



An Introduction to Restorative Practice (RP)

WILLOW TREE Academy

The aim of Restorative Practices is to develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by repairing harm and building relationships. This is our priority as a restorative school; as we see ourselves at the heart of and serving our community. Many of our pupils have Social and Emotional Mental Health issues, many of them are unable to self-regulate and many have few boundaries set for them at home. This means many of our pupils find it increasingly difficult to forge strong friendships, they struggle to know how to deal with their own emotions and resort to anger to express themselves.

All Willow Tree schools serve areas of deprivation where behaviour norms may not be taught, this leads to confusion and a lack of emotional literacy, it is this we aim to address.

Our pupils are nurtured to succeed and Restorative Practice is one way we intend to respond to the challenging and changing needs of our most vulnerable children.

RP will also support our staff, many of whom are placed in daily, difficult situations by the extreme behaviour of the children they support.

For effective teaching and learning to take place, we believe that good relationships need to be at the heart of everything that happens at Willow Tree Academy.

A Restorative based school...

- Focuses on relationships
- Gives a voice to all pupils and staff
- Provides equal opportunities for engagement
- Separates the deed from the doer
- Empowers participants to learn from peers and from their own mistakes
- Gives individuals opportunities to take responsibility for their actions

Restorative Practice is a process that puts repairing harm done to relationships and people over and above blame and punishment. It shifts the emphasis from managing behaviour to focussing on building, nurturing and repairing relationships.

We know that a whole school restorative approach can contribute to:

- Happier and safer schools
- Mutually respectful relationships
- More effective teaching and learning
- Reduced exclusions
- Raised attendance
- Addresses bullying behaviour
- Raises morale and self esteem
- Helps promote a culture of inclusion and belonging
- Increases emotional literacy

As part of the RP process, children and staff will be involved in meetings and circles that include:

The Five RP questions

What happened?

What were you thinking about at the time?

What have your thoughts been since?

Who else has been affected by what you did?

What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

If a child has been affected by the actions of others, which could include both staff and pupils, questions could include:

What did you think when you realised what had happened?

What have your thoughts been since?

How has this affected you and others?

What has been the hardest thing for you?

What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

At Willow Tree Academy we have written our own versions of the above questions to make them appropriate for our three phases; Foundation Unit, Key Stage One and Key Stage Two. Whilst the questions have been edited to be language appropriate for the children at different ages, the thought processes and general structure of the Restorative discussion remains the same.

Restorative Practice is NOT just about the questions. It is about a process that is seen as fair: allows free expression of emotions and significantly is about offering high levels of support, whilst challenging inappropriate behaviour through high levels of control, encouraging acceptance of responsibility and the setting of clear boundaries.

Please note that all school staff, teaching and non-teaching have had (as a minimum) basic training about Restorative Practices whilst many have also attended enhanced training to try and ensure that our intentions translate into actions.

All our children understand and use circles in their everyday school life. As part of our commitment to RP, parents/carers may also on occasion be asked to contribute to a restorative meeting if this is felt to be the right course of action.

Listed below are some examples of affective statements and questions which all staff can use with pupils: The timing of these questions will differ depending on the incident. Always choose an appropriate time and space.

Statements

I am sorry that I misunderstood the situation

I felt really proud of you when I heard

I feel really pleased and encouraged that you made the right choice.

I respect your honesty and thank you.

I was very disappointed when you did that to.....

I am upset and angry by what has just happened.
I feel that (describe action) was very disrespectful.

Questions

What happened? – followed by:
What were you thinking about when you did that?
How did your actions affect?
How do you think felt about what you did?
How do you feel about what you did?
How do you feel about what you did and the effect it had on me?

Restorative Justice Approach in the School

What is Community/Classroom Conferencing?

