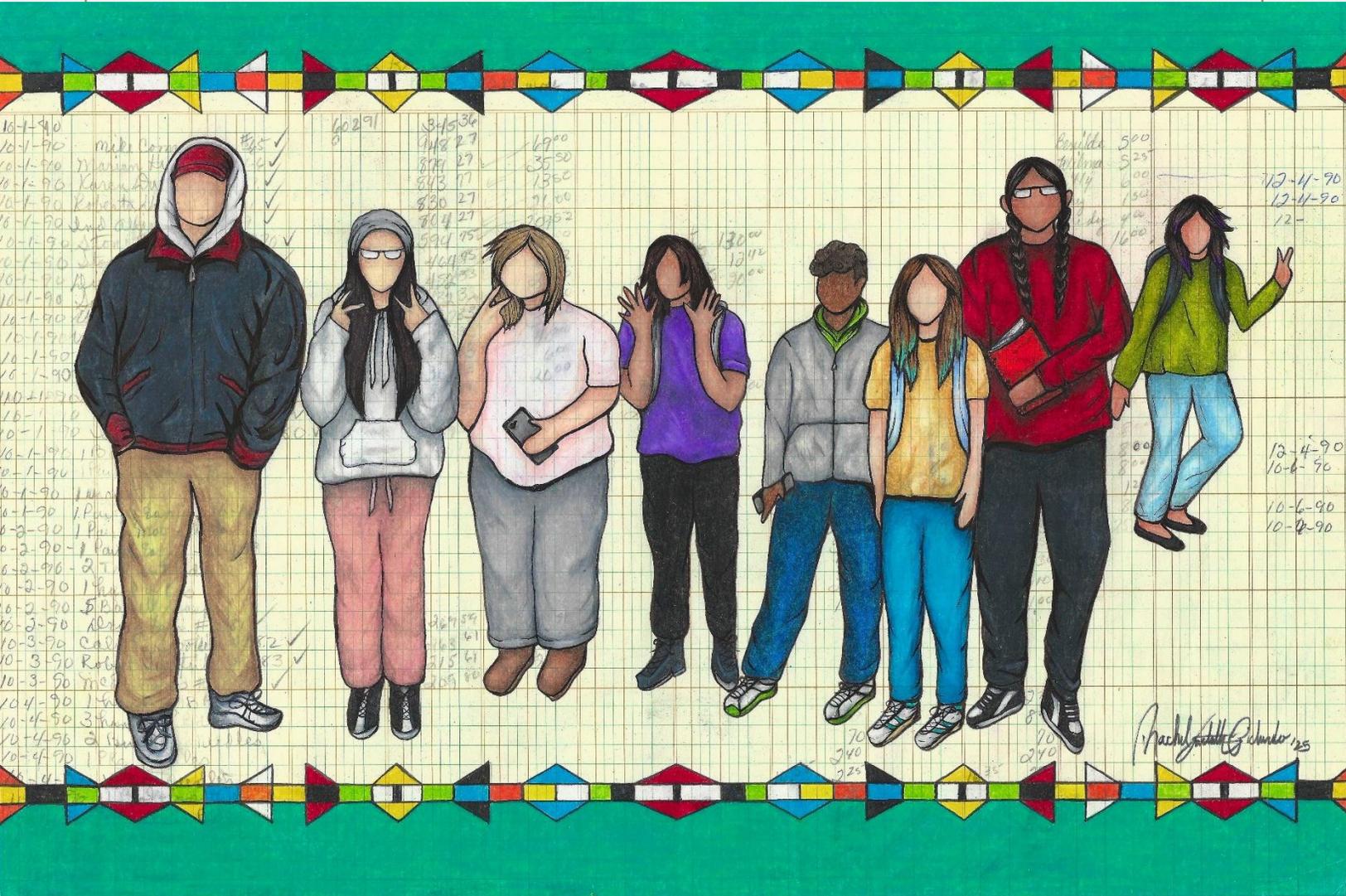


# Restorative Practices in Schools: Creating A Culture of Connection

Tribal Student Achievement and Relations Unit  
Office of Public Instruction





## USING THIS RESOURCE

This resource is designed to serve as a guidance and planning document for implementing restorative practices in schools. Opportunities for personal reflection and group discussion are embedded throughout this document to provide opportunities for personalized learning and foster collaborative planning for strengthening existing, and implementing new, restorative processes to support holistic student learning and wellness.

### **Personal Commitment**

Change begins with openness and willingness on an individual level to lead by example.

Furthermore, leading by example deepens our understanding of what it takes to be restorative. As restorative practitioners it is important that we are willing to speak from our heart, be vulnerable, take accountability, and support others as they begin their journey of becoming more restorative.

### **Group agreements:**

- Confidentiality: What is shared in this space should stay in this space
- Story ownership: Share your own learning and story and let others share theirs unless others give permission for their stories to be told by someone else
- Engagement: Stay engaged and committed to this learning process
- Step up, step back: Share ownership over leading conversations with others and ensure equitable space for all to contribute to discussions and decision making
- Be authentic: Speak your truth
- Expect and access discomfort, ambiguity, and non-closure
- Honor and give space for other people's perspectives and stories
- Others from the group?

# Restorative Practices in Schools: Creating A Culture of Connection

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Part 1: Relational Mindset and Restorative Philosophy</b>	<b>1</b>
Relational Mindset	1
Restorative Philosophy	4
<b>Part Two: Restorative Practices in Schools</b>	<b>11</b>
Restorative Approaches	11
Restorative Alternatives to Discipline	13
<b>Part Three: Communication</b>	<b>17</b>
Restorative Vocabulary	17
The Art of Listening	19
Intent and Impact	22
Positions and Interests	24
Reframing	27
Communication Self-Check List	28
Intercultural Principles of Restorative Communication	29
<b>Part Four: Restorative Dialogues</b>	<b>33</b>
Restorative Inquiry	33
Restorative Dialogue	35
Case Development	36
States of Restorative Dialogues	38
Restorative Community Service	40
<b>Part Five: Restorative Circles</b>	<b>44</b>
Circles as a Restorative Practice	44
General Circle Format	46
Types of Circles	52
Circle Applications in the Classroom	56
Circling Tips and Responding to Challenges	58
<b>Part Six: Restorative Practices and Trauma</b>	<b>62</b>
Types of Trauma	62
Responses to Traumatic Stress	63
Supporting Students Who Experience Trauma	65
<b>Part Seven: Getting Started with Implementing Restorative Processes in Schools</b>	<b>67</b>
Implementation Basics	67
Implementation Planning Guide and Templates	68
<i>Appendix A: Circle Planning Guide</i>	78
<i>Appendix B: Community Building Circle Topic Options</i>	81
<i>Appendix C: Intercultural Lens Circle</i>	83

PART 1. RELATIONAL MINDSET AND RESTORATIVE PHILOSOPHY

In this section we will cover:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Relational Mindset</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Western and Indigenous mindset</li> <li>• Primacy of Social Connection</li> <li>• The Relational Standpoint</li> <li>• Principles of Intercultural Communication</li> </ul> | <p>2. Restorative Philosophy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationality and the Principles of Care</li> <li>• How Restorative am I? Checklist</li> </ul> |
|---|--|

RELATIONAL MINDSET

**Western and Indigenous Mindset**

Foundational to restorative practices is a relational mindset. Restorative practices are rooted in Indigenous worldview and ways of knowing, which can be feel different from mainstream “Western” knowledge and approaches. *Figure 1*

*Figure 1. Continuum of Western and Indigenous Mindset*



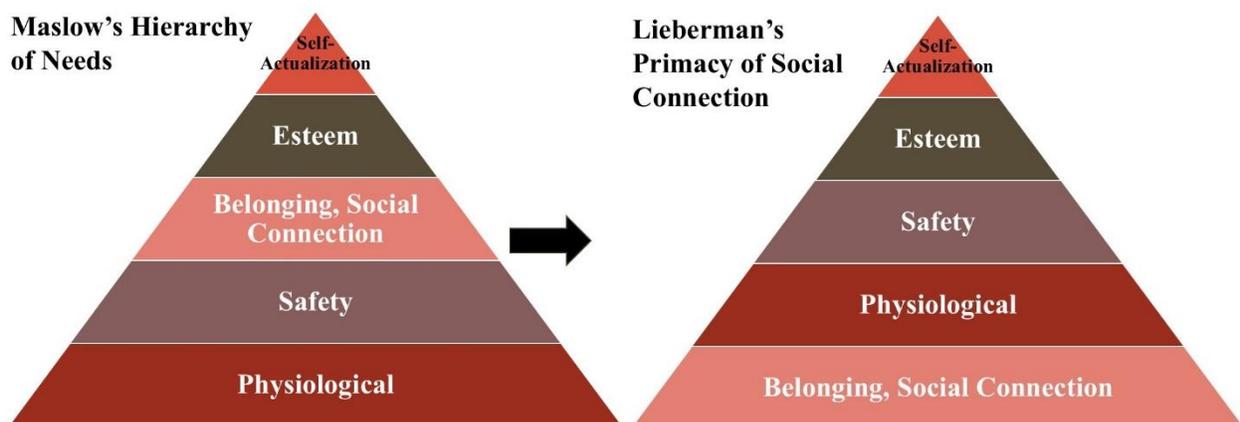
shows some of the key difference between a Western and Indigenous mindset, recognizing the continuum that exists between each element. It is important to note that every person uniquely lies somewhere in the continuum for each concept. For example, someone might be very

community minded, rely heavily on verbal communication, and equally value short-term and lifelong relationships.

### The Primacy of Social Connection

Dr. Matthew Lieberman, a neuroscientist and a founder of the field of *social cognitive neuroscience*, began studying the effects of social connections, such as relationships and ideological conflict, on the brain in 2010. Using Functional Magnetic Resonance (brain imaging), Dr. Lieberman and his team have found the default function of the human brain is social thinking, meaning, unless being purposefully used in other ways to perform tasks involved with analytical thinking (i.e. information gathering, problem solving), the human brain remains in a state of social thinking, primed for connecting and forming relationships with others. After over a decade of research, Dr. Lieberman posits that the need for social connectedness is the greatest primary human need, even greater than food and water, challenging conventional thinking stemming from Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which positions physiological needs as the foundation of human survival (*Figure 2*). To convey his point, Dr. Lieberman notes the necessity of relationships between infants and their caregivers, noting that without the relational connection between an infant and a caregiver, the infants' physiological needs will not be met.

*Figure 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs vs. Lieberman's Primacy of Social Connection*



## The Relational Standpoint

The *Relational Standpoint* outlines six functional concepts related to restorative practices and are useful in summarizing what it means to adopt a relational mindset. These concepts state:

1. Humans are always in relationship
2. Relationships are inevitable, connections are optional
3. When positive connections are established, relationships become less disposable
4. Leaning into one another is valuable and important
5. Learning how to develop positive relationships is as integral aspect of education
6. Harm is seen as fracturing of relationships

## Principles of Intercultural Communication

A relational mindset relies heavily on communication (explored further in Part Three), including *intercultural communication*, which involves recognizing and respecting cultural differences, understanding that communication styles and values vary across cultures, and developing the ability to empathize with individuals from different backgrounds. Effective intercultural communication also requires open-mindedness, adaptability, and a willingness to learn from others. There are six important principles related to effective intercultural communication and a relational mindset:

1. Respect: Treating individuals from other cultures with the same level of respect and consideration that you would expect for yourself. This means avoiding stereotypes and judging others based on your own cultural norms.
2. Awareness: Recognizing that culture profoundly influences how individuals think, see, speak, listen, understand, and act. This includes understanding the context behind cultural practices and being mindful of non-verbal cues.

3. Empathy: Trying to understand the world from the perspective of another culture, which can help bridge misunderstandings and foster deeper connections.
4. Open-mindedness: Being receptive to new ideas and perspectives from other cultures and being willing to challenge your own assumptions.
5. Adaptability: Being flexible and willing to adjust your communication style to suit the preferences of those from different cultures.
6. Willingness to learn: Continuously learning about different cultures and improving your intercultural communication skills.

