

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

A guideline for educators



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How to Use This Guide

Who it's for - This guide is for educators, school leaders, and support staff seeking to strengthen relationships, improve school climate, and respond to conflict in more meaningful, restorative ways.

How to use it - Schools may use this guide to:

- Support professional development and build a shared restorative language
- Guide leadership conversations about school culture and behaviour policy
- Integrate restorative strategies into daily classroom practice

RATIONALE

In today's schools, educators face **growing challenges** like conflict, disengagement, emotional distress, and polarisation among students.

Traditional discipline, which often relies on control and punishment, might stop bad behaviour for a while, but usually **does not address the real reasons** behind it or help build stronger relationships. Over time, these methods can lead to exclusion, resentment, and repeated problems.

Restorative practices offer an alternative rationale: **learning** and **wellbeing flourish** in communities where relationships are valued, voices are heard, and accountability is meaningful.

This shift supports safer, more inclusive learning environments where conflict becomes an opportunity for growth, **reflection**, and **shared responsibility**.

ROOTS

Restorative practices in schools are based on the principles of **Restorative Justice**, which draw on Indigenous and community traditions worldwide.

Restorative Justice **sees harm as damage to relationships**, not just as breaking rules or laws.

At its core, restorative justice is guided by three key questions:

- *What happened?*
- *Who has been affected and how?*
- *What needs to be done to make things right?*

When used in schools, these ideas move the focus from punishment to **repair, responsibility, and making things right**. They show that harm affects not just individuals but the whole community, and that healing needs everyone's involvement and recognition.

In this way, restorative practices bring the values of restorative justice into daily school life, helping both individuals and the community grow.

DEFINITION & REQUIREMENTS

Restorative practices in schools are **ways of thinking and acting** that help build community, **strengthen relationships**, and **respond to conflict** or wrongdoing by focusing on repairing harm rather than meting out punishment.

In practice, restorative approaches:

- Emphasize **relationships over rules**, without abandoning clear expectations.
- Engage all those affected by an incident—students, educators, and sometimes families—in **dialogue and reflection**.
- Promote **accountability through understanding impact**, not through fear or shame.
- Aim for repair, **reintegration, and learning**, rather than exclusion.

“Restorative” means changing your own attitude, and it also means believing in students even when – and especially when – they seem to be behaving badly.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

1 | THE PUNITIVE-PERMISSIVE CONTINUUM

This traditional model presents only two choices:

