

Quick Start Guide to Restorative Approaches in the Classroom for Teachers

Carol Carpenter, 2017©

This document was written using the font "Century Gothic"
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Acknowledgements

In the past few years I have particularly appreciated the restorative, hopeful messages described in the following books:

Stitches: A Handbook on Meaning, Hope and Repair by Anne Lamott, Penguin, 2013.
Better Than Carrots or Sticks: Restorative Practices for Classroom Management by Dominique Smith, Douglas Fisher, and Nancy Frey, ASCD, 2015.
Daring Greatly by Brené Brown, Penguin, 2015.
Rising Strong by Brené Brown, Avery, 2012.
The Courage to Teach by Parker Palmer, Wiley, 1997.
Let Your Life Speak by Parker J. Palmer, Wiley, 1999.
Helping Children Succeed: What Works and Why by Paul Tough, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.
A Spring Within Us: A Book of Daily Meditations by Fr. Richard Rohr, Center for Action and Contemplation, CAC Publishing 2016.

Also, online contributions of Dr. Belinda Hopkins of Transforming Conflict, a restorative approaches organization in the United Kingdom www.transformingconflict.org. I am very grateful for her personal feedback in this work.

Any direct quotations or paraphrased thoughts by any of these writers are cited in the text. Additionally, I am happy to acknowledge that I have been influenced by all of the above mentioned authors and many others whose thoughts have improved by understanding and been woven into mine.

Introduction

The Columbine High School shootings happened in my community; the word "Columbine" became an international symbol of tragic loss of life on a school campus. I am committed to doing everything possible to prevent additional school tragedies.

Following the Columbine shootings, the widely-adopted response was Zero Tolerance when dealing with school rule violations, some of which were unrelated to violence. In hopes of providing safer schools, discipline policies were tightened, in the Denver area and across the United States.

Sadly, the Zero Tolerance policies have not stopped school violence, nor have they helped students learn to deal with conflict peaceably. We have learned that suspensions are not effective in changing the behavior of students. In fact, the research tells us that high suspension rates in schools contribute to the "School-to-Prison-Pipeline."

Many educators have begun to consider the root causes of violence, responding with prevention strategies and restorative conversations that have a powerful impact on helping students change destructive behavior. A strong movement has developed that parallels Restorative Justice in the court system. In schools, we refer to the process as Restorative Practices or Restorative Approaches.

As a community of educators, we have examined evidence about Columbine and other school shootings. What are the root causes of conflict and school violence? How do we handle conflict and avoid violence? We begin with creating classrooms that are positive and healthy places to learn and develop positive connections. With Restorative Practices, or as is most recently being called Restorative Approaches, we have good strategies for establishing a culture that is positive, one that supports a safe learning environment.

Chapter 1 My Personal Journey in Understanding Restorative Approaches

I became involved in Restorative Practices in 2000. I was a Language Arts teacher in a high school in Southwest Colorado when I got word that there had been a robbery at the pizza restaurant I owned with my husband. My husband and an employee were held at gunpoint and robbed by a man in a ski mask. Though the gun was pointed directly into my husband's face, the employee who was making a pizza just a few feet away was most seriously impacted by the event. After this event he began having severe stress and experienced panic attacks in a crowd. This

employee was never able to return to work at our restaurant.

The offender was a man in his early 20's who committed a series of robberies with two other young men in our small town. All the offenders were caught, tried, convicted, and sentenced to at least two years in prison. Neither my husband nor I were involved in those legal decisions.

Just prior to their release from prison, a Restorative Justice team from the county approached us and asked if we would like to meet with the offender and discuss the impact that the robbery had on us. They explained the

process: They would follow the protocol for the Victim/Offender Conference. We would be able to state the exact nature of the harm done and then express what the offender could do to repair the harm. We agreed to this session, though the idea was novel. It was interesting to think that the "system" was willing to address the needs of the victims.

