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Restorative Classroom Discipline

This chapter describes the major features providing a foundation for a restorative discipline approach to school policies and practices that are reflected in what happens for students in classrooms and throughout the school. It provides essential information for sharing with the classroom community and focuses on the processes for planning and introducing Restorative Classroom Discipline in individual classrooms, and on building understandings and skills in restorative practices at all ages and in all school settings.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF CLASSROOMS THAT SUPPORT RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

What does a classroom with restorative discipline policies and practices look like? Here are some of the key characteristics of such classrooms (adapted from McCluskey et al., 2008):

- Positive classroom climate inclusive of all students, where students have a strong sense of belonging rather than being at risk for exclusion
- Students experience positive learning relationships with the teacher and with one another, feel safe, have a high regard for their class, and are given the opportunity to make things right when things go wrong
- Culturally responsive pedagogy underpins the teacher's approach to the diversity in the classroom

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- The teacher focuses on students' strengths, rejects deficit explanations for failure, and takes agency for successful educational outcomes for children and youth
- Families feel welcomed by the teacher and able to visit the classroom freely, participate in activities designed for them with the teacher, regularly receive information about how their young person is doing, and are involved in supporting their child's education as appropriate, including collaborating actively to address problems
- Average daily attendance is high, all absences must be excused for valid reasons, and there is timely daily follow-up by the teacher and the school when students are absent or tardy
- Students receive support and encouragement to meet their educational and social-emotional needs, including positive classroom relationships with peers, teachers with high expectations, and established pedagogies that enable them to achieve to the best of their abilities
- Reasonable and well-understood behavior expectations for children and youth are agreed, specified, and shared within the classroom
- Restorative Classroom Discipline practices with clear definitions of behavior and consequences are in place, known to students, and communicated with families
- Ongoing back-up supports are in place, including threat assessment, crisis management, and in-school suspension to deal with serious behavior
- Restorative practices and mutual respect are the foundations for interactions within the classroom community, not retribution and punishment
- Agency is promoted with responsibility to add value to every student's achievement each year without exception or excuses attributed to background characteristics or challenges such as socioeconomic, linguistic, or environmental circumstances

THE IMPORTANCE OF CLASSROOM CLIMATE

A positive classroom climate is the foundation for restorative practices that sit alongside and support teaching and learning. Classroom climate is influenced and shaped by four major aspects of school life (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). These are:

- *Safety*: Safety encompasses physical aspects such as attitudes about violence, clearly communicated rules, everyone feeling physically

safe, and teachers knowing and adhering to agreed crisis plans. At the social and emotional level for teachers and students, there is respect for individual differences, conflict resolution is taught, and the response to bullying (including cyberbullying) is explicit and fair.

- *Pedagogy*: There is a focus on the quality of instruction, including discursive teaching and active learning; social, emotional, and ethical learning; professional development and professionalism for teachers; and school management who work with teaching staff on curricula, instruction, and pastoral care issues.
- *Relationships*: Relationships in the classroom highlight respect for diversity, shared decision making, and the value of each classroom as a learning community. Teachers and students are connected to and feel good about their school.
- *Environment*: The classroom environment is clean and well maintained; adequate space is available for instructional and extracurricular activities; materials and resources are adequate; support services are available when needed; and the classroom has an inviting aesthetic quality.

The context for the teacher's guide is closely related to holistic ideas underlying the importance of a classroom climate where restorative practices protect *safety* and relationships. Children need healthy physical environments and effective pedagogical practices as a foundation for teaching and learning activities, and the effectiveness of Restorative Classroom Discipline is influenced by these qualities. Teachers cannot guarantee that physical environments are always optimal for teaching and learning, of course; some things may be beyond their reach to change such as the physical condition of a building or the qualifications of support staff. Nevertheless, teachers can work alongside their school leaders to establish restorative practices that optimize children's learning and behavior.

PLANNING AND ESTABLISHING RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

If your school attends to the kinds of school climate issues included above, you have strong support for establishing restorative practices in your classroom. This section of the guide describes how teachers can contribute to restorative practices at both the school and classroom level.

Restorative Practices as Classroom Ethos

The approach described in this guide as “Restorative Classroom Discipline” is not an add-on program for the purposes of behavior management, nor does it provide just another tool in the teacher’s toolbox for use in dealing with student behavior. In fact, Restorative Classroom Discipline represents an ethos that permeates all aspects of classroom organization and relationships that children experience within and outside of the classroom. Fundamentally, restorative school practices signify a rejection of *punishment and retribution* as educational responses to challenging behavior and conflict. Punishment and retribution approaches to problem behavior and conflict typically characterize the criminal justice system in many countries, but they do not reflect educational goals that acknowledge the classroom and school as social communities and children as members of their communities who require support, not exclusion.