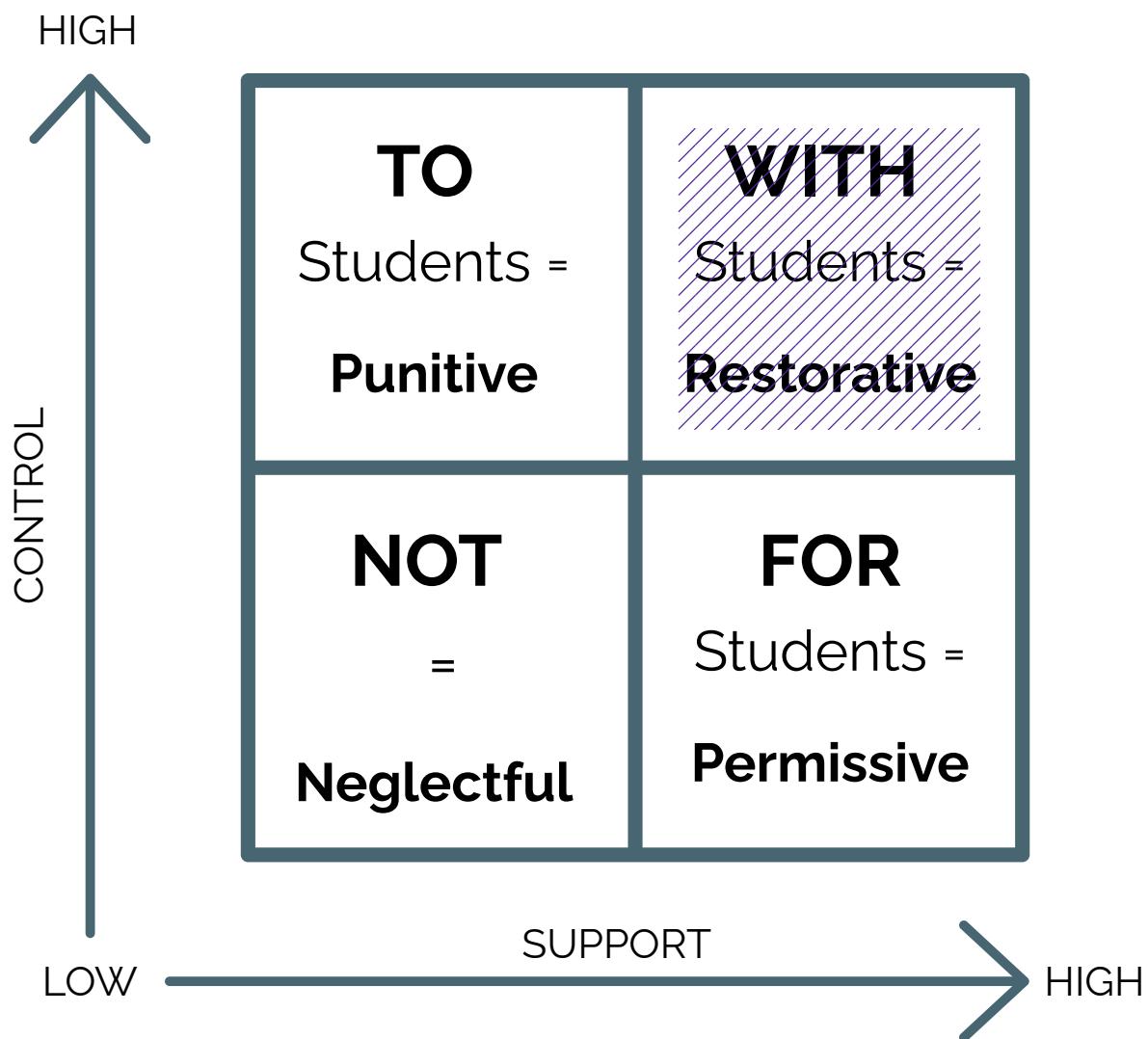
PUNITIVE	PERMISSIVE
Harsh & controlling	Lenient & over-permissive
"Do as you are told"	"It's ok, do not worry about it"
Focus on punishment	Focus on avoiding consequences

LIMITATION:

If educators are not punitive, they are assumed to be permissive—when punished, students feel as victims.

2 | SOCIAL DISCIPLINE WINDOW

This model adds a second axis—support—to show four possible approaches based on levels of **control** and **support**:

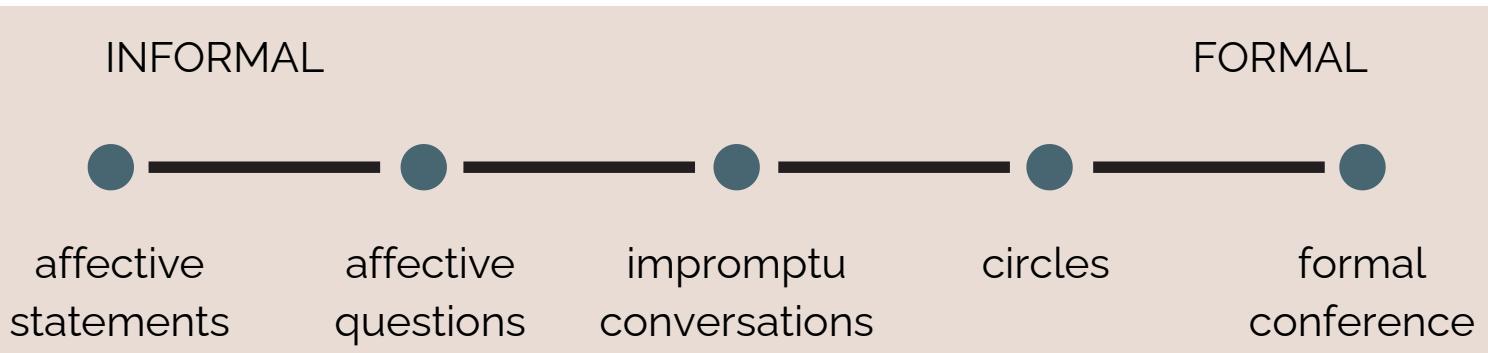


Restorative Response = High Control + High Support

This approach:

- Refuses to accept harmful behavior (accountability)
- While offering care, dialogue, and guidance (support)

THE CONTINUUM



1 | AFFECTIVE STATEMENTS

Definition: Statements that communicate how someone's behaviour has affected you emotionally—also called **“sharing impact.”**

Purpose:

- Build relationships
- Increase students' awareness of impact
- Replace judgment with personal connection

Examples:

Instead of: “Stop teasing Sandy.” → “I’m uncomfortable when I hear you tease Sandy.”

