

# Restorative Practices in the Classroom: Key Ideas

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## Key Idea 1: Our Goal is to Build Community

Restorative practices focus on building positive relationships and providing opportunities for youth to take responsibility for their behavior and lives. At the heart of restorative practices is the belief that we're all in this together, that we're community.

## Key Idea 2: Conflict is Normal so the Focus is on Repairing Harm

Conflict can positively foster learning and relationships when dealt with appropriately. The goal of our response is to manage conflict and repair the harm that sometimes occurs. In this way, we always get back to being community, to keeping our relationships strong.

## Key Idea 3: Restorative Practices Fall on a Continuum

Restorative practices fall on a continuum from informal actions to more formal actions. As you move toward formal practices, more structure, people, planning and time are involved. Each restorative practice is briefly summarized below.

INFORMAL

FORMAL



**Affective Statements:** Affective statements tell another person how they have affected you. *They can be positive or corrective.* They make explicit the impact the other's actions have had on you. When harm (emotional, mental, or physical) has been done, affective statements ensure that the other person knows their relationship with you has been impacted. Affective statements help clarify boundaries, provide feedback and build empathy. Remember the 5:1 magic ratio-- a ratio of 5:1 positive to negative statements builds your relationships with students and helps them accept correction.

- "Jeff, it was a real joy for me to see you work together on your project with Sarah."
- "I was really happy with the effort you showed in class today."
- "When you're talking while I'm trying to teach, I feel frustrated and angry with you."
- "I feel uncomfortable when you tease Armando because I want him to feel safe at school."

**Affective Questions:** Affective questions get people talking about a problem and their feelings. The questions are asked of each participant individually. Affective questions ask students *to think for themselves* about their actions and how they impact others. They lend structure to the conversation and are designed to be restorative. They get students to think and speak. You can use two or three questions in a quick exchange (e.g., playground conflict) or use all of them to address a more serious problem (e.g., a student who stole something).

Questions to Person who Caused Harm	Questions to Those Affected
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What happened?</li> <li>• What were you thinking of at the time?</li> <li>• What have you thought about since?</li> <li>• Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?</li> <li>• What do you think you need to do to make things right?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you think when you realized what had happened?</li> <li>• What impact has this incident had on you and others?</li> <li>• What has been the hardest thing for you?</li> <li>• What do you think needs to happen to make things right?</li> </ul>

**Small Impromptu Conference:** These bring together those involved and are used to quickly address and resolve a problem. The facilitator asks each student the affective questions. A small impromptu conference may be used when there is not a clear offender or victim. The last question is critical as it is reintegrative/restorative in nature and points the way forward.

**Circles or Groups:** Circles are a symbol of community and they imply connectedness and equality. Forming a circle is always worth the effort! Circles build positive relationships, create social capital and establish classroom norms. *Circles can be used as a general practice or a response to wrongdoing*, and they can be used proactively to deal with potential problems. A typical circle uses a "go-around" technique. A talking piece is passed around and students wait their turn to speak. The facilitator may interact with the speaker or ask a clarifying question. Several types of circles are briefly summarized on the next page.

## Restorative Circle Topics

**Check-in:** Use this circle at the beginning of class or anytime. These build positive relationships and help you to get to know your students. Just about any topic works. Topic examples:

- How are you feeling today?
- What is one of your academic goals for the day?
- Briefly tell about a time you saw someone do something kind.
- Share something that you accomplished last week.

**Check-out:** Do a go-around at the end of the day. Topic Examples:

- How was your day today?
- What is one thing you liked about this class today? What is one thing you learned today?
- What are you looking forward to for school tomorrow?
- What is one thing you want to share with your parents about today?

**Classroom Norms:** Engaging students in a discussion about how they should act and work together reinforces classroom norms and procedures. Classroom behavior becomes a collaborative and shared responsibility. Topic examples:

- What helps you to learn while you are in class?
- What stops you from learning?
- What are some things we can agree on about how we want to behave and treat each other?
- How should we respond if someone fails to keep these agreements?

**Classroom Content:** These are circles that work with academic content. Topic examples:

- Tell about a cultural tradition that you have seen practiced or one practiced in your family.
- What is a challenge you're having with your Young America's Project?
- What strategy helps you when you get frustrated with a task?

**Academic Goals:** Students can use circles to establish plans for a project or an upcoming unit of study. Topic examples:

- What are your goals for class this week?
- What is something you need in order to get your work done today?
- What steps for your project will you complete this week?

**Behavior Problems:** Circles can be used to respond to challenging behavior once they are an established part of your classroom routine. Decide whether it's best to deal with the situation individually, in a small impromptu conference or in a circle (e.g., affects larger group, pattern of behavior, air feelings, repair harm, plan changes, etc.). Topic examples:

- What was your part in the problem?
- What can we do to make sure \_\_\_\_\_ doesn't happen again?
- How do you feel when \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g., you get teased, people joke in class when I'm talking, etc.)?
- When you don't know who did something, have you ever had something stolen from you? What was it and how did it make you feel when that happened?
- Name a time you got bullied and describe what it was like.

**Proactive Circles:** These are circles to avoid potential problems. Topic examples:

- What do you think is the appropriate way to act at the art museum?
- List some "dos and don'ts" for this trip.
- How should we act on the bus?

**Circle Tips:**

- It can be nice to start each circle with a ritual, consider asking students for ideas.
- It's helpful to create circle norms (e.g., everyone must speak, thanking people for feedback, etc.).
- Make students your allies for a difficult topic, enlist key peers ("I'm counting on you to speak up today!") and ask them to speak first.
- Keep the focus on the topic or goal you set.
- If a student gets stuck with a question, tell them to ask another student for help (e.g., phone a friend).

**Formal Conferences:** These are used for more serious problems or incidents of harm. These conferences involve pre-planning and are facilitated in a structured format. Formal agreements may be made and outside agencies may be asked to participate or provide support. There are two types of formal conferences: Restorative Conferences and Family Group Decision Making. These conferences are generally facilitated by an administrator or someone with experience in this type of conferencing.

**Note:** This summary is based on the excellent resources from the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), for example, *The Restorative Practices Handbook*, Costello, Wachtel & Wachtel, 2009.