

Restorative Justice Classroom Practices Pack

A Complete Toolkit for Building Community & Repairing Harm

Grades 4-10

UM Printables

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1. Introduction to Restorative Practices

Restorative Justice (RJ) in education is a proactive approach to building community and responding to harm. Rather than focusing on punishment, which often alienates students and fails to address the root cause of behavior, restorative practices focus on accountability, understanding impact, and repairing relationships.

Core Principles of Restorative Practices

- Relationships are central: Building and maintaining healthy relationships is the foundation of a positive school climate.
- Harm causes obligations: When harm occurs, it creates an obligation to repair that harm.
- Involves all stakeholders: The process must involve those who have been harmed, those who have caused the harm, and the broader community.
- Focus on the future: Restorative practices are solution-oriented, focusing on what needs to happen to make things right and move forward.

The Restorative Practices Continuum

Restorative practices exist on a continuum from informal to formal. This pack provides tools across the entire spectrum:

- Affective Statements: Expressing feelings to build empathy (Informal)
- Circle Discussions: Structured dialogue for community and problem-solving (Semi-formal)
- Re-Entry Plans & Conflict Resolution: Structured processes to repair harm and welcome students back (Formal)

2. Affective Statements Reference Guide

Affective statements (or 'I' statements) are the building blocks of a restorative classroom. They allow educators and students to communicate how behavior impacts them emotionally, without placing blame or shaming. This builds empathy and self-awareness.

The Formula for an Affective Statement

I feel [emotion] when [behavior] because [impact]

Optional addition: '...and I would like [need/request].'

Examples: Academic Behaviors

- I feel frustrated when assignments are turned in without names because it takes time to figure out who they belong to.
- I feel proud when the class works quietly during independent reading because it shows we value focus.
- I feel concerned when you put your head down during the lesson because I worry you are missing important information.
- I feel grateful when everyone brings their materials to class because it helps our day start smoothly.

Examples: Peer Relationships

- I feel sad when I hear unkind words in the hallway because this should be a safe space for everyone.
- I feel happy when I see students helping each other with math problems because it shows strong collaboration.
- I feel disappointed when side conversations distract the group because it disrespects the speaker.
- I feel anxious when arguments break out at recess because I want everyone to feel included.

Examples: Community & Classroom Climate

- I feel respected when the classroom is left clean at the end of the day because it shows care for our shared space.
- I feel valued when you share your opinions in discussions because your voice matters to our community.
- I feel overwhelmed when multiple people call out at once because I cannot hear anyone clearly.
- I feel hopeful when we solve our problems together because it makes our community stronger.

Tips for Effective Affective Statements

- Be genuine: Students can detect insincerity. Share your true feelings calmly.
- Keep it neutral: Avoid tone of voice that sounds angry or sarcastic. The goal is to inform, not to guilt.
- Focus on the behavior, not the person: Never use statements that attack a student's character.
- Practice proactively: Use positive affective statements frequently to build a culture of emotional literacy before conflict arises.

3. Circle Discussion Protocols

Restorative circles are a versatile and powerful tool for building community, resolving conflict, and supporting academic growth. Unlike traditional classroom discussions where the teacher manages turn-taking, circles distribute power equally, giving every student a voice.

Universal Circle Guidelines

Before conducting any circle, review these community guidelines with your students:

- Listen with respect: Give the speaker your full attention. Avoid side conversations.
- Speak from the heart: Share honestly, but always with kindness and respect for others.
- Pass with purpose: It is okay to pass if you are not ready to speak, but remain engaged in the circle.
- What is shared here stays here: Respect the confidentiality of personal stories shared in the circle (unless someone is in danger).
- Use the talking piece: Only the person holding the talking piece speaks. Everyone else listens.

Protocol 1: Community Building Circle

Purpose: To build relationships, establish trust, and create a sense of belonging. This circle should be used frequently (daily or weekly) before using circles for conflict resolution.

Time: 15-20 minutes

Materials: Talking piece (a small object that holds meaning, like a stone, stress ball, or decorated stick)

Steps:

- 1. Setup: Arrange chairs in a circle without desks. The facilitator sits as an equal member.
- 2. Opening: Facilitator introduces the guidelines and the talking piece.
- 3. Round 1 (Low-Stakes Check-In): 'Share your name and one thing you are looking forward to this weekend.' (Pass option available)
- 4. Round 2 (Connection Prompt): 'If you could have any superpower for one day, what would it be and why?' or 'What is a skill you have that you are proud of?'
- 5. Round 3 (Deeper Connection): 'Describe a time when someone showed you kindness. How did it make you feel?'
- 6. Closing: Facilitator thanks the group for participating and shares a brief observation about the group's strength.