Community/Classroom conferencing is a key restorative justice strategy and a method the Academy uses as part of their problem-solving approach for addressing discipline incidents in schools. Through a face-to-face meeting, the person(s) who has created harm has the opportunity to be directly accountable to those harmed, while the person(s) harmed has the opportunity to share their viewpoint and have input into the reparation. In some cases, an entire school or community could be classified as “the harmed.”

When to use Community/Classroom Conferencing

In order for the conferencing process to work, the person responsible for the harm must accept responsibility for his/her actions. If there is any possibility that the conference could create more harm than it would repair, the conference should not take place.

Setting up the Conference

The set-up of a conference is similar to traditional Aboriginal healing circles. All of the chairs are placed in a circle with no obstructions. When the participants can see one another clearly, they can achieve a higher level of communication through an awareness of non-verbal signals combined with active listening. The participants are all given the opportunity to share their perspective of the incident and to describe the impact it has had on them. Every participant has the opportunity to be heard, to ask questions of each other, and to collaborate in developing appropriate reparation.

Conference Participants

- Facilitator
 - Person(s) harmed & supporters
 - Person(s) causing harm & supporters
 - Others who were directly or indirectly affected by the incident
- Role of Participants

Facilitator

The role of the facilitator is to prepare the participants for the conference. At the conference, the facilitator's role is to ensure that every participant has an opportunity to speak, to guide the conversation through scripted questions, and to clarify the terms of reparation. It is important that the facilitator determines that no further harm will

come as a result of the process prior to committing to a conference. The facilitator is compassionately disengaged and does not paraphrase, mediate, or control the behaviour of participants in a circle.

Harmed

The role of the harmed in the conferencing process is to openly describe his/her perspective of the incident, describe how it impacted him/her physically or emotionally, and discuss any other impact it had on his/her life. The harmed also plays an important role in setting the reparation, which is intended to help repair the harm.

Person responsible for the harm

During the conferencing process, the person(s) responsible for the harm describes his/her perspective of the incident, what his/her role was in the incident, the impact it had on him/her, and how he/she thinks the actions affected those harmed. For conferencing to be effective, the person(s) responsible for the harm must accept responsibility for his/her actions before entering into the conference. The person(s) responsible for the harm also plays an important role in establishing the reparation.

Supporters

The role of the supporters in the conferencing process is to encourage and assist both the harmed and the person responsible for the harm by describing the incident, the impact it had on them, and to provide input to the reparation. The supporters also help ensure that the terms of reparation are met. These supporters can be witnesses to the incident, school staff, friends, parents, and other community members.

Others

The role of others in the conferencing process is to describe the impact that the incident had on them and/or their community and to support the person responsible for the harm in meeting the terms of reparation. If the offence has impacted other community members, such as a business or the police, then those representatives would ideally become involved as well. Depending on the age of the offender and/or severity of the incident, a school resource officer or police officer should be included. Community is a vital component of conferencing. Providing opportunities for a variety of representatives such as parents, school staff and community members to share their perspective and describe how they have been affected gives the person responsible for the harm a wider perspective and a clearer understanding of the full impact of the incident.

Why Do Schools Need Restorative Practice?

Students Learn a Better Way to Behave

Steps for Conducting a Conference

The restorative practice approach aims to restore the power imbalances that affect relationships by focusing on a problem-solving rather than a punishment model of discipline. When community/classroom conferencing is introduced to students as part of a restorative practice approach, a resolution is more meaningful and effective.

Step 1—describing the incident and gaining perspective

- The person(s) who caused harm describes the incident and accepts responsibility for his/her actions.
- The person who was harmed describes the incident and what he/ she experienced during and as a result of the incident, including physical, emotional and psychological harm.

Step 2—describing and discussing the impact of the conflict

- Supporters of both the harmed and the person responsible for the harm describe their observations and experiences. At this time, supporters may also describe attributes of the harmed that may help him/her overcome the situation, as well as attributes of the person responsible for the harm that may help him/her with successful reparation.
- Other members of the school/community describe what they have observed and experienced as a result of the offence, and the related impacts. • This stage includes additional open discussion and questions that participants may have for one another.

