmed by another student or teacher in 4th grade, you may want to choose one of these questions as a follow-up.

To the person who has been hurt by another's actions...

- What did you think when you realized what happened?
- What impact has this had on you and others?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- What do you think needs to happen to make things right?