## RESTORATIVE PHILOSOPHY

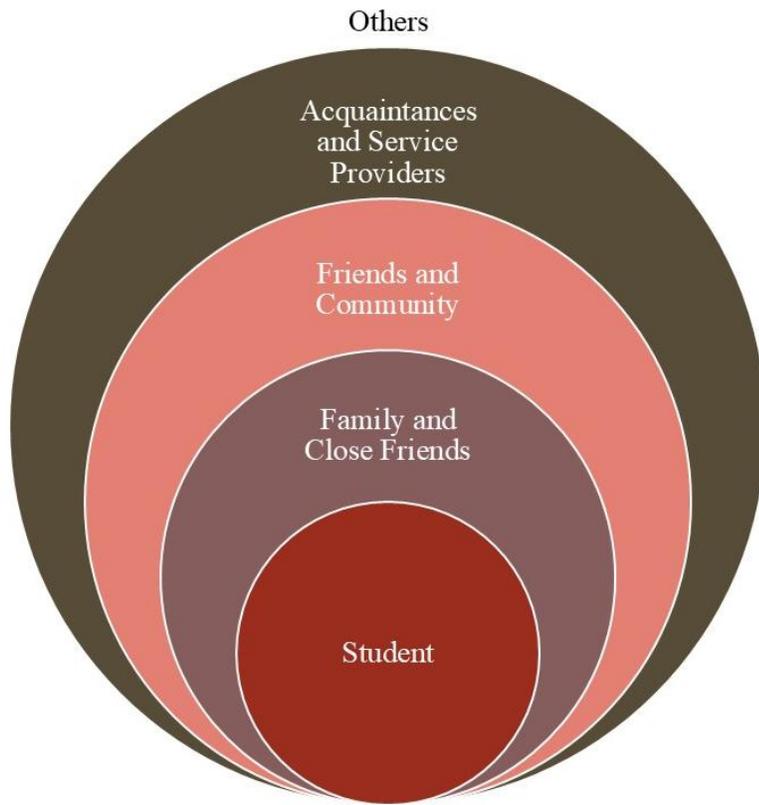
Restorative practice is about creating systems (e.g. schools, criminal) to address harm more meaningfully and undo systemic patterns of institutional racism and oppression. Restorative practices create opportunities for individuals and communities to build relationships and work towards a collective vision of justice. Foundational to restorative approaches are beliefs and understanding that everyone:

- Is inherently worthy and valuable
- Is essentially good
- Always exists in a matrix of relationships (see *Relationality* below)
- Has their own, and shared, stories
- Has the capacity to change their own behaviors
- Impacts their community

## **Relationality and the Principles of Care**

Relationality allows us to take a wider lens in working with individuals, recognizing students, educators, caregivers, and all people are connected to other directly, and indirectly, in

Figure 3. Relational Connectivity of Students



innumerable ways historically, currently, and in the future. Relationality allows us to take a wider lens in working with individuals, recognizing students, educators, caregivers, and all people are connected to others directly and indirectly in innumerable ways historically, currently, and in the future. *Figure 3* shows the various levels of a person's relational connectivity to others, recognizing the proximity of relationships to the

student. Adopting this lens allows restorative processes to draw on relational strengths more broadly and recognizes the far-reaching positive impacts that can be achieved through restorative approaches that both leverage and strengthen connections across a spectrum of relational connectivity.

The Principles of Care can assist in the implementation of restorative approaches while recognizing and leveraging the relationality of all involved. The Principles of Care include:

- Family voice: The relatives of students at the center of a restorative process are heard and choices are given before every decision is made; students and families are empowered to freely make decisions

- Team-based: Everyone involved in the restorative process is seen as one team with different perspectives
- Natural supports: Every student at the center of a restorative process has people who love and care about them and should be considered when creating a restorative plan
- Collaboration: A team-based approach with many caring people involved creates more and better ideas for solutions
- Culturally competent: Every student and family deserves support that works with the way they live
- Individualized: Each student at the center of the restorative process can form their own plan of action based on complexity and uniqueness of life
- Strengths-based: Actions and strategies stem from what students and families currently know and the strengths they currently possess
- Unconditional care: Students are valued and worthy of care no matter the circumstances
- Outcome based: Each plan is focused on the outcomes collectively determined by those involved in the restorative process, emphasizing the needs and desires of the student

### How Restorative Am I?

- Am I able to remain open-hearted, even with those who really challenge me?
- Do I value building relationships as a way to achieve a goal, or do I value them for their own sake?
- Do I see conflict as an opportunity for growth or as something to be managed or eliminated?
- During disagreements do I focus on proving my point or do I prioritize understanding the other person's perspective, even if I disagree with it?

- Do I fundamentally believe people are inherently good and capable of change and growth?
- Do I truly listen? Do the students, parents, caregivers and my fellow colleagues feel that I have heard and understand them?
- Do I take into consideration race, culture or power differences when engaging people?
- Do I actively work to share power when I am in a situation of having the most power?
- Am I able to take accountability for my stuff in a way that is felt by others?
- Do I strive to examine where I might be disconnecting with others when relationships feel strained?
- Am I able to explain my own values around issues with others?
- Am I able to meet people where they are at, and support them to be accountable?
- Am I doing things with people, rather than for them or to them?
- Have I, at any stage, asked for someone I trust to observe my practice and give me honest feedback?
- What is one thing I could intentionally focus on improving around my own restorative practice?

**Individual Activity 1**

1. Reflect on the foundational beliefs of restorative philosophy listed on page 4. Is there anything you would add or remove from this list?



5. For each question listed in the section titled, *How Restorative Am I?*(pages 6-7) mentally reflect on each question listed and ask yourself “how do I know this about myself?”. Write down any thoughts that feel meaningful to your personal journey towards growing in your role as a restorative process practitioner.

**Group Activity 1:**

In small groups, discuss each question listed in the section titled, *How Restorative Am I?*, changing “I” to “we” and reflect on how your school is doing as an organization. Write down things that your school is doing well and areas of growth for becoming more restorative as a school. Give each small group a chance to share with the larger group before moving on.

**What our school is doing well:**

**Areas of growth for our school:**

## PART TWO: RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS

In this section we will cover:

1. Restorative Approaches
  - Restorative Practice Examples
2. Restorative Alternatives to Discipline

## RESTORATIVE APPROACHES

Restorative practices focus on the relationships between individuals- including building, maintaining, and repairing relationships (Figure 4) to form healthy, supportive & inclusive schools and communities. Within a school system, restorative practices build community by fostering communication and relationship skills and repairing harm that occurs in, or outside of, school.

In school restorative practices serve to:

- Create a culture of connection
- Build a safe school climate
- Develop *Whole Child Skills* (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision-making)
- Create time and space for people to build community and make things right
- Inform where we (educators) stand in order to meet our youth where they are

*Figure 4. Facets of Restorative Relationships*



## Restorative Practice Examples

Restorative practices work best when implemented on a school-wide basis, with participation from administrators, staff, students, & families. There are many ways to implement restorative practices within schools and classrooms, below are a few examples, many of which are outlined in further detail throughout this guide:

- **Community Building Circles:** These circles help to build relationships and trust within a group. Community building circles promote deepening discussions and can lead to broader circle topics.
- **Healing/Understanding Circles:** Listening circles that respond to harm and impact whether it is a result of an incident or ongoing history and experience; the intention is to hear each other's perspectives and not to solve an issue.
- **Mediation:** A trained neutral party (including peers) helps disputing parties' identify the problem and arrive at a mutually agreeable approach to resolving the dispute.
- **Problem Solving/Conflict Resolution Circles:** Allow individuals directly involved in a conflict, as well as others affected by it, to come together to share perspectives and come up with agreements about how to repair any harms.
- **Restorative Dialogue:** Often utilized in conferencing or mediation models to respond to harmful behavior and can be used in situations in which disciplinarian (e.g. school administrators, law enforcement) has been involved.
- **Restorative Inquiry:** Information gathering process using nonjudgemental exploration and active listening skills following an event or situation. Restorative inquiry explores an incident without blame and uses relational questions to bring out who was affected by the incident and how, and what needs to happen to make things right.

- **Welcome Back Circles:** Often utilized when returning from a break from school (e.g. summer break, winter break) to strengthen connection to school and build community.

#### RESTORATIVE ALTERNATIVES TO DISCIPLINE

When utilized in school-disciplinary actions restorative practices are highly effective as they focus on addressing the *root causes* of unwanted behavioral issues thereby preventing existing and future unwanted behaviors from recurring. Restorative Practices are both proactive and reactive: (1) Proactive by developing community through relationship building; and (2) reactive by restoring relationships by repairing harm. Restorative practices encourage restorative inquiry to help all who are involved better understand why unwanted behaviors occur by asking:

- **What happened?**
- **Who was impacted/affected?**
- **What can be done to make this right?**
- **What will keep this from happening again? What support is needed?**

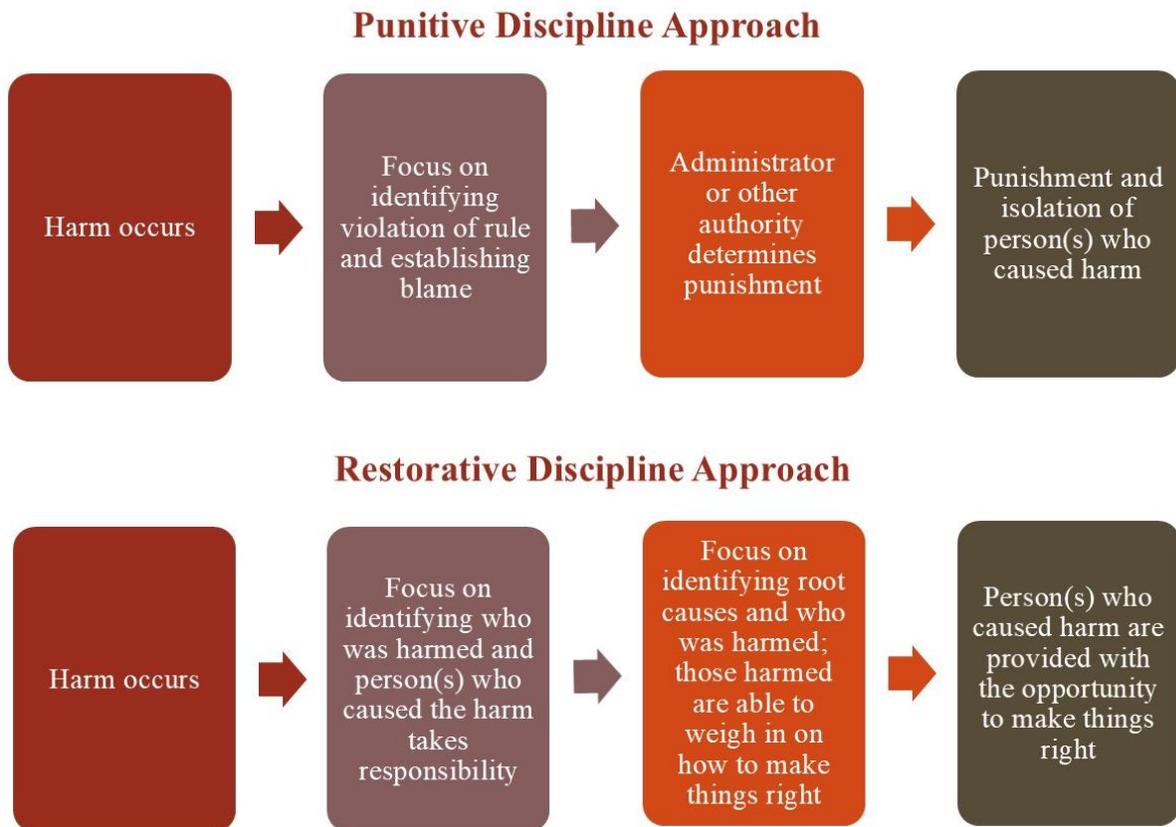
There are several key differences between a restorative discipline approach and a punitive approach, which has been historically used in most school settings. *Figure 5* shows the typical processes of each approach, beginning with harmful, unwanted behavior(s) occurring. After harm occurs, punitive approaches focus on the behavior that occurred, which violated a rule, and on assigning blame: who broke the rule. Restorative approaches instead focus on who was harmed by the action that took place and seeks to assist those who caused the harm to take responsibility. Next, in a punitive approach, an authority figure, often a school administrator, determines what the punishment will entail and the person(s) who caused the harm are punished, often in ways that isolate the person from others, including those he/she/they harmed.

Alternatively, in a restorative approach, restorative processes are used to identify the root causes

of the behavior that lead to someone else being harmed and those who were harmed are given the opportunity to weigh in on how to correct the harm that occurred to repair relationships; the person(s) who caused the harm then carry out the actions deemed necessary to make things right.

**Individual Activity 2:** When are punitive discipline approaches typically used in your school?

Figure 5. Punitive Discipline Approach vs. Restorative Discipline Approach



**Individual Activity 3:** Referring to the example you provided on the previous activity, how could a restorative approach be used in placement of the punitive approach that is typically enforced?