On the evening of the meeting with the offender we first met with our former employee to assure him of our support and discuss the possible value of what was about to happen. He was very nervous, but ready, finally, to face the person who had caused damage to his life and sense of safety two years earlier.

The session went well and ended with a sincere apology from the young man for the damage he had caused. Since we would all be seeing each other from time to time in our community, it was a relief to have had this conversation and feel a resolution that removed much of the fear, tension, and awkwardness.

Another event occurred in June of 2016 that confirmed my belief that we educators are morally and ethically responsible for teaching conflict resolution and restorative approaches to our youth. I received a text from my husband, who was the human resources and finance director of a sustainability-focused non-profit, alerting me to the fact that he and his colleagues were "sheltering in place" because an active shooter was in their building; he was hearing gunfire. Two people died that day because there was unresolved conflict between them. Thankfully, innocent bystanders were not also killed, but everyone

was seriously impacted by witnessing this violence and the ensuing intervention by more than 30 first responders. It is my mission, especially after this event, to teach students that there are ways to handle discord non-violently.

Though my initiation into Restorative Approaches came through a very difficult situation, and my beliefs about the importance of RA came through a second personal tragedy, I have been thankful for the opportunity to use my experience and expand my thinking into this very important work.

My reflection on how we deal with each other in a world filled with divisiveness and conflict has evolved from my work as a parent, classroom teacher, administrator, and Dean of Students in urban schools. I have responded to urgent situations and have made many assessments of possible suicide and homicide threats in schools. We educators find ourselves in situations that require quick, smart decisions upon which many lives may depend.

It is essential that classroom teachers have the tools for creating a positive classroom climate as well as the helpful resources for crisis management. It is my hope that the following ideas will enhance the critical, hard work that is done by teachers each day to provide academic excellence while giving unprecedented levels of behavioral support. Yes, **unprecedented levels of support** for students and their families due to many factors, many of which have origins outside the classroom. Teachers have my deepest admiration.

Chapter 2 Learning from What Works Best

It is time to look at what has not worked and examine the current data on what might be a more promising discipline practice. So let's begin with the WHY. Why are we shifting our discipline model from authoritarian to restorative? Because the research tells us that Restorative Approaches work more reliably.

We have come a long way since the post-Columbine days of "Zero Tolerance" and other authoritarian approaches. There is no evidence that a safer environment is created by suspensions and expulsions.¹ Safety is made possible when biases and misunderstandings are addressed and conflict is resolved.

That is not to say that there should never be a suspension or expulsion, but in most cases Restorative Approaches show the most

When we focus on punishing the offender, the needs of the victim remain largely unmet, unless the victim actually finds pleasure in the suffering of the offender. Most of us would agree that getting even is not an effective solution. As Gandhi famously said, "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."

When we focus on a process by which the offender can right the wrongdoing, then we have created a win-win situation by supporting the victim while expecting the offender to be a part of the solution. As fair-minded adults, we assist in this process. The offender is held accountable with his/her dignity intact. When the offender is empowered to change a negative situation to a positive one, lessons are learned, hearts are mended, and misbehavior is less likely to reoccur.

promise for long-term solutions. The outcome has promise of long-term potential because the offender is helped to realize the need to change his/her behavior. Behavior is changed by intrinsic motivation rather than external force. According to Paul Tough in *Helping Children Succeed*, intrinsic motivation happens when we do these three things: build relationships, recognize and acknowledge the student's developing competence, and grant autonomy.² Restorative Approaches fill these needs that are the groundwork for healthy, intrinsic motivation.

Successful restorative conversations involve choices negotiated between the victim and the offender, not mandates from an authority figure. Students become competent in healthy interactions and more autonomous in making decisions.

What happens to students when we reduce suspensions?

- They are in the learning environment rather than out on the streets unsupervised.
- They don't return from a suspension with vengeance, anger or shame.
- They are less likely to get legal citations, begin a series of court appearances, and accumulate fines or serve jail time.
- They are more likely to graduate.