Session 2

The Power of Affective Language

Objective: Learn to use affective statements to build empathy and communicate impact.

Key Concept: Expressing Emotion Without Blame

Affective statements (I feel... when... because...) are the most informal and frequent restorative tool. They build a culture of emotional literacy. When we share how behavior impacts us, we invite empathy rather than defensiveness. Avoid statements that attack character (e.g., 'You are so disrespectful') and replace them with statements about impact (e.g., 'I feel disrespected when you talk while I am talking because it makes it hard for others to hear').

Practice Activity (20 mins)

Using the Affective Statements Reference Guide from this pack, rewrite the following punitive statements as affective statements:

1. *"Stop running in the hallways!"*
2. *"You failed this test because you never pay attention."*
3. *"Why are you always late?"*

Have staff share their rewrites in small groups and provide feedback.

Action Step for Next Week

- Use at least 3 positive affective statements a day (e.g., 'I feel so proud when I see you helping a peer because...').
- Replace one reprimand with an affective statement when a student is off-task.

Session 3

Facilitating Restorative Circles

Objective: Understand the structure and facilitation of proactive community circles.

Key Concept: The Proactive Power of Circles

Circles are not just for conflict. Proactive circles build the social capital needed to weather difficult situations. A circle relies on a shared symbol (the talking piece), which equalizes power, slows down conversations, and ensures every voice is heard. Without proactive circles, reactive circles during conflict will feel forced and ineffective.

Circle Facilitation Tips (10 mins)

- Model vulnerability: The facilitator should go first to set the tone and depth of the circle.
- Embrace silence: Allow for pauses after someone speaks; do not rush to fill the void.
- Allow passing: Forcing students to speak breaks trust. They will speak when they are ready.

Practice Activity (20 mins)

Facilitate a brief Community Building Circle with the staff using the prompts from Protocol 1 in this pack. Give staff the experience of being participants.

Action Step for Next Week

- Conduct one proactive Community Building Circle with your students. Start with low-stakes prompts (e.g., favorite foods, weekend plans) before moving to deeper topics.

Session 4

Repairing Harm & Re-Entry

Objective: Learn the process of repairing harm and utilizing re-entry plans.

Key Concept: The Restorative Questions

When harm occurs, we must separate the deed from the doer. Instead of asking 'Why did you do that?' (which invites defensiveness or 'I don't know'), we use specific restorative questions to explore impact and accountability.

Questions for the person who caused harm:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- Who has been affected by what you did? In what way?
- What do you think you need to do to make things right?

The Re-Entry Process

When a student returns from a suspension or severe exclusion, they often feel shame or alienation, which leads to repeated behavior. A Re-Entry Plan (provided in this pack) ensures the student understands the impact of their actions, has a clear path to repair harm, and feels welcomed back into the community. The goal is reintegration, not continued isolation.

Practice Activity (20 mins)

Review the Re-Entry Plan Template and the Conflict Resolution Circle Protocol (Protocol 3). Role-play a re-entry meeting in groups of three (Facilitator, Returning Student, Teacher) using a hypothetical scenario: 'A student was excluded for 3 days for a verbal altercation with a peer.'

Final Action Step

- Commit to using the Re-Entry Plan Template for the next student who returns from an exclusionary discipline event.
- Reflect on your journey over these four sessions. What is one restorative practice you will commit to using daily?

Final Thoughts

"Restorative justice is not a program to be implemented; it is a way of being to be embraced."

Shifting from punitive discipline to restorative practices is a journey, not an overnight transformation. There will be days when it feels easier to simply hand out a detention or send a student out of the room. On those days, remember why you started this work: every student deserves to feel valued, heard, and capable of growth.

Restorative practices do not excuse harmful behavior; rather, they demand that students face the true impact of their actions and take active steps to make things right. This is a much harder - and much more meaningful - path than passive punishment.

As you implement the affective statements, circles, and re-entry plans in this pack, give yourself and your students grace. Building a restorative classroom community takes time, consistency, and courage. But the result - a classroom built on mutual respect, empathy, and genuine accountability - is profoundly worth the effort.

Thank you for choosing to do the hard work of healing and connection. Your students are lucky to have a teacher who believes in their capacity to repair harm and do better tomorrow.

Wishing you a restorative and transformative school year,

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