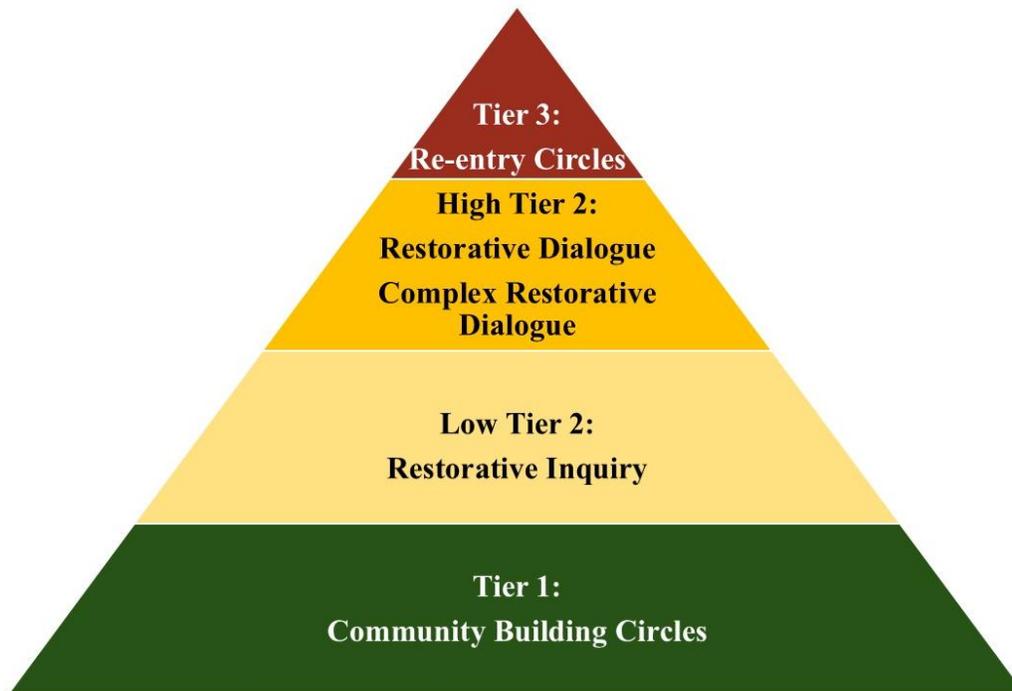
How might relationships within the class/school you serve be impacted by implementing a more restorative approach in the example you chose?

Within a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) approach restorative alternatives to discipline can be utilized across each tier (*Figure 6*):

- Tier 1: Universal Approaches (Relationship Building, Preventing Challenging Behaviors)
  - Community Building Circles can be implemented weekly, daily, or at any frequency to build relationships, create shared values, and strengthen emotional literacy and problem-solving skills in students.
- Low Tier 2: Targeted Approaches (Responding to Small Challenges)
  - Restorative Inquiry (outlined further on page 33) can be implemented to support reflection and engage in shared problem solving after a behavior has occurred.
- High Tier 2 (Responding to Intermediate to Large Challenges)
  - Restorative Dialogue (outlined further on page 35) is used to respond to harmful behaviors in which a disciplinarian (e.g. school administrators, law enforcement) has been involved to avoid exclusionary discipline.

- Complex Restorative Dialogue is used to respond to harmful behavior that includes multiple stakeholders as a means to avoid exclusionary discipline.
- Tier 3: Intensive (Supporting Reentry)
  - Reentry Circles are used to support return of student who experienced exclusionary discipline (e.g. detention, suspension, justice system involvement) to reacclimate the student and begin rebuilding positive connections with peers and the school.

*Figure 6. Restorative Alternatives to Discipline within a Multi-tiered System of Supports*



## PART THREE: COMMUNICATION

In this section we will cover:

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 1. Restorative Vocabulary                     | 4. Interests and Positions       |
| 2. The Art of Listening and Mindful Listening | 5. Reframing                     |
| 3. Intent and Impact                          | 6. Communication Self-Check List |
|   | 7. Intercultural Principles      |

## RESTORATIVE VOCABULARY AND THE ART OF LISTENING

Community building begins with the power of our language. Words like *relationship*, *accountability*, *harm*, *impact*, and *repair*, are integral to shifting the way we process conflict. Using language that doesn't assign blame and speaks in terms of harm done rather than rules broken gives space for restoring relationships, as does utilizing active, empathic, and compassionate questioning instead of assuming or accusing.

Restorative communication is driven by a set of values that shape how we talk with students, respond to behavior, and build community; these values are outlined in more detail below.

*Restorative Vocabulary Values:*

Value	Relation to Restorative Communication	How it Helps in Classrooms
Respect	Restorative communication begins with the belief that every student deserves to be heard and treated with dignity—even when their choices need correcting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students feel safer expressing themselves.</li> <li>• Adults model what respectful disagreement looks like.</li> <li>• Students are more open to feedback when they feel respected.</li> </ul>
Responsibility	Instead of imposing consequences on students, restorative practices help students take ownership for their actions by reflecting on the impact and planning repairs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students learn accountability, not just compliance.</li> <li>• Fewer repeated misbehaviors.</li> <li>• Students internalize expectations rather than fear punishment.</li> </ul>

<p>Relationship-Building</p>	<p>Restorative communication strengthens relationships by treating conflict as an opportunity to reconnect rather than disconnect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student–teacher trust grows.</li> <li>• Classroom climate becomes calmer and more cooperative.</li> <li>• Students are more motivated when they feel connected to adults.</li> </ul>
<p>Empathy</p>	<p>Students learn to consider how their choices affect others- not because they are shamed- but because they are guided to understand impact.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduces conflicts between students.</li> <li>• Helps students develop social-emotional depth.</li> <li>• Teaches life skills of perspective-taking and compassion.</li> </ul>
<p>Equity</p>	<p>Restorative communication ensures all students are treated fairly by focusing on understanding and repairing—not labeling or excluding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduces disproportionate discipline outcomes.</li> <li>• Supports students whose behavior stems from unmet needs.</li> <li>• Creates a sense of belonging for all students.</li> </ul>
<p>Collaboration</p>	<p>Restorative practices involve students in problem-solving rather than solving problems for them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students develop agency and voice.</li> <li>• Solutions become more durable because students help create them.</li> <li>• Shifts teacher role from “enforcer” to “coach.”</li> </ul>
<p>Healing/ Repairing Harm</p>	<p>Instead of focusing solely on rule-breaking, restorative communication focuses on repair: what needs to happen to make things right?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict becomes teachable, not traumatic.</li> <li>• Students learn that harm can be repaired through actions and empathy.</li> <li>• Restores relationships that would otherwise remain damaged.</li> </ul>
<p>Consistency &amp; Predictability</p>	<p>Using the same restorative questions and tone creates predictable structure for students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students know what to expect after a conflict.</li> <li>• Adults respond consistently across classrooms.</li> <li>• Builds student trust in the school system.</li> </ul>

## THE ART OF LISTENING

Communication is at the center of restorative practices and communication skills develop and change throughout a person's life. Communication always occurs between two or more people and often relies on the speaking and listening skills of each person involved in the communicating taking place. The practices listed below provide tips to improve listening skills for all forms of communication and are especially important for restorative communication.

### **Be curious**

- Practice genuine interest in learning who students are as human beings.
- Be compassionate in your curiosity and be sure curiosity does not turn into prying.

### **Be open**

- Suspend your own judgments and assumptions.
- Ask open-ended questions.

### **Listen to understand**

- Put aside your own opinions for the time being; seek to understand what is important to the other person.
- Try to understand how our past affects all of us.
- Be aware of your own hot buttons and discomfort.
- Ask clarifying questions.

### **Pay attention to non-verbal communication**

- Notice tone of voice, volume, body orientation, eye-contact, facial expression, posture, etc. in yourself and the speaker(s). Notice how body language impacts others' body language.

### **Pay attention to power dynamics**

- Power dynamics are inherent in all situations and require honest reflection to understand the impacts of inequitable power dynamics on communication. What are the differences in gender and gender identity, age, ethnicity, nationality and documentation, language, income, religion, ability, education and other status?
- Who holds the most power and how does this impact communication?

**Notice what is not being said**

- Ask questions to understand.

**Emotionally relate to how they are feeling**

- Empathize. Nurture the relationship. Reflect what is being said. Use their words.

**Be patient, be present**

- Listening is speedier than talking; don't jump ahead. Be aware of and allow for communication style differences.

**The Art of Mindful Listening**

\*Adapted from "The Art of Mindful Facilitation" by Lee Mun Wah, Stir Fry Seminars.

Listening is a lifetime opportunity. Listening and responding mindfully requires being present and open.

*Empathetic Listener:* Your role is to listen for the emotional content in the speaker's story. Tune into your own feelings that arise, as the speaker shares. When sharing your feedback with the speaker, convey an emotional affect with your own voice, body and the content of your listening.

- At what parts of the story do you sense that the speaker is emotionally moved?
- What emotions are you picking up in what they say and what they do not say?

Example: *I was very moved when you talked about the bond between your mother and yourself when you were a child. I could sense your deep loss when she suddenly passed away.*

Factual Listener: Your role is to listen for the factual content of the speaker's story. Relate back the relevant facts. Avoid sounding like you are reading a list but rather relaying about those facts that seemed to be the most significant to the speaker. Try to do so without adding your own interpretations.

- What are the most significant facts that they are sharing?
- Look for the keywords that they use. Repeat back to them their own words.

Example: *You said a lot about your father, but one thing that stood out for me was when you mentioned that he didn't attend your graduation even though he had promised to be there.*

Non-Verbal Listener/Timer: Your role is to observe the non-verbal messages that are being communicated through their body, facial gestures or other movement as they share their story. As Timer - give the group warning when their time is up. Keep the group moving on schedule.

- What do you notice about them as they are talking? Eye movement, hands, feet?  
Overall?
- How does their movement change as the content of their story changes?

Example: *I noticed that you looked down when you talked about your boss.*

Speaker's Feedback to Listeners: The Speaker gives feedback to each listener on how effective and accurate they were in their responses. The goal of the feedback is to help the listeners become more effective and mindful as mediators. While it is easy to start responding and be drawn into giving more details about your story, stay focused on how the listener's feedback affected you. Share what worked and didn't work.

- How were you impacted when you heard the listener's feedback?

Example: *When you repeated the factual details of my life, it was like I was watching a movie of my life.*

Example: *When you gave me empathetic feedback, I could feel the emotion of the story more so than when I was first shared the story.*

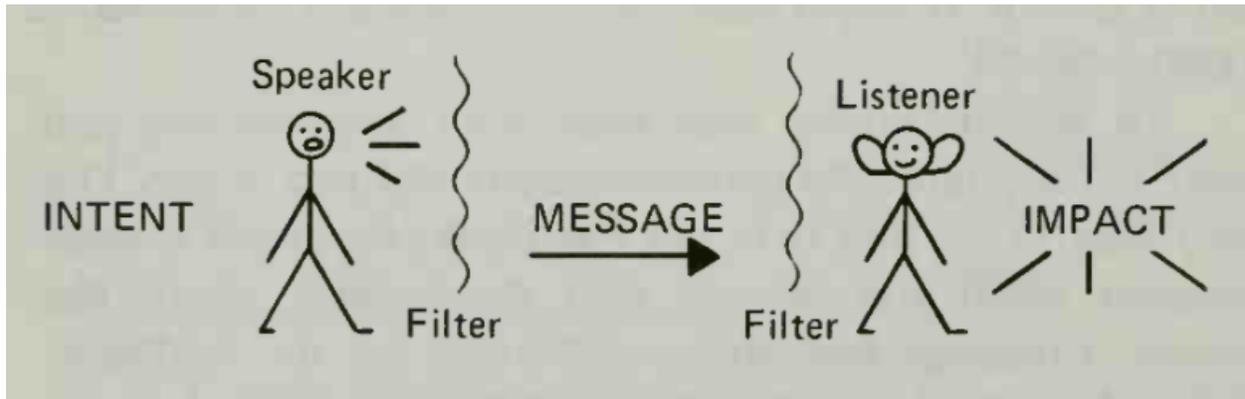
## INTENT AND IMPACT

A shared human experience is communication and miscommunication. *Figure 7* shows the communication process beginning with the intent of the speaker and ending with the impact of the listener. It is important to note this process is also true for nonverbal communication, including body language and any visual cue people use to communicate.

- **Intent:** Intent is the speaker's meaning for communication; the motivation or purpose of our actions or conversations.
- **Impact:** Impact is what the communication achieves, the results of what the speaker does or says, how the speaker's actions or words are perceived.

Often, the intent of a message and the way a message is perceived by the listener differ, meaning what the speaker meant to convey may not have the intended impact on the listener. There are many reasons the intent of a message and the impact of a message may not align. *Figure 7* displays the filter of the speaker and the filter of a listener, which a message must pass through during the communication process. A filter can take many forms and include any condition present within the speaker, the listener, or the environment. Filters can also be layered. There will be an opportunity to explore these concepts later in this section.

Figure 7. Communication Process Between a Speaker and Listener



To communicate more effectively as a speaker work to achieve the desired impact of your message:

1. Take time to notice the impact your communication has on your listener.
  - If the impact appears to differ from what you intended, set aside your intentions and ask:
    - “I noticed you had a reaction when I said...”
    - “Did it bother you when I...”
    - “I think we might have a misunderstanding. What did you hear me say?”
2. Check for understanding; don’t assume your message had the intended impact.
3. If the impact of communication was not what was intended, talk about the intent of the message without denying the impact that was made on the listener.
  - Help the other person feel heard and offer acknowledgement:
    - “(Name), I heard you say...”

- “Tell me more about...”
- “So, what happened for you is \_\_\_\_, is that accurate?”