Are we ready to look at our own motivations for the choices we make in how we deal with behavioral issues? Are we acting out of fear, or even anger, when children misbehave? Are we willing to think in a broader way, including a pathway to true forgiveness and healing?

I have learned some very good tools from several sources for restoring peace and healing the damage done. Since I can't improve upon some of the information I have read, I have included some important material from one of these sources on the following two pages (p. 7 & 8).

¹http://jprc.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/RJ_Literature-Review_20160217.pdf, p. 2

²Paul Tough, *Helping Children Succeed* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt), p. 63.

The following information, set within asterisks, comes from Transforming Conflict, an organization supporting Restorative Approaches in the UK, used by permission.

See <http://www.transformingconflict.org>

What are Restorative Approaches? The 'unique selling point' of a restorative approach is that it offers schools an alternative way of thinking about addressing discipline and behavioral issues and offers a consistent framework for responding to these issues. The table below compares different ways of thinking and responding in authoritarian and restorative models of discipline.

Authoritarian Approaches
The focus is on:

Restorative Approaches
The focus is on:

Rule-breaking	Harm done to individuals
Blame or guilt	Responsibility and problem-solving
Adversarial processes	Dialogue and negotiation
Punishment to deter	Repair, apology and reparation
Impersonal processes	Interpersonal processes
<i>and, as a result,</i>	<i>and, as a result,</i>
The needs of those affected are often ignored	The needs of those affected are addressed
The unmet needs behind the behavior are ignored	The unmet needs behind the behavior are addressed
Accountability = being punished	Accountability = putting things right

Schools that work restoratively find that relationships are stronger and learning is more effective, and so there is less need to resort to sanctions and punishments to try to 'manage' behavior.

Restorative Approaches provides an underpinning ethos and philosophy for making, maintaining and repairing relationships and for fostering a sense of social responsibility and shared accountability. There are many challenges in implementing an organization or institution-wide approach since the restorative way challenges deeply-held notions about power and control and the urge to make things unpleasant for someone when they have done something wrong or 'misbehaved'.

When harm has been caused by inappropriate, sometimes thoughtless, negative behavior then all sides need:

- a chance to tell their side of the story and feel heard
- to understand better how the situation happened
- to understand how it can be avoided another time
- to feel understood by the others involved
- to find a way to move on and feel better about themselves

If conflicts and challenges are dealt with in a way that get these need met then those involved can repair the damage done to their connections with the others involved, or even build connections where there were none previously. They feel fairly treated and respected, since they have been trusted to find solutions for themselves and put things right in their own way. Because they have been listened to, people in conflict are more ready to listen to others' perspectives and emotional

responses, and so empathy is developed. This can change the choices made in future situations, as mutual respect and consideration develop.

Punitive disciplinary responses, on the other hand:

- cause resentment rather than reflection
- are rarely considered fair
- do not repair relationships between those in conflict and indeed can make them worse
- leave those labelled as wrongdoers feeling bad about themselves leading to further alienation
- can often leave those people expected to act punitively feeling uncomfortable and frustrated – and wishing there was an alternative

Environments that have had most success in the implementation of a restorative approach are those that have seen it as part of an ongoing plan to develop relationship skills, emotional intelligence, health and wellbeing and distributed leadership opportunities. In educational environments this also includes participatory and collaborative teaching and learning and peer support. By seeking to build cohesive, compassionate communities wherever people live and work together, restorative approaches also address community cohesion in practical and pragmatic ways.

Many people like to think of an institution-wide restorative approach in terms of a 3-tiered model based on a public health model, as first developed by Brenda Morrison building on the work of John Braithwaite. The health model is built on a community-wide strategy for maintaining health and wellbeing and developing preventative strategies; it offers targeted support as needed and focused acute interventions for serious and emergency cases.

The institution-wide restorative model can be based on the following diagram:



End of material from <http://www.transformingconflict.org>

Chapter 3 How do I use Restorative Approaches in my classroom?