In contrast to retribution, the primary aim of restorative practices is the development of positive relationships and peaceful resolution of conflict for teachers and students. Restorative Classroom Discipline is not simply a behavior management system, though it includes the key elements of positive behavior management described in general terms as “educative” and “non-aversive” (Evans & Meyer, 1985; Meyer & Evans, 1989) and in specific models as “Positive Behavior Support” (Dunlap, Sailor, Horner, & Sugai, 2009; Sugai et al., 2005) and “Positive Behavior for Learning” (Savage, Lewis, & Colless, 2011). While Restorative Classroom Discipline utilizes strategies developed and validated through decades of behavior management intervention research, it differs from behavior management approaches by starting from a relationship perspective where the focus is on context, organization, and culture. It is not strictly a bottom-up approach that emphasizes descriptions of acceptable and unacceptable behavior within deficit intervention frameworks. Nor is it top-down in asserting classroom rules set by the teacher whereby violations are viewed as transgressions against rules. Instead, Restorative Classroom Discipline is people-focused, accepting that positive and supportive relationships are crucial for learning to occur in educational environments. Conflict must be addressed by making amends, or relationships will otherwise be damaged and even broken.

Restorative Classroom Discipline also goes beyond being simply a philosophy or set of principles. Restorative Classroom Discipline concurs with the societal goal that the primary purpose of schools is to *educate*. This responsibility to educate goes beyond basic skills such as literacy, numeracy, and subject knowledge: it includes education for citizenship and becoming contributing members of one’s community. Thus, restorative

practices are grounded in educative principles for providing all members of the school community with skills and understandings about positive social interactions and relationships that support learning and peaceful resolution of problems and conflict.

Restorative Practices as Prevention and Intervention

Restorative practices entail a comprehensive framework and strategies that have been empirically validated as effective at three levels:

- *Prevention*: Restorative practices are the foundation for a positive classroom climate that encourages and supports teaching and learning. For both teachers and students, it provides the framework for developing social and emotional competencies for achieving caring relationships and peaceful resolution of conflict. This level is sometimes referred to as Tier 1 in the literature (Campbell & Anderson, 2008).
- *Secondary intervention*: Restorative Classroom Discipline encompasses a systematic, positive, and accountable set of practices that have been demonstrated to be effective in addressing specific incidents of harmful acts or threats. These practices include more formal processes for restoration of relationships such as ongoing problem solving, and conferencing and mediation to repair harm and prevent future incidents. Secondary intervention approaches are also designed to address the needs of children who typically require individualized support services on at least a temporary basis at different times in their school careers (generally considered to be approximately 15 percent of the school population), but these services are fit within the overall ethos of Restorative Classroom Discipline and not as something added or different. This level parallels what is referred to as Tier 2 in the literature (Campbell & Anderson, 2008).
- *Tertiary intervention*: Within an overall framework of Restorative Classroom Discipline, the model also encompasses individualized interventions and support services likely to be long term and ongoing for that small percentage of the school population (approximately 2 to 5 percent) who present significant and sometimes ongoing behavioral challenges in classrooms and schools. However, for these children as well, intervention is consistent with the principles and practices of restorative practices. One feature that differentiates restorative discipline at this level is that even children who exhibit serious behavioral challenges are not excluded from the

school community but are provided support to restore and repair while remaining in school and doing their work. This level of intervention has been referred to as Tier 3 in the special education literature (Walker et al., 1996).

Restorative Classroom Discipline Planning

In schools where there is a commitment to restorative practices, teachers will be involved at various stages of developing the model implemented at your school. There will be many aspects of the framework that are familiar to you, but there will also be areas where you may require further professional development (see Chapter 10). An important first step is to ensure that you contribute to the schoolwide development of restorative practices—not just to the implementation in your classroom. We have provided a Discussion Paper that provides a brief summary of restorative practices that can be used in talking with others about the approach.

Discussion Paper: What is Restorative Classroom Discipline?

Background: Restorative practices in schools have been implemented and internationally guided by Zehr (1990) and others. Restorative classroom practices are based on a restorative justice view that offenses represent conflict between people that is best addressed by working to restore relationships and making things right, not by blaming and punishing with a focus on retribution.

Definition: Restorative discipline reflects a whole-school ethos encompassing principles and practices to support peacemaking and conflict resolution through healing damaged relationships and making amends where harm has been done while preserving the dignity of everyone involved.

Key Features:

- Restorative, not retributive, ethos of inclusion in the school
- Curriculum focus on relationships among staff and students, including support for enhancing skills and understandings for restorative conversations and conflict prevention and resolution
- Restorative policies and practices reflecting a whole-school approach to positive relationships, behavioral challenges, and solving conflict through restorative practices
- Processes for mediation, shuttle mediation, and peer mediation in classrooms and schoolwide
- Processes for restorative meetings, informal conferences, classroom conferences, and formal conferences

- School rules, guidelines, and systems that are transparent and fair in response to incidents and threats that require staff and students to be protected from harm or potential harm
- Supports and resources that ensure student and staff safety and mutual respect

References: McCluskey et al. (2008); Varnham (2008); Zehr (1990).

SUMMARY

This chapter provides an overview of the essential features of schools and classrooms committed to restorative practices. The chapter begins by emphasizing the overall importance of attending to school climate and then introduces Restorative Classroom Discipline as a comprehensive approach to relationships, problem solving, the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflict, and strategies for restoration and making amends where harm has occurred. The next chapter describes the process of setting transparent and fair schoolwide and classroom behavior expectations as well as ensuring that such rules are culturally responsive to today's diverse student population.