As a listener, be aware of your own filters and how the impact you feel from a message may not be what was intended:

1. Speak your truth in the way you want to be heard:

- “I know this isn’t what you intended, but it bothered me when you said \_\_\_\_\_. Can I tell you what I heard?”
- “What I hear \_\_\_\_, I feel \_\_\_\_”
- “I don’t like it when I hear \_\_\_\_\_. Can we talk about it?”

2. Help the other person understand the impact their message had on you:

- “What I experienced was...”
- “The impact this had on me was...”
- “What I really want you to understand is....”

**Individual Activity 4:** In your own words, describe the difference between message intent and impact.

## POSITIONS AND INTERESTS

Interpersonal conflict can be seen as *an expressed struggle between interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference*. When we are in conflict, we can often become hyper-focused on how we want to meet our goals/needs (our position) rather

than meeting the goal or need itself. To expand the potential positive outcomes, we can use the tool of identifying and addressing the interests associated with the conflict. **Positions** are demands. For example, a parent might say, “*either you switch my child out of Mr. Barnes class, or I will withdraw him from school*”. These are closed statements that offer limited options. **Interests** are the concern or needs underlying the conflict—the why. For example, a parent may say “*I strongly believe Mr. Barnes is singling out my child and injuring his confidence and motivation.*”.

We can uncover interests with helpful questions that are posed with **compassionate curiosity**:

- Why is that important to you?
- Help me understand why it’s important that this happen?
- What’s your concern about what would happen if...?
- Can you say a little more about why you want this to happen?

**Individual Activity 5:** Read the statement below under positions and write the different possible “interests” the person may have.

1. Position: *You don’t like me, so you’re always watching me to find something to kick me out of class for.*

Possible interests:

- Feels unvalued and unwanted
- Feels she is expected to fail
- Feels she is watched closely, and unfairly, for mistakes
- Feels she’s not allowed to feel frustrated when she doesn’t understand

2. Position: *This school is stupid. If a teacher says I have to leave my phone in my locker I’m not even going to that class.*

Possible interests:

3. Position: *I am not changing in the locker room. I don't care if I fail PE.*

Possible interests:

4. Position: *That #\$&\*@! hit me first! My parents taught me I have the right to defend myself!*

Possible interests:

5. Position: *I don't know why you are calling me about your classroom discipline problems. You're the teacher, you should be able to handle it.*

Possible interests:

6. Position: *If you suspend my son one more time, I am going to the school board and media.*

Possible interests:

7. Position: *I'm not coming to your student parent-teaching meeting. All you ever do is badmouth my child.*

Possible interests:

## REFRAMING

A reframe is "taking out the flame" and reflecting the message back to the speaker in a way that neutralizes negative or biased language, clarifies the underlying need or interest, and emphasizes a positive goal or common ground. A reframe can help diffuse emotions and move in a more positive direction. For example, if a coworker says, "*No one can get a word in edgewise with a blabbermouth like Mary at our meetings!*" you might say, "*It sounds like it's important to you that everyone gets an opportunity to speak.*". You've omitted the name-calling and blaming and identified the positive interest behind their position instead. Reframing is one of the more difficult skills to master and in the moment requires that you draw from active listening skills, uncovering positions vs. interests, and the use of open-ended questions to inform how you might reframe any given statement.

**Group Activity 2:** Working in small groups, practice reframing the statements made below.

1. "I am not working with the lazy kids in this group. They are making me do all the work."
2. "If that moron touches me one more time, I will beat him up."
3. "She is a liar. I did not say anything about her family."

4. "I hate going to those team meetings. Sarah is too emotional, and I'm tired of her crying all the time. She should just shut up and do her job!"
  
5. "Ms. Miller is the worst teacher my son ever had. He is not learning a thing."
  
6. "This school is horrible and backwards. You don't even use our culture."

#### COMMUNICATION SELF-CHECK LIST

##### **Communication Self-Check List:**

- What are the power dynamics in this conversation (differences in gender and gender identity, age, ethnicity, nationality and documentation, language, income, religion, ability, educational and other status)?
  
- Are the differences (including the differences in communication styles and in lived experiences) between you and the person(s) you are talking with likely to create filters that cause a mismatch between intent and impact? Do you check the intent and share the impact? Are you ready to listen without becoming defensive when impact is shared with you?
  
- Are you uncomfortable in any way? Why?
  
- Did you self-check to gauge how present you are and if you are in a space to listen with your mind and your heart while suspending judgment? Are you truly curious and do you listen for understanding (rather than thinking about a possible reply)?
  
- Are you paying attention to what is not being said and to body language (including your own)?
  
- Are you willing to dedicate some time towards building relationships and not just towards accomplishing tasks?

- What is your interest {the "why?" - concern, need) vs. your position (the expressed demand)? Do you understand the other person's interest/position?
- Are you trying to reframe what is being said into language that is not evaluative and inflammatory?
- Are you reflecting back, checking if you understood and summarizing while still being your true authentic self?
- Do you avoid jargon? Are your questions open ended?
- Do you own your own feelings (I-statements) and accepting responsibility for the self?
- Do you offer unsolicited advice? Are you labeling or diagnosing?

Do you express appreciation and positives that you truly mean?

## INTERCULTURAL PRINCIPLES OF RESTORATIVE COMMUNICATION

Restorative practices bring people together across different cultural identities and experiences.

Effective facilitators must go beyond simply exchanging words—they must understand how culture shapes meaning, expression, and relationships. The following principles provide practical guidance for creating inclusive, respectful, and effective communication in restorative settings.

### **Key Principles and Applications for Facilitators:**

- **Cultural Relativism**

*Principle:* Understand cultural practices and values on their own terms, rather than judging them by your own standards.

*In Practice:* If a participant avoids eye contact, recognize that this may be a sign of respect in their culture rather than disengagement.

- **Self-Awareness**

*Principle:* Recognize how your own cultural background and communication style shape

your interactions.

*In Practice:* Notice when your tone, body language, or assumptions may unintentionally silence or alienate someone.

- **Empathy**

*Principle:* Strive to see the world from another person's perspective.

*In Practice:* When a participant reacts strongly, listen for the underlying values or experiences that might explain their emotions.

- **Respect**

*Principle:* Work diligently to treat everyone with dignity.

*In Practice:* Affirm participants' contributions, even if their views differ from your own

- **Cultural Humility**

*Principle:* Approach interactions with the understanding that unless we are from a culture we cannot be competent in it, regardless of how much we have learned.

*In Practice:* Check perceptions and assumptions, practice compassionate curiosity, and ask respectful questions from a place of humility and learning.

- **Adaptability**

*Principle:* Flexibility is essential in cross-cultural communication.

*In Practice:* Be willing to adjust your facilitation style—whether that means slowing the pace, changing your questions, or using more visual supports.

- **Patience and Tolerance for Ambiguity**

*Principle:* Intercultural interactions may involve uncertainty and misunderstanding.

*In Practice:* Allow extra time for participants to process and respond and be comfortable with moments of silence.

- **Managing Ethnocentrism**

*Principle:* Avoid assuming your culture’s way of doing things is the “right” way.

*In Practice:* Acknowledge when multiple perspectives are valid, even if they conflict with your own.

- **Mutual Creation of Meaning**

*Principle:* Communication is a shared responsibility.

*In Practice:* Check in frequently by asking, “Does this reflect what you meant?” or “How do you understand this situation?”

By putting these principles into practice facilitators develop the skills to create restorative spaces where cultural differences are honored, trust can grow, and all voices can be heard.

### Facilitator Framing: One Perspective of Native American Communication Patterns

#### **Key Communication Considerations (generalized but commonly referenced):**

- **Respect for silence**

Silence may be a sign of thinking, respect, or emotional processing—not avoidance.

- **Indirect or observational communication**

Many Native students are taught to listen first, speak when ready, and use fewer words.

- **High value on relationality**

Restorative practices resonate deeply with Indigenous principles of connection, and community responsibility.

- **Avoiding confrontation or public correction**

One-on-one, calm, relational conversations are often preferred.

- **Story-based sharing**  
Students may communicate experiences through narrative rather than linear explanation.

## PART FOUR: RESTORATIVE DIALOGUES

In this section we will cover:

- |                         |                                    |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Restorative Inquiry  | 4. States of Restorative Dialogues |
| 2. Restorative Dialogue | 5. Restorative Community Service   |
| 3. Case Development     | • Check List                       |

## RESTORATIVE INQUIRY

Restorative inquiry is a set of communication and relationship-building strategies that help students reflect on their actions, repair harm, and strengthen their connection to the school community. It shifts the focus from punishment to understanding, from blame to problem-solving, and from reacting to teaching skills.

**Restorative inquiry uses open-ended, nonjudgmental questions to guide students to:**

- Explain what happened
- Reflect on their thinking and actions
- Understand impacts on others
- Identify needs and repair harm
- Make a plan for better choices next time

**Why It Works**

- Builds genuine accountability
- Reduces repeat behavior incidents
- Strengthens teacher–student relationships
- Teaches social-emotional skills: empathy, self-regulation, conflict resolution

- Creates a calmer, more respectful school climate

### **Core Restorative Questions**

1. *What happened from your perspective?*
2. *What were you thinking or feeling at the time?*
3. *Who has been affected, and in what ways?*
4. *What do you need now to move forward?*
5. *What can be done to repair harm?*
6. *What will you do differently next time?*

### **How to Use Restorative Inquiry (Steps)**

1. Regulate first (for adult and student)
2. Ask with curiosity, not correction (See Part Three: Communication for more)
3. Listen fully before responding (See Part Three: Communication for more)
4. Guide toward solutions the student generates
5. Check back-in later

### **Tone Tips**

- Stay neutral: “Help me understand...”
- Avoid asking “why” which can sound accusatory
- Allow silence for thinking
- Validate feelings, not harmful behavior
- Remember: **Connection before correction**

## RESTORATIVE DIALOGUE

**Restorative Dialogue involves a meeting between the person who harmed others, the people directly impacted, students and family supporters for both groups and a skilled facilitator.**

All participants recount what happened to them at the time of the incident and to gain a clear understanding of the full impact and damage done. They then collectively decide what to do to repair relationships affected and minimize further problems. Agreements are recorded, signed and followed up on.

Before engaging in restorative dialogue, make sure the following is clear to all involved:

1. Tenets of Dialogue:
  - Confidentiality: Be sure all parties know the importance of confidentiality and the limitations of keeping information confidential. Ensure all parties are aware of mandatory reporting requirements.
  - Voluntary: Ensure all parties know they are engaging in the dialogue by choice and can choose to end the dialogue at any time.
  - Informed Participation: Ensure that all parties know what the process looks like, what they can expect from the facilitators, and clearly understand the goals.
2. Overview of the Process: Provide an overview of the process so parties know what to expect (each stage of the restorative dialogue process is outlined further below).
  - Opening statement and ground rules
  - Guided questions: Initial stories of what happened
  - Who was harmed and how
  - What can be done to repair the harm as much as possible
  - What can be done to prevent future harm from occurring

- Agreements
  - Closing
3. Role of the Facilitator:
- Guides the process without providing input
  - Enforces ground rules
  - Remains neutral and advocates equally for all participants
  - Serves as an agent of reality to test proposed solutions
4. Logistics:
- Location and schedule of the dialogue
  - Contact information

#### CASE DEVELOPMENT

The purpose of case development is to:

1. Get a deeper sense of what is going on for affected parties
2. Determine if parties are willing to participate in a restorative dialogue
3. Prepare them for the dialogue
4. Nurture or begin to develop a relationship and rapport with the parties
5. Assess physical and emotional safety for the parties

During case development, facilitators are looking at the following criteria to determine if it is appropriate to move forward with a face-to-face dialogue:

- Both the person(s) responsible and the person(s) impacted are able to relate their side of the story, including factual and emotional content
- The person responsible is willing to take responsibility for their role in the situation
- The person responsible shows remorse for their actions

- Both the person responsible and the person(s) impacted are willing and able to work with the other party to come to a workable agreement
- Both the person responsible and the person(s) impacted are willing and able to contribute to a safe and productive meeting

To help determine readiness for Restorative Dialogue, ask each person involved the questions below:

**Questions for Person(s) Responsible for the Harm**

1. What happened?
2. Who was harmed and how?
3. What can you do to make things as right as possible? Is there anything the other person can do?
4. What can be done to prevent this from happening again?
5. What support do you need? Would it be helpful or important to have anyone else at the meeting with you?

**Questions for Person(s) Harmed or Impacted**

1. What happened? What did you think when you realized what happened?
2. Who was harmed and how? What impact has this incident had on you and others? What has been the hardest thing for you?
3. What do you think needs to happen to make things right? What can the other student(s) do to make things as right as possible? Is there anything you can do?
4. What can be done to prevent this from happening again?
5. What support do you need? Would it be helpful or important to have anyone else at the meeting with you?