First, focus on trust-building and relationship-building. One's body language and spoken language tone is critical. Laugh, share goodwill. Some of us will shed tears of joy and tears of compassion. Model social and emotional skills that include conflict management. Listen well. These skills can be woven into the curriculum if one looks for creative ways to include them.

Restorative Approaches are most effective when they are used proactively, before a problem begins, to teach polite interactions between different kinds of people. **Peace Circles**, are a very effective way to build relationships within the classroom and establish trust and goodwill. Circles can be used to introduce each other using meaningful dialogue.

Sometimes there is an event in the classroom that prompts a teacher to stop the lesson and shift the conversation. The teacher begins by putting the whole class in a circle with no desks blocking the view between students. Yes, this involves some time and furniture rearranging, but it is worth it. If chairs are not attached to a desk, they may be used, or students may sit on the floor. It is important that nothing be in between the students, and that all are on the same level, whether on the floor or in chairs. Some schools have a room dedicated for this purpose and the chairs are already set up in a circle.

It is also important to explain the rules:

- the speaker who holds the Talking Piece is not to be interrupted,
- the speaker determines when the talking piece is passed on to the next person in the circle,

- no rude or profane language is to be used,
- body language must be respectful.

Next, the teacher explains that the "Talking Piece" reminds us that the person who is holding it will speak without interruption. I use a battery operated candle that changes color. It came from the Dollar Store. If you are fortunate enough to have a Native American student, she/he might provide a traditional Talking Piece.

The teacher begins the circle by stating why we are having a Peace Circle. It may begin with a statement about a positive situation that deserves acknowledgement and reflection, a concern about inappropriate behaviors, or any issue that may be problematic for the learning environment. Difficult issues are handled honestly, and with extreme care for the feelings of all class members. This is not the place for shaming a person for bad behavior. The teacher models the process by making the first statement. An opening statement might be: "As we began working in groups today, I heard some teasing comments that may have been hurtful. This is an opportunity for us to reset the tone so that we can work together, enjoy learning, and enjoy each other."

She/he uses "I" messages and makes statements about personal perceptions and personal hopes for the class. Ideally, the comments are concluded on a positive note.

The teacher then passes the talking piece to the student next to her/him. When each person has finished speaking, the Talking Piece is passed on to the next person. The next person may speak or pass it on without speaking. This process may end after one complete round, or it may go around again depending upon the needs of the class. Sometimes students will skip the first round, but

then participate after others have spoken when they get a second opportunity.

Circles encourage a sense of belonging and equity. A properly managed circle encourages self-esteem and provides a safe place for expressing feelings and needs. Additionally, the circle builds the skills of active and empathic listening, increases the vocabulary of healthy social and emotional interaction, nurtures mutual respect, and values diversity. Team spirit, camaraderie, and shared responsibility grow. Students are eventually able to implement a Peace Circle without an adult if a session is needed when there are no adults available, such as before or after school. (Just as Harry Wong said about the value of routines and procedures!)

Circles provide a forum for the development of problem-solving and conflict-management skills which are essential for adolescents as they

learn to use positive behaviors that serve them into adulthood. Without our modeling of these skills, some of our students are likely to fail to learn non-violent ways of managing conflict.

Possible openings for a Peace Circle:

- “I just witnessed an act of kindness, and I want to talk about how that made me feel.”
- “We are about to begin a novel about racial tension, and I thought it might be good to express some thoughts about how this issue has affected each of us.”
- “I am thinking about my need for a positive learning environment for you. What does that look like?”
- “You have a paper due in one week. I’d like to know what is going well for you and what you may be struggling with. Let’s talk.”

Chapter 4 What Is Another Other Restorative Approach?

Restorative Conferences are between two or three students, between a student and a teacher, or a student and Dean. These are **one-on-one** or **small group conversations** that occur outside the classroom. They may be facilitated by a Dean or other member of the RA team, or they may be handled by the classroom teacher.

