

# Aligning Caring School Community and Restorative Practices

## Restorative Practices

Restorative practices are formal and informal processes that proactively build healthy relationships and a sense of community to prevent and address conflict and wrongdoing. By creating a caring and supportive school culture with healthy relationships between and among educators and students, restorative practices can prevent and reduce behaviors that are harmful. These relationships also make it possible to repair harm and restore positive relationships when mistakes are made. Restorative practices help those who have engaged in harmful behavior to take responsibility for their actions and understand how their behavior affected others while also acting to repair the harm that has been caused. As the International Institute for Restorative Practices states, “The aim of restorative practices is to develop community and to manage conflict and tensions by repairing harm and building relationships. This statement identifies both proactive (building relationships and developing community) and reactive (repairing harm and restoring relationships) approaches” (Wachtel 2016).

Circles and conferences are common classroom structures in schools that use restorative practices. Proactively, circles are used to:

- Build relationships and community
- Teach social skills
- Celebrate students
- Teach problem-solving and listening skills
- Allow a safe space to speak, listen, and offer perspectives

Circles can also be used reactively to:

- Respond to problems
- Address conflicts
- Respond to wrongdoing

The following are a few helpful resources for understanding restorative practices:

- “Defining Restorative” (<https://www.iirp.edu/restorative-practices/defining-restorative/>)
- “Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools” (<http://schottfoundation.org/resources/restorative-practices-toolkit>)
- “Fix School Discipline: Toolkit for Educators” ([http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/FSD\\_EducatorToolkit\\_small.pdf](http://www.fixschooldiscipline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/FSD_EducatorToolkit_small.pdf))

## Caring School Community®

The *Caring School Community* program is a social and emotional learning (SEL) and discipline program designed to help students become caring, responsible members of their school communities, and to grow into humane, principled, and skilled citizens of a democratic society. From day one of kindergarten through the last day of grade 8, the lessons in the program help teachers create warm, safe, and disciplined classroom environments where students can develop the skills and dispositions they need to interact constructively with others. The program accomplishes this by:

- Building caring relationships between and among students and adults
- Directly teaching social skills
- Creating calm, orderly learning environments through the use of effective classroom management practices

In a manner similar to restorative practices, the *Caring School Community* program uses meetings and a circle structure to build relationships, teach social and emotional skills, and solve problems. In the *Caring School Community* program, each day starts with a Morning Circle and ends with a Closing Circle. These structures help build community, provide opportunities to practice social and emotional skills, and help students begin and end each day in a calm, caring,



and respectful way. Additionally, class meetings are used to help solve problems, make class decisions, and provide students with a sense of autonomy and voice in the classroom. Finally, the program's approach to discipline eschews extrinsic rewards and punishments in favor of helping students develop self-discipline. Like restorative practices, the *Caring School Community* program supports students as they shoulder the responsibility for repairing and restoring relationships, while ensuring that dignity and respect for all students are maintained.

To discover more about the *Caring School Community* program, visit <https://www.collaborativeclassroom.org/programs/caring-school-community/>.

## **Using the *Caring School Community* Program and Restorative Practices Together**

The *Caring School Community* program and restorative practices are partnered together in many schools and districts. Sharing similar views on supporting student development and having complementary classroom practices make it possible to combine the two approaches.

When using restorative practices with the *Caring School Community* program:

- Use the class meetings and the Morning Circle, Closing Circle, and Cross-age Buddies activities from *Caring School Community* to teach the social and emotional skills and deepen relationships. This can serve as the Tier 1 support for students.
- Ensure that the staff discusses how restorative practices will integrate with the school's vision for supporting students when developing the school culture statement as detailed in the *Principal's Leadership Guide*.
- Use *Caring School Discipline* and restorative circles for Tier 2 and Tier 3 support of student behavior.
- Use the *Caring School Community* program to set the context and develop the skills for students to use restorative practices.

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## **References**

Wachtel, Ted. 2016. "Defining Restorative." <https://www.iirp.edu/restorative-practices/defining-restorative/>.