Step 3—reparation and re-integration

- The participants collaboratively determine how the harm should be repaired with action that is meaningful and related to the specific situation.
- To increase the success of the reparation, the facilitator records the agreement, obtains the signatures of both the harmed and the person responsible for the harm and sets a schedule for follow- up.
- Participants ensure that the person responsible for the harm is supported and has the capability to complete the reparation and reintegrate into their community.

An effective reparation agreement must be logical and healing, and it must include the following criteria:

- It must be **related** to the offence. This means that the reparation has something to do with the negative behaviour and ideally aims to reverse the negative impact. For example, damage to a personal belonging could involve repairing the belonging. Bullying could involve, among other things, the person responsible for the harm “looking out” for the harmed in the future, ensuring that he or she is not bullied by someone else.
- It must be **reasonable**. There is no sense setting consequences that the person responsible for the harm is not capable of fulfilling. This increases the likelihood of failure and rejection of the process, leading to alienation rather than reintegration. There is also no benefit in creating consequences that are too lenient. Consequences that encourage learning must require some amount of effort or sacrifice to have impact.
- It must be **respectful**. It **must not** harm anyone involved. Demeaning consequences, or those that enhance rather than transform feelings of guilt, increase feelings of alienation and resentment. An inappropriate example might be forcing the person responsible for the harm to wear a tag saying “I am a bully.” Everyone involved should retain his/her dignity.
- It must be **responsible**. The person responsible for the harm must take responsibility for completing the reparation and not let it fall to someone else. The person

responsible for the harm must commit to completing the reparation with a reasonable amount of support. By meeting all of these criteria, reparation provides an opportunity for learning and healing by using a problem-solving rather than a punishment approach.

Example Scenario 1 Incident: a student was walking down the classroom aisle and was tripped by another student. There were two student witnesses to this incident; however, the teacher did not see it happen. The teacher heard a big crash and the classroom erupted in laughter. This was a one-time incident. To address this, the community/classroom conference could take place immediately or could be delayed until lunch break.

The participants of this conference would include: the teacher, the person who tripped the other student, the harmed (the person who was tripped) and the witnesses to the incident.

1.The conference would start with a description of the offence from the viewpoint of the person responsible for the harm (ownership of behaviour). The facilitator (teacher) then asks, “What happened?” to the person responsible for the harm, then to the harmed, then to the witnesses.

2.The facilitator would ask the harmed to elaborate on the impact of this incident by asking “How did you feel?”

3.The witnesses would describe how the incident affected them. The facilitator would ask “How did you feel when this happened?” and/or, depending on their response, “How would you feel if this happened to you?”

4.The person responsible for the harm now has a chance to respond. The facilitator would ask, “Is there anything you want to say to anyone before we move on?”

5. Next is the agreement/reparation phase. The person who was harmed says what he/she would like to see happen to repair the harm. The facilitator would ask the harmed “What would you like to see happen that would help repair the harm that has been done?” For younger students the facilitator would ask, “What would you like to see happen that would make you feel better?” The facilitator asks the same questions of the witnesses, followed by comments from the person responsible for the harm.

6.Agree on reparation with specific, measurable behaviours and/or actions and timelines. Ideally, a signed agreement would be the end result. Note: If this was an ongoing incident between these students, supporters would be included and a more formal process would be used.