**Final Questions for All Involved**

1. What do you hope to gain from the dialogue?
2. What are you willing to do to get that result?

**Things to Consider**

- Were there any issues or conflicts between those involved prior to this incident?
- What have the last few weeks or months looked like?
- What did last year look like?
- Do you think others outside of the conflict played a role in the situation?
- Do you think this situation can be settled and that everyone involved can move on?
- How would you feel about the situation if you were in the other person's shoes?
- Would you feel safe meeting with the other person in this conflict? What would make you feel safe?
- Do you think you can sit down with the other person in this conflict and have meaningful conversation?

**STAGES OF RESTORATIVE DIALOGUE**

When all parties are ready to engage in restorative dialogue, the facilitator can walk all participants through the four stages of restorative dialogue.

**Four Stages of Restorative Dialogue:**

Stage 1: Opening	Introductions of the facilitator and participants.
	Role of the facilitator: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Guide the process without providing input</li> <li>2. Enforce ground rules</li> <li>3. Remain neutral and advocate equally for all participants</li> </ol>

	4. Serve as an agent of reality to test proposed solutions
	Review the voluntary nature of the participation.
	Review & sign consent to meet/confidentiality form (if applicable).
	Ground rules: Cover any rules for the dialogue and an overview of the process that will occur.
Stage 2: Guided Questions	Each participant tells their own story about what happened and who was harmed.
	Each participant shares how they were impacted.
	Each participant shares what can be done to repair as much harm as possible.
	Participants brainstorm how to achieve accountability through making things right and repairing harm.
	Participants discuss what will keep this from happening again.
	Participants discuss what will make them more comfortable and/or safe from this point forward?
	Participants describe what would make them feel supported.
	Participants make requests or offer support to the person responsible, or the person harmed.
Stage 3: Agreements	Participants create a written agreement together to repair harm and (possibly) to prevent future harm. A restorative agreement demonstrates progress, clarifies points of action, and provides closure.
	<p>Agreements can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restitution</li> <li>• Community service (see next section)</li> <li>• Outreach to school/peers/family</li> <li>• Relationship building with mentors, etc.</li> <li>• Connecting to needed resources for students and families</li> <li>• Apology letters</li> </ul>
	<p>Components of good agreements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mutually acceptable</li> <li>• Agreement items come from the participants</li> <li>• Participants are fully committed to fulfilling the agreement</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address impacts/harms: Harm to victim/person directly affected; harm to community; harm to person responsible</li> <li>• Flexible - incorporate creative thinking in repairing harms</li> <li>• Measurable, realistic and timely</li> <li>• Durable</li> </ul> <p>Address "what-if" scenarios/contingency planning (Example: If John cannot make it to community service, he will contact the site supervisor on his cell phone to see if it is possible to reschedule).</p>
<p>Stage 4: Closing</p>	<p>The facilitator will check in with each participant to see if there is anything more anyone would like to say</p>
	<p>Cover any next steps if they were established</p>
	<p>Thank participants for their time and commitment</p>

RESTORATIVE COMMUNITY SERVICE

Meaningful community service aims to broaden accountability options that are meaningful and beneficial for youth, the people impacted by harm, and the whole school community. The following are essential principles in building a community service program.

- **Worthwhile work:** The benefit of each service project should be very apparent to participating youth. Discussing the worth of the work being done is an ideal pre and post service activity if the project's worthiness is not easily apparent.
- **Youth as resources:** Youth engaging in service are reintegrated as essential to the community and to making the project a success. Treating youth as an essential resource offers opportunity to create a stronger self-image, transforming their feelings of being a "problem" into a newfound sense of being essential in the eyes of the community and more importantly to themselves.

- **Attention to transferable competencies:** Service projects focus on building skills that not only enhance technical expertise but also go beyond the work itself and are applicable life skills such as reliability, teamwork and strong work ethic.
- **Sense of accomplishment, closure, and community recognition:** Service projects have a beginning and culminate into an end that creates a sense of accomplishment and closure for youth. Community recognition of youth accomplishment is important in re-framing as positive contributors to society.
- **Focus on helping the disadvantaged:** Service that focus on helping those less fortunate engage youth in meaningful work that fulfill community needs and the need to be needed by others. Doing for others builds resiliency.
- **Building a community service program:** Building a restorative community service program in your school takes intentionality and time. The above principals are key to have in mind as you develop your program.

#### Restorative Community Service Criteria List:

- Does the community service embarrass, shame or isolate the youth? Shame and isolation don't make things right; they create disconnection and more harm. It may work to change behavior for people who have a lot of connection, support, and self-esteem. But for those who don't, for those who are acting out as an expression of trying to get needs met, shame and isolation can exacerbate the behavior.
- Are the youth seen as resources and able to apply their skills and learn new ones? New skills can be hands-on, non-academic skills, they can be academic skills, or they can be both. For example- are they learning how to build something? Are they using academic skills like reading directions? Or doing math? Remember, youth are resources too! What

are some skills your youth have that could be a community service project? Do they know how to make a video? Can they make a restorative practices one? Are they bilingual? Can they translate something for the classroom or the school?

- Are the youth able to build positive relationships with adults? Building positive relationships with adults is important. It helps youth feel connected, it provides an adult that they can trust and go to, and it creates opportunities for that adult to continue to talk about and reinforce restorative values - accountability, making things right, giving back. Which adults are they building relationships with? Do they already have a positive relationship with this adult? Are there other ways to create opportunities to build relationships with the adults they don't connect with?
- Is the community service task or project connected to what they did? For example, if a student throws food in the cafeteria, it makes sense to clean the cafeteria. If a student speaks rudely to a teacher, picking up trash around the school is not connected to the harm that was caused and therefore is not an appropriate community service task.
- Are the community service efforts and projects acknowledged? Is there a place in the building dedicating to showing the community who has given back and what they have given? Is it communicated in the newsletter? Or on the website? Via video? This helps define what community looks like and acknowledges the individuals who are contributing to that.
- Does the community service option allow students to directly help others? Part of the effectiveness of restorative practices is developing empathy for others. As a result of our life experiences, we each have different capacities to offer empathy. Creating

opportunities for people to experience empathy towards another, even if totally separate from the person(s) they impacted, helps develop and strengthen empathy skills.

**Individual Activity 6:** Look back on your response from Individual Activity 2 (page 14) where you indicated the situations when punitive discipline is often used in your educational setting. Using this same example, what type(s) of restorative process may be able to be used in place of this punitive approach? You may use any of the strategies listed in this guide or think of your own restorative process. Describe how the restorative process could be implemented and why you think it would be an effective approach.

**Group Activity 3:** In small groups, share your responses from Individual Activity 6. What similarities do you see in your responses? What differences? Where do you see opportunities for implementing restorative processes? Where are there differences in opinions?

## PART FIVE: RESTORATIVE CIRCLES

In this section we will cover:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Circles as a Restorative Practice</li> <li>2. General Circle Format</li> <li>3. Types of Circles</li> <li>4. Circle Applications in the Classroom</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Circling Tips and Responding to Challenges           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common Circle Challenges</li> <li>• Working with Challenging &amp; Emotional Circles</li> <li>• Derailer Strategies</li> </ul> </li> </ol> |
|--|--|

## CIRCLES AS A RESTORATIVE PRACTICE

Circles help build positive relationships and social- emotional skills, such as empathy and good communication skills, which affect both short-term (school success) and long-term (relationships and employment) experiences. Circles give everyone a voice. Circles can be used as a classroom strategy to strengthen staff relationships, reinforce learning, prepare students to learn, and develop beneficial lifelong skills.

**Circles can be powerful sources of building resiliency and implementing restorative processes if they are practiced consistently and predictably during times of non-conflict.**

To be effective, circles must be routinely practiced consistently during times of non-conflict. Circles are places that nurture friendship, positive social interaction and broaden an array of social connections. Restorative process practitioners practice compassionate curiosity and work to be consistently inquisitive and open minded about a students' internal emotional state: *Is this student feeling anger? Could it be fear?* Restorative process practitioners focus on repairing the harm and elevating the perspectives of students and modeling emotional regulation by embodying reflection about their own emotional and physical state and working to stay calm: *Am I calm right now? Do I need a moment to de-escalate myself?*

**Compassionate Curiosity:** The practice of approaching situations and interactions with genuine interest and desire to understand, while also approaching with kindness and empathy.

Circles build routine and predictability into the school experience for students and can be especially helpful during difficult transitions including the beginning of the day, after lunch, or after summer, winter or spring breaks. Prior to beginning a circle, a non-verbal regulation activity, like movement or music, allows students to become calm and bring their verbal capacity “online”.

During a circle:

- Participants are seated or stand in a circle so that everyone can be seen. It is important to move desks/tables to the side of room to the best extent possible.
- There is always at least one circle facilitator, and sometimes two. The role of the circle facilitator is to structure the circle process with purpose and intention, hold space for the circle, and support all voices being brought into the room. Often, and usually unconsciously, participants will situate the facilitator as an authority figure, looking to them to direct or make decisions for the group. Instead, the circle facilitator should empower the group to do the work they need to do.
- There is typically a centerpiece in the middle of the circle; the purpose of the centerpiece is to have something to center our eyes on during heartfelt discussions. For ongoing groups, centerpieces are also an opportunity for the group to build their own community by creating their centerpiece.
- A talking piece is used to give voice to the person holding it and communicate to the other circle participants that their role is to listen. Often the talking piece carries meaning

or significance for the circle facilitator and/or the group. It can be passed around the circle or shared across the circle. It is important to honor if participants would like to pass.

- Group agreements are best when they are co-created by the circle participants.
  - It is important that the agreements are written (could be on slips of paper, paper plates, or even laminated for groups coming together regularly).
  - It is also important that group agreements be positive and are generally limited to 5-6 agreements. Examples:
    - Show respect
    - One person talks at time
    - Honor time limits to ensure everyone has a chance to speak
    - Respect confidentiality
    - Speak your truth

## GENERAL CIRCLE FORMAT

This format can be amended depending on the amount of time or topic. While it can be tempting to skip the agreements and values round, it is important that you don't unless you are in a group that has been meeting in a circle for a while and have covered values in previous circles. A reoccurring group should always revisit the guidelines and values even if just briefly.

1. Opening
2. Agreements / Values
3. Introduction of Talking Piece
4. Check-In

5. Discussion Rounds
6. Check-out
7. Closing

### **Opening**

Purpose: to create a special or sacred space where everyone will come together to share ways we ordinarily don't have the opportunity to do. Also, to ground everyone, set a positive tone for participants to transition into the circle process.

- Examples of an opening: poems, quotes, guided meditation or breathing exercise
- Suggested opening language: "We have come together today to learn more about one another and to be together in a way which will make our school community (or our class group) stronger, closer and safer"

### **Group Agreements & Values**

Purpose: to allow Circle participants to identify and agree upon shared agreements for the circle. It's very important to convey the importance of agreement and to hold participants accountable to agreements as they directly impact the success of the circle.

Example of possible Circle agreements:

- Respect the talking piece: everyone listens, everyone has a turn
- Speak from the heart: your truth, your perspectives, your experiences
- Listen from the heart: let go of stories that make it hard to hear each other
- Trust that you will know what to say: no need to rehearse
- Say just enough: without feeling rushed, be concise and considerate of the time of others.
- Keep what is shared in the circle in the circle (confidentiality)

Suggested agreement language: *Here are some core circle agreements. Are there any other agreements you would like to add?*

Pass the talking piece around the circle and chart any other guidelines.

### **Values**

Circle participants identify and agree upon personal and shared group values which everyone will honor during the circle. Note: The traditional way is to ask people to bring their "best selves" to the discussion. Values are a reminder of how to *be* in Circle. Respect, honesty, trustworthiness, courage, are examples of such values.

### **Introduction of the Talking Piece**

Purpose: to create an equitable environment for sharing. Everyone gets a chance to speak or have the right to pass. For those that do not have the talking piece, it is an opportunity to actively listen to the speaker. Sometimes the talking piece may be suspended to encourage spontaneous sharing or brainstorming.

Example of a talking piece: Meaningful objects that community members can relate to or something that has meaning to someone or is relevant to the topic to be discussed (e.g. stuffed animal, rock, stone).

Suggested language: *The person holding the talking piece is the person with the turn to speak and share. Everyone else in the circle is actively listening and trying not to spend time thinking about what they are going to say.*

The talking piece usually moves in a circular format (clockwise or counterclockwise). Every person has the opportunity to speak and the right to pass if they choose. Even though someone may pass, they must still be present and participate.

### **Check-in**

Purpose: to invite participants to talk about how they are feeling on physical, mental or emotional levels at the moment.

Suggested check in language: *Name one word describing how you are feeling? If you could be a weather pattern, what pattern would describe how you are feeling right now (today)?*

### **Discussion Rounds**

Purpose: choosing a topic that is appropriate for the group to discuss will directly impact the success of the circle.

If this is a new group and you are just getting to know each other, you may ask people to share what is important to them about being in this community. A good prompting question for a circle will allow people to speak from a personal perspective about something that relates to the group. After asking a question that allows people to tell a story, you may ask a question that encourages people to speak about the issue or reason they were brought into the circle today (community building, celebration, general check-in, current event etc.).