Instead of: “Nice job.” → “I was really happy to see how focused you were during the whole lesson.”

Key Pedagogical Idea: Separates the **deed** from the **doer**—respecting the student while addressing the behaviour.

2 | Affective Questions

Definition: Questions that prompt students to **reflect on their actions, consider others' perspectives, and take responsibility for repair.**

They replace blame with **reflection, empathy, and problem-solving.**

Core Question Schemes

1 - When Things Go Wrong (for the person who caused harm):

- *What happened?*
- *What were you thinking of at the time?*
- *What have you thought about since?*
- *Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?*
- *What do you think you need to do to make things right?*

2 - When People Are Affected (for those harmed):

1. *What did you think when you realised what had happened?*
2. *What impact has this incident had on you and others?*
3. *What has been the hardest thing for you?*
4. *What do you think needs to happen to make things right?*

The question “Why did you do that?” is intentionally avoided—it often leads to excuses or defensiveness rather than reflection.

3 | Impromptu Conversations

Definition: Brief, on-the-spot restorative exchanges used to **address minor conflicts or reinforce positive behaviour** before issues escalate.

Typical Structure:

1. *What happened?*
2. *How were people affected?*
3. *What can be done to make this right?*

Purpose:

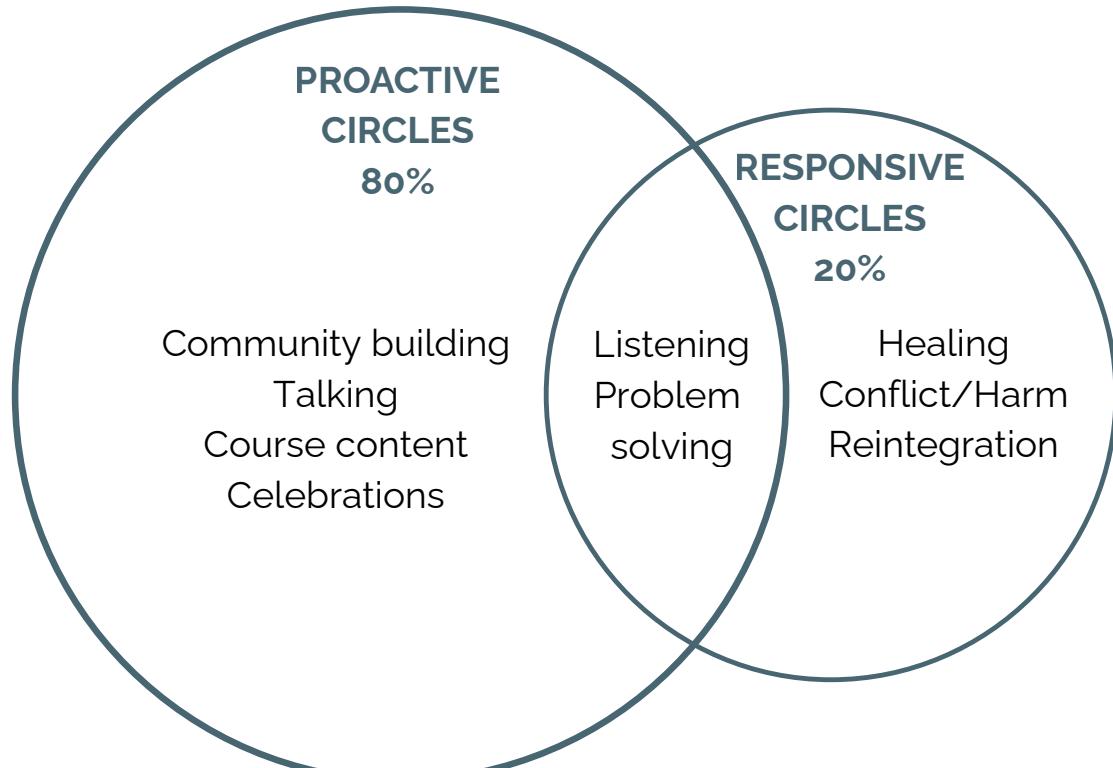
1. *Prevent escalation*
2. *Engage students in ownership of solutions*
3. *Reinforce dignity and reintegration*

4 | Circles

Definition: A structured discussion format in which participants sit in a circle, often using a talking piece to ensure one speaker at a time.

