

What Are Restorative Approaches In Education?

Restorative Approaches are a range of practices used to manage behaviour in schools. They range from informal **Restorative Conversations** and **Restorative Enquiry** through to **Restorative Mediation, Mini-Conferences** and full **Restorative Conferences**.

The term '**Restorative Practices**' is used in education to mean:

- restoring good relationships when there has been conflict or harm;
- developing school ethos, policies and procedures that reduce the possibilities of such conflict and harm.

Experience has shown that Restorative Approaches provide a useful and effective short to medium term way of responding to incidents in schools, and that regular use of these approaches helps to develop pupils' understanding of the consequences of problematic behaviour and to reduce its frequency and severity.

Restorative Approaches are not entirely new, but offer a framework within which existing good practice can build and develop. Restorative Approaches are complementary to other important approaches in use in Highland including **Staged Intervention**, the development of **Emotional Literacy, Solution-Focussed thinking and meetings** and **Person Centred Planning**. Restorative Approaches add a new dimension to thinking and practice in relation to achieving Inclusion.

What are Restorative Enquiry and Restorative Conversation?

Restorative Enquiry, Restorative Conversations and restorative language can be used on a daily and routine basis with students and colleagues. There are many situations in a school day where active non-judgemental listening and sharing of feelings can be used. This is relatively easy if the people are not in conflict with each other, but can also be used when conversations are difficult and people see things differently.

Restorative Enquiry involves curiosity:

"How do you feel about that?"

can involve actively owning a problem:

"I have a problem that I would like to discuss"

"Can I tell you what happened from my perspective?"

and aims to resolve issues:

"Why don't you tell me how you see things. I'll do the same and then we can try and sort this out."

Restorative Enquiry also describes a way of listening and responding to other people's points of view. It also involves the use of open body language, listening with empathy

and listening for feelings and needs. The listener takes a neutral perspective and aims to help the other person identify what needs to be done in order to put things right or move on.

In a school setting this could include a discussion between a teacher and a student following an incident that has caused concern to either person. It would replace the more prevalent approach of “telling off” following what is sometimes called ‘disruptive behaviour’, usually attributed to the young person. The approach may allow the meanings behind the behaviour to be expressed, through exploring the feelings and thoughts that occurred before, during and after an incident.

What is Mediation

Mediation is a process in which people in conflict are supported by a neutral third party to hear each other’s viewpoints and to find a mutually acceptable way forward. It gives people the opportunity to appreciate the impact of their behaviour on other people – whether this was wilful or inadvertent. Peer Mediation is the term given to this process when the mediators are young people working with other youngsters. A key principle of mediation is that the people with the conflict are in the best position to find ways to resolve it.

What is Restorative Conferencing?

Mini-Conferences

Mini-conferences involve a group of people working together with a neutral facilitator to resolve conflict, repair relationships and move forward. It follows a structured, scripted framework, within which everyone has the opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings about the issue being discussed and the impact it had on them. A mini-conference can conclude with an agreement that is written up and signed by everyone involved.

Full Restorative Conferences

A full Restorative Conference involves the wider school community.

Where a serious incident has occurred a highly structured, scripted process occurs. The process not only consists of the people directly involved in an incident, but also their parents/supporters. Key school personnel may also be invited. The Conference takes place in a room where everyone can sit in a circle where thought is given to who should sit where. The Conference facilitator will have spoken with everyone involved prior to the meeting to prepare them for the process, answering questions and queries. It is important that everyone present has volunteered to attend and feels safe. The Conference is intended to be a positive experience from which people can benefit.

The purposes of the conference are to establish what harm has been done, what is needed to put things right and how the situation can be avoided in the future.

Where Can I Find Out More?

More information about Restorative Approaches can be found on the following websites;

www.transformingconflict.org

www.restorativepractices.org

www.sacro.org.uk

www.scottishmediation.org.uk

www.iirp.org

www.teacherstv.com

Key books include;

‘Just Schools: A Whole School Approach To Restorative Justice’, Belinda Hopkins, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004

‘Restorative Practices In Schools’, Margaret Thorsborne & David Vinegrad, Incentive Publishing, 2004

‘Restorative Practices In Classrooms’, Margaret Thorsborne & David Vinegrad, Incentive Publishing, 2004

For more information about the development of Restorative Practices in schools in Highland contact;

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