### **Check-out**

Purpose: To invite participants to express how they are feeling at this moment as the circle is about to end.

Suggested check out language: *Share one word about how they are feeling at the end of the Circle or about what they most appreciated about the process.*

### **Closing**

Purpose: To close the circle with intention and allow participants to re-enter the world and acknowledge the work done in circle.

Examples of a closing: poems, quotes, do a guided meditation or breathing exercise, etc.

You may suggest that everyone stand shoulder to shoulder and take three deep breaths together.

You may also read a short poem or quote and with an expression of gratitude to all present for their participation.

See *Appendix A* for a Circle Planning Guide.

**Individual Activity 7:** In your own words, describe the seven steps involved in conducting a circle. Briefly describe the step and why the step is important to the overall process.

1. Opening

2. Agreements / Values

3. Introduction of Talking Piece

4. Check-In

5. Discussion Rounds

6. Check-out

7. Closing

**Group Activity 4:** In groups of two or three, share what you wrote for each of the seven steps involved in conducting a circle. If something important is shared by your group mate(s), add it to your own notes.

## TYPES OF CIRCLES

*\*Portions adapted from Circle in the Square: Building Community and Repairing Harm in School by Nancy Riestenberg*

### Relationship Building and Repairing Focused Circles

**Community Building Circles:** Community building circles help build relationships and trust within a group. These promote deeper discussions and can broaden circle topics. They often include a topic prompt and can be used in classrooms, staff meetings, community settings, etc.

Examples: Check-in and check-out circles, transition circles

- "Something you are proud of"
- "Something others might not know about you"
- "Something with which you need support"

See *Appendix B* for a list of topic ideas for Community Building Circles.

**Healing Circles/Circles of Understanding:** Healing circles and circles of understanding are listening circles that respond to harm and impact whether it is a result of an incident or ongoing history and experience. The intention is to hear each other's perspectives and not to solve an issue.

**Problem-Solving/Conflict Circles:** Conflict circles allow individuals directly involved in a conflict, as well as others affected by it, to come together to share perspectives and come up with agreements about how to repair any harm.

Examples: fights, gossip, disrespect, breaking classroom agreements

**Accountability Circles:** Accountability circles provide time for classrooms or groups that meet regularly to hold participants accountable when they step outside the group norms and impact others. Occasionally, those most directly affected may need a separate smaller circle to address

the conflict and impacts to relationships further. Accountability circles can be a meaningful way to address those impacts and reintegrate the person(s) responsible back into the group.

Examples:

- "How did you contribute to the chaos in art class yesterday? What can/could you do differently in the future?"
- "How did the outburst in our meeting yesterday impact you? Is there anything you want to take accountability for in that interaction?"

**Restorative Dialogue:** Restorative Dialogues can take different forms (more on information on *Restorative Dialogue* can be found in *Part Four*, page 35). They often utilize conferencing or mediation models. They respond to harmful behavior and can be used in situations in which law enforcement has been involved. Preparation is essential in these dialogues and caution should be taken so as to not to re-traumatize the victim(s)/survivor(s). **Facilitating these circles requires extended training and practice.**

Examples: assault, harassment, large-scale theft, criminal trespass, property crime (graffiti, etc.)

**Silent Circle:** Silent circles are especially helpful when emotions are high, due to conflict, and verbal dialogue may be difficult in the moment. Silent Circles begin with participants silently writing their responses to one or more prompts. The responses are then read out loud by the circle facilitator. After all the responses have been shared by the facilitator, a talking circle is held to identify ways to avoid conflict in the future.

**SEAD: Stop Everything and Dialogue:** SEADs are monthly school-wide circle dialogues. Staff or student groups select topics, and every classroom conducts a dialogue. In groups of 4 or 5 students then make art from the discussion and the art is posted in the halls. SEADs include four rounds of activity:

- Round 1: The leader brings the general topic to the circle.
- Round 2: To personalize the topic, participants speak about how they've experienced it.
- Round 3: Participants are challenged to act for common good.
- Round 4: Possible additional questions are included about what the school is doing to address the topic.

Sample SEAD prompts:

- "What do you think respect means?"
- "Describe a time when you showed someone respect."
- "What does it feel like when people are disrespectful?"
- "If you want, share a time when you felt disrespected."
- "What does the school do well to show respect to all the people here?"
- "What could the school do better?"
- "What suggestions do you have for the principal?"
- "What can you do show respect in this school?"

**Overall Class Recovery Intervention:** For a more global intervention for targeting/harassing, Overall Class Recovery Intervention circles can be implemented using the following progression: a) generalize the value b) personalize the value c) challenge the group to embrace the value as their own.

Example:

- What is targeting or harassing?
- Tell how you felt when you have been harassed or seen others harassed?
- (Challenge) Next time you see someone being harassed, what are you going to do?

The teacher/circle facilitator closes circle.

**Repairing Harm to Substitute Teachers:** Circles after relational harm has been caused to a substitute teacher fosters empathy, accountability, and works to prevent the behaviors from being repeated in the future.

Example:

- "When did things get off track yesterday?"
- "What could you do next time when things get off track?"
- "What could the substitute have been experiencing yesterday?"
- "What can be done to make things right?"

### Strengthening Learning Focused Circles

**Curriculum Circles:** Curriculum circles allow all students' voices to be heard in relation to class material. Students can express their opinions & emotions about a topic. Teachers can also use these circles for review and to get a sense of student comprehension.

Example:

- "Say one thing you know about the subject." "What has been challenging for you in this unit?"

**Elective Class Check-in Circle:** Moment for centering students and welcoming them into an elective class. This typically takes only 3 minutes of the class period.

Example: An art teacher welcoming students into her class who do not attend her class daily.

- "Say your name and one word to describe how you are feeling"

**Pre-Unit Knowledge Go-Around:** Classroom teachers invite students to share anything they know about a topic before the unit begins.

Example: An educator asks students to tell him what they already know about ecosystems before beginning the unit.

**Transition Circles:** Used during times of change in the normal classroom routine and experience for students.

Example: An educator is preparing to take a leave of absence and holds a circle for students to meet the substitute teacher who will be teaching for the next month.

- "What do you hope to learn from your new teacher? What could you commit to doing to help the class work together with your new teacher?"

**Individual Activity 8:** Referring to the list above, which types of circles are you open to trying in your school or classroom? What benefit do you expect to gain from the implementation?

## CIRCLE APPLICATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

*\*This section is adapted and compiled by Kathy Levine, Grant School, Duluth, Minnesota.*

To begin:

- Morning meetings to prepare students for the day ahead  
Check-in: How was your night, something good/something not so good in your life, go over schedule for the day
- To create classroom beliefs, rules, expectations
- Getting to know each other: name games, sharing, something no one knows about you, someone you wish you could have lunch with (living or dead)

## Anytime:

- Teach character/values: perseverance, respect, courage, honesty, accountability, responsibility, compassion, excellence, reverence, authenticity, random acts of kindness, people who have the value, how to demonstrate the value
- Minor behavior issues: teasing, stealing, fighting, threats, problems on the playground
- Sharing (show and tell): an item of personal significance
- Brainstorming ideas: ideas for creative writing, how to spend class money, where to go on field trips, class projects, research paper topic, planning music program
- Fun, cooperative activity: creating the class circle centerpiece, telling appropriate jokes, storytelling, ghost stories
- Reviewing: unit, quiz, test, term/quarter, for fun
- Evaluation: field trips, assemblies, books, units, projects, effort, job performance
- Goal setting: for project, subject, unit, test, behavior
- If a friend is struggling, how can we help them or help them get support?
- Debrief what did & didn't go well in your cooperative group
- Student-led circles: in class, modeling with younger students, in the evening to teach parents
- Student chosen discussion topics
- Team meetings with colleagues
- Staff meetings
- Engaging community members including families

## In closure:

- Share something good that happened that day

- Acknowledge transitions when a student or teacher is leaving
- Recognition at end of quarter/term: sharing something you are proud of that you did that quarter, celebration of improvements
- Thank you circle: thank someone who helped you or did something nice for you that day
- Debrief the day
- End of school year: highlights, what would you do differently

### CIRCLING TIPS AND RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES

Before starting a circle, read the tips below to prepare for success in utilizing the circle process.

1. Know yourself. Knowing your own triggers/experience and potentially being transparent about those when appropriate can set the tone for youth's trust in the facilitator and the circle. How you introduce the circle topic will heavily influence others participation.
2. Trust that youth are more than capable of dealing with sensitive issues.
3. Be conscientious about who starts the circle because they will set the tone for how others answer.
4. The purpose of circling around deep/sensitive topics is to bring awareness and for youth to grow and learn around the subject. If harmful language comes up, use it as a learning opportunity, and maybe check assumptions around the intent of the comments made.
5. If the expectation is that the circle is a place of trust and safety, then comments made that would impede that safety and trust should be acknowledged and gently corrected before moving on.
6. If a response that is harmful comes to the circle, be curious about the response and then put it back on the group as to the impact. Acknowledge that there are different perspectives on issues and ask for those perspectives to also come into the circle.

7. Another way to approach a sensitive subject is to have people anonymously write down responses, mix them up, and pass them out again so that no one is reading their own response. This way if something negative comes out, addressing the issue does not necessarily turn into a power struggle, and folks who might not speak up may be more likely to write something down. This could then be used as a springboard for having a deeper conversation.
8. ***If anyone is using this as a platform to be abusive and continues to be after redirection, the circle should be stopped,*** and there would need to be follow up both with the group and with the individual. If the individual is not willing to take accountability, then there should be follow-up with the group perhaps without the individual there.
9. If youth are having a hard time internalizing the topic, ask them to think of the situation with a family member or person close to them in it (what if this was your mother, sister, brother, etc.).
10. Trust the group to self-monitor: for every one person that says something inappropriate, there will often be a majority who say something meaningful.
11. Sometimes it is best to do a pair share on the topic before the circle begins, so that participants have an idea of what they will talk about.
12. A 'self-care', light group activity or focusing on a positive take away either verbally or through the arts from the circle is also helpful at the end of a group when big emotions have come up so youth aren't left sitting with intense feelings.
13. Be aware of cultural considerations, for example talking about oneself or family, might not be a cultural norm.

## Common Circle Challenges and Responses

If this...	Try this..
It's taking too long to get into a circle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice circling up</li> <li>• Circle at a consistent time</li> <li>• Time the process and challenge students to beat their time</li> <li>• Plan for furniture placement</li> <li>• Consider alternative circling spots</li> <li>• Ask students to come up with solutions</li> </ul>
The circle is taking too long	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask for check-ins to be one or two words</li> <li>• Be flexible with prompts</li> <li>• Time spent allowing kids to feel heard is well spent</li> </ul>
No one is talking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use art activities</li> <li>• It's okay not to share sometimes but do try every time</li> <li>• Start with a pair share</li> <li>• Try to set a fun and community building tone then build into serious content over time</li> <li>• Ask students to brainstorm why no one is talking</li> <li>• Ask questions students want to answer</li> </ul>
There are derailing behaviors (more on this below)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revisit agreements and values</li> <li>• Try to determine the function of the behavior and focus on that, "It seems like this topic makes you uncomfortable."</li> <li>• Engage students who derail to come up with prompts or be a circle keeper</li> <li>• Have a one-to-one restorative discussion at a different time</li> </ul>
One or two students do most of the talking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students make/bring their own talking piece</li> <li>• Consider giving natural leaders a job</li> <li>• In private conversations ask quiet students what they need to feel ready to participate more</li> </ul>
Students are sharing about private family issues, abuse, suicide, drugs or alcohol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explain what you are mandated to report before the circle begins and throughout as necessary</li> <li>• Create a plan with partners to manage this if it occurs</li> <li>• Follow up with school officials, mental health providers and nurse's immediately after the circle and make a mandated report as necessary</li> </ul>
Circle is generally not going well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult with others for ideas, suggestions, or coaching</li> <li>• Observe another circle</li> <li>• Ask a colleague to cofacilitate with you</li> <li>• Ask students how to improve the circle</li> </ul>

## Derailer Strategies

*Know Your Why: Know the purpose of your circle and always be able to come back to it.*

Derailers can impede the circle process and deter the group from the purpose of the circle. There are many reasons why a derailment might take place; regardless of the reason for the derailment, reminding participants of the established agreements and commitment made at the beginning of the circle process will help reorient participants after a derailment. Below are a few examples of derailments and potential responses from the circle facilitator:

- **Superficial response:** Respond by saying, *Thanks for saying something but the purpose of this circle is to get to know each other on a deeper level, could you add something else that means something to you?*
- **Repeater:** Respond by saying, *I just want to remind everyone the purpose of our circle is to get to know how we are both similar and different so please try and give a response that is really true for you.*
- **Gossip:** Respond by saying, *I appreciate your telling a story that is true for you but an important agreement in our circle is speaking for ourselves, since that person isn't here can you please share your learning from that experience and just speak about/for yourself? or, I want to honor our agreement to only speak for ourselves, sounds like what you learned was in that experience*
- **Passing quickly:** Respond by saying, *I want to remind us to hold the talking piece for a few seconds before passing so you give yourself time to gather your thoughts or, the more we all share the more meaningful this circle time is so its ok to pass once but we'll come back to you on the second go around.*

## PART SIX: RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND TRAUMA

In this section we will cover:

- |                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. Types of Trauma               | 3. Supporting Student Who Experience Trauma |
| 2. Responses to Traumatic Stress |   |

“If the only tool you have is a hammer you tend to see every problem as a nail.”  
-Abraham Maslow

## TYPES OF TRAUMAS

Restorative processes are especially appropriate for supporting and responding to students who have experienced any type of trauma:

- Acute trauma: a one-time occurrence related to a specific incident
- Complex trauma: exposure to multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature, and the wide-ranging, long-term impact of this exposure
- Cultural trauma: an attack on the fabric of a society, affecting the essence of the community
- Historical trauma: the cumulative exposure of traumatic events that affect an individual and continues to affect subsequent generations
- Intergenerational trauma: unresolved trauma that is internalized and passed from one generation to the next
- Secondary trauma: the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person which can result in symptoms similar to those experienced by those directly experiencing the trauma
- Vicarious trauma: the cumulative transformative effect of working with survivors of traumatic life events, including cognitive changes internal to the helper

Both secondary trauma and vicarious trauma can lead to compassion fatigue especially in those who have experienced trauma themselves at any point in their lives. It is important to be aware of the potential impacts of working with students and families who have, or are, experiencing trauma as part of any restorative work. Additionally, it is important to note that many types of traumas may be co-existing at the same time.