Example Scenario 2 Incident: two students have been involved in a bullying incident (such as name calling or physical confrontation), and the offence took place during the school day in front of a local business off school grounds. Because bullying is an ongoing relationship issue between the one who is harmed and the person responsible for the harm, the school may choose to take a thorough approach to emphasise the full impact of the behaviour for everyone involved. The steps to be followed in this example would be similar to scenario 1, but with a more formalized conference process. All participants should collaborate to set the reparation and a schedule for follow-up. This might include reparation to the business owner as well as to the individual who was harmed. The participants in this conference would include a facilitator, the person harmed, the person responsible for the harm, any staff members

who were involved in addressing the issue, the principal, the students' teacher(s), their parents, friends/supporters of both the person responsible for the harm and the harmed, any other person affected, and a representative from the business that was affected (community). If substance abuse, mental illness, or another personal disturbance is suspected, it would also be beneficial for a community service provider in that field to be present. The conference would start with a description of the offence from the viewpoint of the person responsible for the harm (ownership of behaviour). The next step would be elaboration from the harmed, including the series of events (bullying being a relationship issue and not an isolated incident) and the specific impact of this incident. The school staff might describe how the incident affected them in terms of compassion and concern for all of the parties involved, as well as time, extra paper work, calling home, or the effects on the classroom community. The parents might describe how they missed time at work or were forced to neglect other responsibilities. The friends would describe how they observed the incident and how it affected both the harmed and the person responsible for the harm, as well as their own personal experiences (if applicable) as individuals and supporters. The business owner might add to this by describing the impact that the nearby violence or aggression might have had on his/her customers and the business itself. All participants should collaborate to set the reparation and a schedule for follow-up. In this situation, this might include reparation to the business owner as well as to the individual harmed. It is important to remember that the purpose of the conference is to repair the harm done and, where possible, to reintegrate the person responsible for the harm into the community.

Schools that choose to integrate community/classroom conferencing into their school often want to evaluate the impact it has on students, the school and the community. Useful data to collect would relate to achievement, attendance, and type and number of incidents reported to the office. In addition, the school could decide to conduct focus groups or surveys with students, teachers and parents that measure the following:

Reflecting on the process

1. General Behaviour and Self Concept

- To what extent have students developed an increased sense of self-worth and respect for themselves and others?
- To what extent do students work and play more cooperatively with peers?
- To what extent do students' responses fall within the problem-solving approach to inappropriate behaviour?

2. Safety and Bullying

- To what extent has bullying, harassment and assault among students been reduced in participating schools?
- To what extent do students intervene in bullying, harassment and assault by peers?
- To what extent do students feel safer and more secure?

3. Community

- To what extent have students developed a more positive attitude toward school?
- To what extent is there an increased attachment to community and to the adults in the community?

4. School Success

- To what extent has there been greater scholastic achievement?

5. Outcomes Pertaining to Adults/Community

- To what extent do parents, teachers and other adults: have a better understanding of positive role modelling? Rather than simply punish, this approach teaches those responsible for harm to understand and accept responsibility for the impact their actions have on others while giving them the support they need to become involved with their community in a more positive way. Restorative programs reintegrate those responsible for the wrongdoing back into the school community so that they may become resilient and responsible members of that community, upholding its rules and values. By recognizing the potential for healing, empowerment of individuals, bringing relationships back into balance and strengthening communities, schools have begun to adapt and to adopt restorative justice practices for dealing with conflicts. These practices are acknowledged as an important alternative to traditional systems of discipline within our schools.

Impact on the Community

Unlike the traditional justice system, community/classroom conferencing provides a structure for everyone affected by an offence to participate in the solution. It allows them to have a voice and collaborate toward repairing and healing the harmed, the person responsible for the harm and the community. By reintegrating the person responsible for the harm and reducing his/her likelihood to re-offend, the process decreases the potential for further harm to the community and its members.

Impact on Families

Parents who have a child involved in the process may notice an increase in empathy and responsibility in school, at home and in extra-curricular activities. Those harmed may experience increased confidence and recover more fully from negative experiences. Conferencing provides an opportunity for all participants to grow and receive support from those around them. Parents who participate in the process may gain insight and strategies for use at home.

Transferability

When students learn to use community/classroom conferencing to resolve issues at a school level, they will start to understand how the process can be applied outside of the school setting. Exposure to the conferencing process can inspire students to take a role in initiating restorative justice approaches in their communities. This problem-solving skill set will remain with them throughout their lives.