Whether you choose to facilitate these conversations during class (after arranging coverage), after class, or by appointment with students, here are some guidelines that are helpful:

- Avoid the temptation to lecture. It is usually ineffective. Students learn best when they answer questions and get to be a part of the solution.

- If there has been a conflict, those who were involved meet together to determine the following, each person speaking in turn without interrupting anyone else:
 - What happened?
 - What was the impact on you?
How were you affected?
 - What can be done to repair the harm?
 - How can this be made better for the future so that it doesn’t happen again?

In my experience, even if there appears to be a victim and an offender, there are usually complications that muddy those roles. In most cases, the offender may also be a victim in their perception, and perhaps in reality. Indeed, it is possible that the offender was “set-up” by the victim.

Each person’s story must be heard. Pain must be articulated, to whatever degree it is

possible, and solutions sought in earnest. Each person must listen to the other in order for the conflict to reach resolution.

I have been amazed at the willingness for students to apologize and genuinely try to remedy a wrongdoing when they truly understand the damage that has occurred. Understanding comes when we truly listen to each other.

I also have seen great healing occur when a teacher admits wrongdoing to a student and seeks a remedy for the harm done. Remember the wisdom of Big Bird: "Everyone makes mistakes."

These conversations work if we stay on track with the protocols, trust in the process, and allow everyone involved the opportunity to learn from mistakes. Einstein, Edison, and many other successful thinkers can verify that truth.

The positive impact of restorative approaches in a school is undeniable. Regardless of whether the whole school embraces these practices or not, the teacher may choose to use them. The use of Restorative Approaches in the classroom can have a far reaching impact on the lives of your students while making your work much more pleasant and productive.

Supplemental Materials follow on pages 12-16

Belief Leads to Action

<p><u>Guiding Belief 1a</u> Students who feel hopeful, autonomous, accepted, and valued are most likely to achieve at higher levels. As educators, we are able to provide this support.</p>	<p><u>Action Item 1b</u> Use genuine, specific feedback with clearly stated pathways for improvement as you evaluate students' academic work. As you learn about each student's personal life, find specific ways to support their dreams.</p>
<p><u>Guiding Belief 2a</u> We educators don't need to be perfect, but we do need to be highly engaged, paying attention, and responsive to student needs.</p>	<p><u>Action Item 2b</u> Students appreciate the time and effort you take to craft a really good lesson. (They also are quick to recognize when the planning is not up to par.) Whether or not they verbalize it, they feel valued when they see your commitment to their success.</p>
<p><u>Guiding Belief 3a</u> There is a huge difference between "You are bad" and "You did something bad, but it can be fixed and I will help you do that." Having hope and making things better always wins over getting even.</p>	<p><u>Action Item 3b</u> Teach the difference between demanding retribution and repairing the harm that was done. Use literature, nature, current events, TED Talks, and YouTube videos for meaningful examples that they will remember.</p>
<p><u>Guiding Belief 4a</u> Choose your words carefully. Students are deeply offended by sarcasm, no matter how clever or funny the adult may think it is.</p>	<p><u>Action Item 4b</u> Model the use of genuine language that conveys a straightforward message. Humor is great, as long as it is not at the expense of another's feelings.</p>

Guiding Belief 5a

Teach the difference between destructive shame and that of guilt that is generated from a sense of empathy for the feelings and needs of others.

It is appropriate to feel guilt over a thoughtless action; guilt can make one accountable for correcting a problem.

Shame makes a person feel unlovable and it is damaging to one's deep self. Properly handled guilt leads one to corrective actions that heal the offender as well as the victim. "Shame is a focus on self while guilt is a focus on behavior."³

Action Item 5b

The difference between guilt and shame should be modeled in the actions of teachers and taught explicitly.

Use literature, nature, current events, TED Talks, and YouTube videos for meaningful examples that they will remember.

Guiding Belief 6a

One's body language is a reflection of how you feel about your students and the work you are willing to do on their behalf.