## RESPONSES TO TRAUMATIC STRESS

People who are impacted by trauma often have power/agency suddenly and unexpectedly taken away from them in ways that feel frightening. Students who have experienced trauma often have a difficult time calming their behaviors and emotions and are sometimes thought to be “attention seeking” or engaged in a “power struggle”. Often students express their trauma or fear with behaviors that keep them safe in most settings but can appear as aggression, rage, or other socially non-desirable behaviors in school. When actively having a trauma response, students (and adults) are unable to perform verbal reasoning and other forms of higher order thinking (e.g. cause and effect, forward thinking). For these and other reasons, students impacted by trauma often have difficulty making and keeping positive friendships.

Possessing a relational mindset (see page 1) allows educators and other adults to better understand behaviors as responses to trauma instead of a personal slight. Some of these behaviors may include:

- Adverse effects on brain development, cognitive and academic skills, and language acquisition (e.g. stutter)
- Problems focusing on and completing tasks, planning for, and anticipating future events and understanding their own contribution to what happens to them
- Sleep disturbances including dreams of the events that have occurred

- Eating disorders and disturbed body image
- Changes in the levels of stress hormones like those seen in combat veterans
- Problems with movement and sensation, problems with coordination, balance, and body tone
- Unexplained physical symptoms and medical problems (e.g., asthma, skin problems, and autoimmune disorders)
- Bodily reactions such as fast heart rates, churning stomachs, or sweatiness when re-traumatized
- Hypersensitivity to physical contact
- Insensitivity to pain
- Trouble regulating their emotions, self-soothing, or exhibiting coping skills
- Difficulties with knowing and identifying feelings, describing feelings and internal states, describing wishes and desires to others, regulating their mood, and showing coping skills
- Feeling of detachment or depersonalization, as if they are “observing” something happening to them that is unreal, withdrawing from the outside world, or demonstrating amnesia-like states
- Lack of a continuous, predictable sense of self
- Poor impulse control
- Self-destructive behavior
- Aggression towards others
- A heightened awareness of potential dangers to themselves or others
- The feeling that the world is uncertain and unpredictable
- Problems with boundaries, distrust, suspiciousness

- Low self-esteem, shame, and guilt

**Individual Activity 9:** Without using the names of students, jot down any behaviors you have witnessed in your school or classroom that may have been trauma responses.

## SUPPORTING STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCE TRAUMA

Educators can support students to build resilience and overcome trauma by being trauma sensitive and informed. Specifically, educators can:

- Intentionally create opportunities to get to know students
- Be aware of and try to avoid trauma triggers
- Provide a calm, consistent and structured environment
- Be aware of and offer strategies for self-regulation such as breathing exercises, tactile stimuli (rocks, manipulative objects like stress balls), "brain gym" activities, music and rhythm, drawing, movement such as dance, muscle relaxation such as yoga, and guided imagery
- Incorporate restorative practices that focus on not causing further harm, on building relationships, and on holding people accountable for their behaviors without rejecting them as people



## PART SEVEN: GETTING STARTED WITH IMPLEMENTING RESTORATIVE PROCESSES IN SCHOOLS

In this section we will cover:

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| 1. Implementation Basics | 2. Implementation Planning Guide and Template |
|--------------------------|---|

### IMPLEMENTATION BASICS

In this section, we will cover the basics of beginning to implement restorative practices in your school.

#### **Top Down and Bottom Up**

To create a fully restorative school community it is important to include as many stakeholders as possible in the planning, goal setting, practices, evaluation, feedback and events.

- **Top Down:** District supports, administration, and school staff need to know the philosophy and practices of restorative practices in order to know how to support the work in schools.
- **Bottom Up:** Youth, families and community partners need to be involved in every aspect of implementation. This helps ensure that those most impacted by school practices and policies are included in the planning and facilitation of practices.
- When only a few school staff are a part of planning and rollout this creates a sense of non-inclusion for other stakeholders, limits creativity in implementation and silences diverse voices and perspectives.

#### **Form Teams and Meet Regularly**

Consistency in meeting as a team is vital to sustaining the work of restorative practices and community building in schools.

- The teams should set yearly and quarterly goals and discuss how and when they will check in and evaluate whether they are meeting these goals.
- The agenda for routine meetings should also be discussed with each team, so meetings do not get overrun by escalated or pressing issues.
- When needed, other meetings should be scheduled to accommodate stakeholders' schedules and participation. Notes, ideas and planning should be shared amongst the different group meetings, so everyone knows what others are doing.

### **Set Goals and Track Progress**

Use a Restorative Practice Implementation Guide and Action Plan; set realistic goals, build in action steps and timelines to measure impact.

### **Proactive Before Reactive**

Remember that 80% of a school's restorative practices should be community building. Building a strong school-community lays foundation for circles addressing harm and escalated incidents when they occur.

## IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING GUIDE AND TEMPLATES

The steps below are designed to assist with the cultivation of a plan to implement restorative practices. Each step can be adapted as needed and we encourage utilizing the responses gathered in the individual and group activities featured throughout this guide as a starting place for planning to create a culture of connection through restorative practices.

### Step 1: Develop a Team and Prepare for Collaboration

**Identify participants:** Diverse perspectives and ideas are critical to this process. If possible, identify participants who have varying experiences at school, such as students, caregivers, and school staff. If it does not seem reasonable to involve students throughout the entire process,

schools should consider involving them at a minimum during Step 4, to assist with developing prioritizing actions to cultivate a culture of connection. Often, students have unique insight into issues negatively and positively affecting the culture (or climate) of a school, as well as innovative ideas for improvement. Additionally, if there is reason to believe certain groups of people have had poor experiences with feeling connected to school in the past, such as students who have experienced exclusionary discipline, it is important to invite members of that group to join the process to the greatest extent possible.

Step 1: List the members of your team in the space below, including their name and their current role within the school.

**Identify a facilitator:** A facilitator will guide participants through each of the steps outlined below but will not provide their own opinions or make recommendations for action steps. It is best to identify a facilitator who can be neutral during the process and is skilled in guiding groups of people through a series of steps.

**Prepare for collaboration:**

- **Prepare the space:** When the time comes to carry out the planning process, identify a comfortable space with enough tables and chairs, good lighting, and access to things needed to keep people comfortable for a couple hours or more, such as restrooms and water. Arrange tables and chairs so participants can look at and speak with each other throughout the process (e.g. circle, square, or rectangle formation).
- **Prepare the materials:** The materials needed will include:
  - Paper and writing utensils for each participant
  - Whiteboard or poster board for group discussion notes
  - Sticky notes (large to medium in size)
  - Markers: Red, orange, yellow and green
- **Prepare the participants:**
  - On his/her own, the facilitator should read through each step outlined in this process before starting the collaborative planning process with others. The facilitator should be allowed to adjust the planning process as needed to meet the needs of the group and is encouraged to use the tools listed in the appendices.
  - The participants should be encouraged to review this guide if they have not already, but it does not need to be a requirement for all participants, especially students who may be a part of the collaborative planning process.

## Step 2: Prepare and Present Information About Restorative Processes

Ideally, those who are a part of the restorative practices planning team participated in reviewing the information featured in this guide. However, if others are invited to collaborate in the planning process, such as students, it's not necessary that they review this entire guide.

1. Ask those that have reviewed this guide and participated in all the individual and group activities to review their responses and make notes of anything that feels important to consider during the collaborative planning process.
2. Ask those that have reviewed this guide to partner with someone who has not reviewed the guide (if present); ask those who have reviewed the guide to share the notes they took, providing a very high-level overview of the content of the guide and how it contextually relates to the school-community partnering in the collaborative work. If all participants have reviewed the guide, facilitate small group discussions so participants can share their thoughts with at least one other person.
3. Using a talking circle format, the facilitator will guide participants through a series of prompts and discussion rounds to first ensure all participants are aware of the purpose of the collaborative work and intended outcomes and answer any questions the participants have about the process or expectations.
  - *Note: It is recommended that the facilitator utilize the Circle Planning Guide (Appendix A) to prepare for the collaborative process*
  - Recommended discussion round prompts:
    - What comes to mind when you hear the term: culture of connection?
    - What excites you the most when it comes to implementing restorative practices in your school?
    - What challenges do you foresee?
    - What questions do you have right now?

- Ask someone to write these questions down on a whiteboard or poster paper. After everyone has responded to this prompt, answer questions that are necessary to answer before moving forward. Continue to circle back to remaining questions as the group moves forward with the collaborative work and answer other questions as they arise.

### Step 3. Develop Vision and Major Themes

Developing themes across responses from individuals involves looking for similarities, patterns, or trends which can create a vision for the collaborative work and set priority areas for action.

1. Using whiteboard or poster paper, the facilitator should write the themes that came in response to the first circle prompt from Step 1, *What comes to mind when you hear the term: culture of connection?*. Give each participant an opportunity to add to the themes identified by the facilitator. Use responses to develop a “vision” for the school that represents what a culture of connection looks like and feels like. Document the vision in a separate area and continue to circle back to the vision as necessary to keep work aligned with the established vision for the work.
2. Once a vision for the work has been established, ask participants to individually write responses to the following prompts:
  - *Thinking about the vision we have for this work, write down responses to these questions:*
    - *Start: What new restorative practices could be implemented to help us achieve our vision of creating a culture of connection?*

- *Stop: What practices are currently being used that could keep us from achieving our vision of creating a culture of connection?*
  - *Continue: What practices are currently in place that are already assisting us in achieving our vision of creating a culture of connection?*
3. Create three separate areas on a whiteboard or poster paper with the headings of *Start*, *Stop*, and *Continue*. In groups of 2 or 3 people ask participants to share their individual responses to the three questions asked in the previous activity; try to ensure at least one person in each small group has read through the entirety of this guide. In small groups, identify commonalities between individual responses and responses that feel important for further consideration. Encourage participants to keep the *vision* of the work in mind during small group discussions.
  4. Using sticky notes, ask each small group to write the ideas they would like to bring forward to the whole group on individual sticky notes (one idea per sticky note) and place the sticky note under the category the strategy falls under: *Start*, *Stop*, or *Continue*. Ensure any participating students are afforded equitable opportunities to weigh in on ideas (this could happen by grouping students together with the facilitator).
  5. Once responses are recorded on sticky notes and placed in their respective categories, the facilitator should review the responses and group responses that are alike together. The facilitator should then read aloud each proposed practice listed under each category (*Start*, *Stop*, *Continue*) and allow time for questions to clarification.

#### Step 4: Prioritizing Actions

- Provide each participant with a copy of the handout below.

## Creating a Culture of Connection: Prioritizing Actions Handout (Page 1 of 2)

Often, through these processes, many good ideas are generated as strategies that could be implemented to create a culture of connection but may surpass the real capacity of the school to implement. The matrix below can be used to prioritize action steps to help schools prioritize strategies more effectively by asking:

- How many people will be positively impacted by the proposed strategy?
- How difficult is the proposed strategy to implement?

### Potential Positive Impact

The potential impact on the school community provides an opportunity to consider what actions will positively impact the highest number of people and help school leaders focus interventions on populations in the most need of positive action.

