

Restorative Practices

If you haven't heard the term "restorative practices," you soon will. Restorative practices in education are based on an approach to building healthy school relationships and a strong sense of community—a community that allows students and educators to make positive connections in a safe and supportive environment.

Restorative practices aren't intended to replace current initiatives and evidence-based programs like Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) or social and emotional learning models that assist in building a foundation and culture of caring. Programs and initiatives like PBIS complement restorative practices.

In one Baltimore City school where restorative practices have been in place since September, one simple practice—talking circles—was used after the unrest following Freddie Gray's funeral to help ease tensions for both school staff and students. Before the school day started, staff "circled up," then each homeroom did, too. Already comfortable with the process, both adults and children used their safe circle time to find common ground and set the stage for moving forward.

Schools using restorative practices are making news across the country as districts choose relationship-building, problem-solving, positive confrontation, and discussion to address student behavior. Instead of suspension and expulsion, restorative practices encourage students to repair harm, restore



relationships, and strengthen their community.

The Pennsylvania-based International Institute for Restorative Practices, which supports The Restorative Works Learning Network programs used in Baltimore City Schools, says that the fundamental premise of restorative practices is that people are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes when those in positions of authority

do things with them, rather than to them or for them.

What are restorative practices?

- Restorative justice focuses on righting a wrong committed and repairing harm done. The goal is to place value on relationships and focus on repairing relationships that have been injured.

- Community conferencing involves the participation of each person affected by the behavior and allows all stakeholders to contribute to the conflict resolution process.

- Community service allows for individuals to restore a harm they may have committed to the school community.

- Peer juries allow students who have broken a school rule and trained student jurors to collectively discuss why the rule was

broken, who was affected, and how the referred student can repair the harm caused.

- A circle is a versatile restorative practice that can be used proactively, to develop relationships, and build community; or reactively, to respond to wrongdoings, conflicts, and problems.
- Conflict resolution programs teach young people how to manage potential conflict, defuse situations, assuage hurt feelings, and reduce any inclination to retaliate after a conflict.

- Peer mediation has been shown to reduce discipline referrals, violence rates, and suspension rates.

- Informal restorative practices include the use of affective statements, which communicate people's feelings, and affective questions, which cause people to reflect on how their behavior affects others.

- Social-emotional learning teaches skills that allow children and adults to calm themselves when angry, make friends, resolve conflicts respectfully, and make ethical and safe choices.

Learn more by reading NEA's guide at otlcampaign.org/restorative-practices, and visiting restorativeworks.net for news, free webinars, and resources.