Action Item 6b

(from Toni Morrison as quoted in *Daring Greatly* by Brené Brown⁴)
"Let your face speak what's in your heart. When they walk in the room, my face says I'm glad to see them. It's just as small as that, you see?"

Guiding Belief 7a

We believe in being courageous and taking risks to benefit our lives and the lives of others in our community.

Action Step 7b

Teach students to use language that builds community:

"I need help." "This is important to me."
"How can I improve this?" "I will try!"
"Let's give it our best shot!"
"Will you teach me how to do this?"
"I accept responsibility for that."
"How may I support you?"

³ Brené Brown, *Rising Strong*, Spiegel & Grau, 2015, p. 194.

⁴ Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly*, New York, Avery, 2012, p. 223, eBook.

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Guiding Belief 8a</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">We believe that punishing behavior is not as effective as helping the student change behavior.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Action Step 8b</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Use Circles and Restorative Conversations to resolve conflict. Teach students to use these strategies when needed if an adult is not present to facilitate.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Guiding Belief 9a</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Empowerment is central to successful Restorative Approaches. Students should feel empowered to be heard when there is a conflict with an adult. Adults must be able to admit wrongdoing and correct errors during these conversations.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Action Item 9b</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Be sure that all parties in a conflict have a chance to tell their version of what happened and what they need to have happen for a good outcome. All parties must contribute to the process.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Guiding Belief 10a</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Students want the opportunity and encouragement to be their "best selves." They depend on adults to help them sort through the consequences of bad choices.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Action Item 10b</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Lecturing rarely works. Asking questions is a better strategy for looking at the behavior, assessing how it is impacting others, and determining what can be done differently.</p>
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<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Guiding Belief 11a</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">When emotions are running high, it is the adult's responsibility to de-escalate the situation and provide the forum in which the conflict may be addressed rationally.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Action Item 11b</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Make non-threatening eye contact--with empathy. 2. Speak quietly and identify the problem. 3. Ask the student what they should be doing at that moment. 4. If they don't know, tell them what the desired behavior should be. 5. Keep angry students apart; call for security or RA team to help if needed.
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<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Guiding Belief 12a</u></p> <p>Students want acknowledgment of their importance and their competence. Encouragement from teacher and peers goes a long way toward building a sense of competence and relational trust.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Action Item 12b</u></p> <p>Ask students how they wish for their success to be recognized and how they might support their classmates with positive encouragement.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Guiding Belief 13a</u></p> <p>Students want teachers to be sensitive to their needs and approachable for support. Students respond to adults who care about them, challenge them to achieve, and provide comfort when they are hurting.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Action Item 13b</u></p> <p>Focus on the goals that students set for themselves. Refer to the goals rather than nagging about what hasn't been done. Students can learn to support each other in meeting goals.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Guiding Belief 14a</u></p> <p>Students value rules and procedures that provide a safe and predictable environment.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Action Item 14b</u></p> <p>Classroom rules can be as simple as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take care of yourself. • Take care of each other. • Take care of this place.
<p style="text-align: center;">Guiding Belief 15a</p> <p>Families of students are important members of the educational team. Positive communication with families is critical for building relationships that serve the student.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Action Item 15b</p> <p>Phone or email several parents/caregivers each day, or each week, with a positive message. Keep track of who is called. (Don't leave any out. If you try hard enough, there will be something positive to say that will help the family even more than you can predict.)</p>

Guiding Belief 16a	Action Item 16b
We all like to negotiate through problems and mistakes while keeping our dignity intact. Students and teachers in difficult situations need support that honors their dignity.	When facilitating Restorative Conversations or Peace Circles, use positive suppositions about people and act wholeheartedly to preserve each person's dignity. This will be reflected in your choice of words.

This may be a good next step for your team: Discuss a personal Guiding Belief that is essential to your classroom culture and create an Action Item that matches that Belief.

Guiding Belief 17a	Action Item 17b

Carol Carpenter, Researcher and Practitioner, 2017©

Advancing Restorative Approaches

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