- **Some positive effects:** This includes interventions that will have a minimal positive effect on the school community and/or will only impact a small number of students.
- **Some noticeable positive effects:** This includes interventions that will have a noticeable effect on a small group of students.
- **Focused positive effects:** This includes interventions that will positively impact a specific group (or groups) of students with specific needs who require focused attention on their school experience.
- **Universal positive effects:** This includes interventions that have the potential to positively impact all (or nearly all) students.

### Likelihood of Implementing

Some strategies to foster a culture of connection will be easier to implement than others. Considering the likelihood of implementing strategies, such as costs and time needed to implement them, can help school leaders be realistic in the action steps they create and more quickly reach the established vision of creating a culture of connection.

- **Very difficult to implement:** This includes strategies that would be very difficult to implement for various reasons, such as cost and time needed to implement the intervention effectively. These strategies may also be ones that could not be easily implemented in the current school system (i.e., strategies that would drastically change the current day-to-day operations of the school).
- **Fairly difficult to implement:** This includes strategies that would have some difficulty to implement, including those that may have a moderate amount of expense, require a lot of dedicated time and effort, and would require additional steps to be made for the strategy to be successful in the current school system.
- **Mildly difficult to implement:** This includes strategies that can be implemented with minimal effort and/or expense. These strategies are also those that can be implemented into the existing school system with minimal difficulty.
- **Easy to implement:** This includes strategies that can be implemented with very minimal effort, including strategies that cost little to no money and/or can be easily implemented in the current school system.

**Creating a Culture of Connection: Prioritizing Actions Handout (Page 2 of 2)**

**Action Item Prioritizing Matrix:**

		<b>Potential Impact on School Community</b>			
		Some Positive Effects	Some Noticeable Positive Effect	Focused Positive Effects	Universal Positive Effects
<b>Likelihood of Implementing</b>	Very Difficult to Implement	<b>LOW</b>	<b>LOW</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>
	Fairly Difficult to Implement	<b>LOW</b>	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH</b>	<b>HIGH</b>
	Mildly Difficult to Implement	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH</b>	<b>TOP</b>	<b>TOP</b>
	Easy to Implement	<b>MEDIUM</b>	<b>HIGH</b>	<b>TOP</b>	<b>TOP</b>

2. After reviewing the handout, the facilitator will guide the participants through the process of discussing and ranking each strategy identified in Step 3. Using colored markers, the facilitator will indicate the ranking of each proposed idea/strategy in accordance with the categories of: low priority (red), medium priority (orange), high priority (yellow), top priority (green). If needed, use consensus voting to determine the ranking of each strategy if there is a difference of opinion on how the strategy should be ranked. Ensure students have equitable opportunity to weigh in on the rankings of strategies.
3. After the ranking of the strategies concludes, use a whiteboard or poster paper to create a summary of the recommendations which will be passed on to school leadership for further consideration and implementation. The summary document should include these details:
  - Top priority strategies to start, stop and continue
  - High priority strategies to start, stop and continue
  - Medium priority strategies to start, stop and continue
  - Low priority strategies to start, stop, and continue
4. Close the collaborative process with a closing talking circle.
  - *Note: It is recommended that the facilitator utilize the Circle Planning Guide (Appendix A) to prepare for the collaborative process*
  - Recommended discussion round prompts:
    1. *What one to two words describe how you're feeling after participating in this process?*
    2. *Do you have anything else you would like to say before we close out?*

5. Thank participants for their time and work and provide contact information of person (i.e. school leadership) who will be available for participants to reach out to with follow-up questions and to receive updates on the implementation of restorative practices.

## APPENDIX A

### Circle Planning Guide

1. What is the purpose or goal of your circle?

(ex. Community building, check-in, address specific classroom issue, curriculum/content... etc.)

2. Circle Introduction:

(How will you introduce and convey the reason for the circle to the participants?)

3. Establish core agreements & values:

- How would you like to establish your group agreements?
- What additional questions will you ask to create shared values?
- How will they be visible to the group?

4. Opening

(How will you open the circle? A poem, quote, song, breathing, story...?)

5. Introduction of Talking Piece.

(What object are you using and why?)

6. Check-In

(What question will you ask for the initial check-in round? Example: On a scale of 1-10, today I am a \_\_\_\_\_)

7. Discussion Rounds (What needs to be addressed in the circle? What questions will you ask?

How many rounds will you facilitate?)

To consider: Are the questions you are asking high or low risk?

Does the question directly or indirectly address the goal and purpose for the circle?

What are some potential challenges that may surface?

How will you handle them?

8. Check out (What question do you want to present to bring closure to the circle? ex. how are people doing right now?)

9. Closing (How will you close the circle, praise and celebrate the participation of the circle members? (Quote, song breathing, story...?)

## APPENDIX B

## Community Building Circle Topic Options:

- A person I admire
- Something I like to do alone/with others
- An important event in my life
- My favorite place
- Something about me that you wouldn't know unless I told you
- If I only had one wish what would it be
- One way I wish I could be different
- What I value most in a friend
- A special occasion or holiday related to my culture
- Something about my culture that I appreciate
- Something that makes me especially happy/sad
- A time I got my feelings hurt
- Someone who respects me
- A secret fear I have
- Something in my life I'm happy about
- A time I was alone but not lonely
- A time I was afraid to do something but did it anyway
- Something I do for my own well-being
- Something I did or made that I'm proud of
- Something I like about myself

- A time I stood up for something I strongly believe in or wish I had
- I helped someone who needed and wanted my help
- One of the most caring people I know
- A time someone misunderstood my point of view
- A time I felt included
- A time I was afraid to face a conflict
- Something that really bothers me

## APPENDIX C

**INTERCULTURAL LENS CIRCLE: A RESTORATIVE COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY FOR TEACHERS****Purpose**

To help teachers practice restorative communication skills while exploring how cultural backgrounds influence perceptions, conflict responses, and relationship-building in the classroom.

**Time**

45–60 minutes

**Group Size**

6–20 participants

**Materials**

- Scenario cards (provided below)
- Talking piece
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Markers

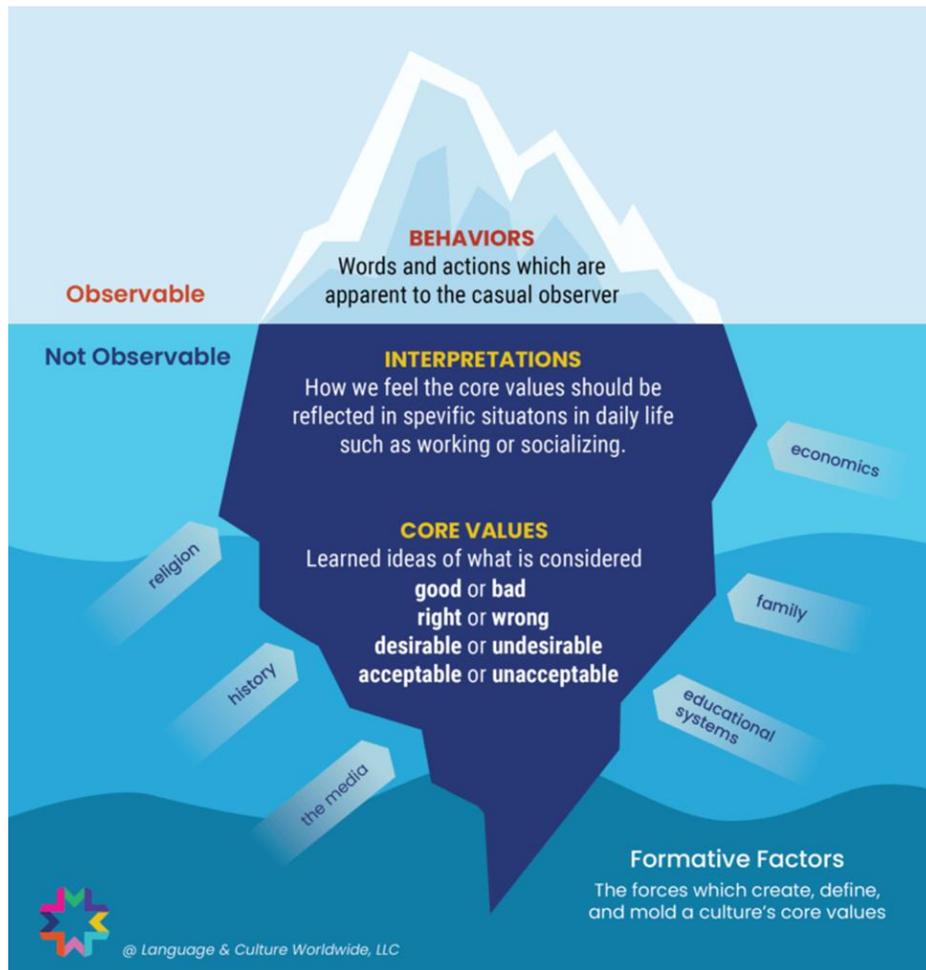
**Learning Outcomes**

By the end of the activity, teachers will:

- Recognize some of their own cultural assumptions in classroom interactions
- Identify hidden cultural factors that can escalate or diffuse conflict
- Practice restorative questioning that invites student voice
- Strengthen empathetic listening across cultural differences
- Develop culturally responsive strategies for repairing harm

## 1. Warm-Up: Cultural Iceberg (10 min)

- Facilitator shows an image of the “cultural iceberg.”
- Teachers discuss in pairs:
  - *Which aspects of culture are most visible in our students?*
  - *Which hidden cultural elements might affect how they interpret conflict or authority?*
- Facilitator links this to restorative practice: understanding what’s beneath the surface is essential for repairing harm



## 2. Scenario Circles (25–30 min)

Teachers move into a **restorative circle** with a talking piece.

### Instructions

1. Each group receives a scenario card (see below).
2. Participants reflect on:
  - a. How their own cultural lens might interpret the situation
  - b. How a student’s cultural lens might differ
  - c. Potential misunderstandings rooted in communication styles, values, or norms
3. Each person speaks in turn using the talking piece.
4. After first round, facilitator introduces **restorative prompts**:

### Restorative Prompts

- *What happened from your perspective?*
- *What assumptions might people make in this situation?*
- *How could cultural factors shape what each person needs?*
- *What questions would help you understand the student’s story better?*
- *How can RP help bridge cultural differences here?*

## 3. Reflection Mapping (10–15 min)

Groups create a visual representation on chart paper showing:

- Cultural factors influencing the scenario
- Possible sources of misunderstanding
- Restorative questions or strategies that help repair harm
- Inclusive communication approaches (e.g., validating silence, avoiding assumptions, inviting context-sharing)

Maps are shared briefly with the full group.

### Scenario Cards

#### Scenario 1: “The Disrespect”

A student avoids eye contact and gives one-word answers when spoken to about a conflict. A teacher interprets this as dismissive or disrespectful.

#### Cultural lenses to explore:

- Eye-contact norms
- Power distance
- Approaches to conflict (direct vs. indirect)

### **Scenario 2: “The Loud Group”**

A group of students communicate loudly and passionately during a group project. Another group sees this as aggressive and complains.

#### **Cultural lenses:**

- Expressiveness norms
- Collective vs. individual communication styles
- Emotional display rules

### **Scenario 3: “The Family Story”**

During a restorative conference, a parent answers for the child. The teacher worries the student’s voice is being overshadowed.

#### **Cultural lenses:**

- Family hierarchy
- Elders as spokespeople
- Role of children in formal conversations

### **Scenario 4: “The Rule Breaker”**

A student frequently speaks out of turn but is highly engaged. Teacher sees this as defiance; student sees it as participation.

#### **Cultural lenses:**

- Classroom turn-taking norms
- High-context vs. low-context communication
- Value placed on debate and dialogue

	<b>Low-Context</b>	<b>High-Context</b>
<b>Example Countries</b>	US, UK, Canada, Germany, Denmark, Norway	Japan, China, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, France, Italy, Spain
<b>Business Outlook</b>	<b>Competitive</b>	<b>Cooperative</b>
<b>Work Ethic</b>	<b>Task-oriented</b>	<b>Relationship-oriented</b>
<b>Work Style</b>	<b>Individualistic</b>	<b>Team-oriented</b>
<b>Employee Desires</b>	<b>Individual achievement</b>	<b>Team achievement</b>
<b>Relationships</b>	<b>Many, looser, short-term</b>	<b>Fewer, tighter, long-term</b>
<b>Decision Process</b>	<b>Logical, linear, rule-oriented</b>	<b>Intuitive, relational</b>
<b>Communication</b>	<b>Verbal over Non-verbal</b>	<b>Non-verbal over Verbal</b>
<b>Planning Horizons</b>	<b>More explicit, written, formal</b>	<b>More implicit, oral, informal</b>
<b>Sense of Time</b>	<b>Present/Future-oriented</b>	<b>Deep respect for the past</b>
<b>View of Change</b>	<b>Change over tradition</b>	<b>Tradition over change</b>
<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Explicit, conscious</b>	<b>Implicit, not fully conscious</b>
<b>Learning</b>	<b>Knowledge is transferable (above the waterline)</b>	<b>Knowledge is situational (below the waterline)</b>