

CONVERSATION GUIDE

An Introduction to Restorative Practices

Part 3. Why Use Restorative Practices

(with Miss MJ Namm, K-9 School Principal)

This video shares the story of how one K-9 school introduced restorative practices to students, staff and parents and how these practices resulted in a more welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment.

Key understandings:

- Building a restorative school culture is a collaborative journey involving staff, parents and students.
- Realizing that many people may be experiencing conflict within the school environment is one reason for adopting restorative practices.
- The first step is developing a common language for talking about conflict.
- When students are experiencing difficulty, staff ask restorative questions that focus on:
 - What happened?
 - What were you thinking of at the time?
 - Who has been affected by what you have done?
 - In what way have they been affected?
 - What do you think you need to do to make things right?
- By focusing on relationships rather than on assigning blame, a restorative approach to resolving conflict gives students voice and demonstrates respect and caring.
- Restorative practices also affirm that conflict does not have to be a negative experience; conflict can be an opportunity to problem-solve, to strengthen relationships, and to learn about and demonstrate respect for the perspectives of others.
- Another key restorative practice is sharing circles where students learn to listen and respect the views of others.
- Using a talking stick to indicate turn-taking, each participant speaks without interruption, expressing themselves in any way that is comfortable, such as sharing a story, a personal experience, using an example or stating what they feel.
- These structured activities are opportunities for students to become better listeners and begin to understand the perspective of others.
- Sharing circles can be a regularly scheduled classroom activity as well as a cross-grade activity during school assemblies.
- Circles can also be useful for staff meetings and can contribute to more open and truthful conversations.

Why Use Restorative Practice

Key understandings (cont.)

- When students and staff are comfortable using sharing circles it may be appropriate to introduce restorative or problem-solving circles for global problems that do not single out one or more students
- Trained staff can also use this strategy to help small groups of students solve conflict or other issues in a collaborative and supportive way.
- Restorative circles work to repair relationships and help students develop the ability to forgive others, and be more accountable for their own behaviour.
- Students can also reflect on restorative questions on their own as a calming technique.
- Reframing “supervision of students” as “interactions with students” can help staff use recess and hallway supervision as an opportunity for positive interactions with students (to tell students what they are doing right), aiming for at least a 4:1 ratio of positive to corrective interactions.
- Implementing restorative practices requires a significant investment of time, not only to listen to students, but also to do follow-up with students to ensure relationships are being repaired.
- Restorative practices in schools starts where students are, gives them voice, and builds positive relationships.

Questions for reflection and discussion:

- What kinds of conflicts are people experiencing in your school environment? How is this conflict generally being handled and how is it affecting the overall learning environment?
- What part of this school story had the most resonance for you? Was there anything about this story that surprised you?
- Why is student voice such an important aspect of welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments?
- How could reframing the supervision schedule as an “interaction schedule” change how students and staff interact?
- What aspect of restorative practices do you feel has the most potential to make a positive different to the learning environment? Why?

For more information:

- See Alberta Education’s [resources on restorative practices](#), including a [video](#), [conversation guide](#), and [external links](#).