Core features:

1. *Equality of voice*
2. *Respectful listening (no interruptions)*
3. *Teacher participates as a member of the community*
4. *Builds connection, trust, and shared norms*



(Pranis, 2005; IIRP, 2021)

4.1 | Responsive Circles

When to Use:

- When behaviour affects multiple students
- When there is a pattern rather than a one-off incident
- When the classroom climate “doesn’t feel right”

Common Prompts:

- *What was your part in the problem?*
- *How did this make you feel?*
- *What can we do to make sure this doesn’t happen again?*

Principles:

- Acknowledge harm without shaming
- Center those affected
- Reintegration, not exclusion
- Collective responsibility

4.2 | Proactive Circles

Purpose: To build relationships, establish norms, support learning, and prevent conflict.

Key Insight: Anticipating challenges reduces impulsivity and improves self-regulation.

Common Formats:

1. **Check-In** (beginning of class)

- *How are you feeling today?*
- *What did you accomplish last week?*

2. **Check-Out** (end of class)

- *What is one thing you learned today?*
- *What are you looking forward to tomorrow?*

3. **Classroom Norms** (co-constructed expectations)

- *How should we treat one another?*
- *How should we respond if agreements are broken?*

4. **Curriculum Integration**

- *Unit openers:* assess prior knowledge and student interests
- *Unit closers:* reflect on learning and “take-aways”
- *Content-based prompts* (e.g., strengths and weaknesses in a subject)

5. **Goal-Setting & Monitoring**

- *What steps will you take toward your project?*
- *What accomplishment are you most proud of?*

6. **Anticipatory / Preventive Circles**

- *How might you be tempted to act out on this trip/activity?*
- *How will you handle disagreements?*

5 | Formal Conferences

Definition:

Structured, facilitated meetings for **serious incidents** involving those who caused harm, those affected, families, and school staff.

Types:

- Restorative Conferencing (e.g., "Real Justice" model)
- Family Group Conferencing (FGC/FGDM)

Purpose:

- Understand what happened
- Explore impact on all parties
- Agree on concrete actions to repair harm

Educational Value:

Builds empathy, accountability, and long-term behavioral change—far beyond what punishment alone can achieve.

PEDAGOGICAL SHIFT

TRADITIONAL DISCIPLINE



RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE

Rule enforcement	Relationship building
Punishment	Repair of harm
Teacher control	Student responsibility
"Stop that!"	"This is how that affected me/others"
Compliance	Reflection, empathy, agency, action

**KEY THEME:
STUDENTS ARE NOT BAD -
BEHAVIOURS CAN BE HARMFUL;
RESTORATION SEPARATES IDENTITY
FROM ACTION**

IB PHILOSOPHY ALIGNEMENT

1 | Pre-Assessment

- Proactive circles at the start of units assess prior knowledge and student goals.
- Mirrors IB practices in **diagnostic assessment** and student voice.

2 | Inquiry

- Restorative questioning fosters inquiry into:
 - What happened
 - Who was affected
 - What can be improved
- Mirrors **inquiry-based learning** cycles used in IB classrooms.

3 | Agency

- Students co-construct solutions and commitments.
- Strong alignment with IB's emphasis on **learner ownership and voice**.

4 | Reflection

- Affective questions and check-outs require students to analyse **actions, emotions, and outcomes**.
- Directly aligned with IB's emphasis on **metacognition and reflective practice**.

2 | Approaches to Learning

- **Self-management skills:** goal setting, emotional regulation
- **Social skills:** empathy, collaboration, conflict resolution
- **Communication skills:** active listening, respectful dialogue

3 | Learner Profile

- **Caring** – acknowledging others' feelings
- **Reflective** – considering impact and growth
- **Open-minded** – listening to multiple perspectives
- **Principled** – taking responsibility and making amends

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Restorative practices humanise discipline** by centring relationships and impact.
- **Most issues can be addressed informally** through affective language and questioning.
- Circles integrate **social-emotional learning** with academics, supporting both climate and achievement.
- Students develop **empathy, accountability, and agency**, becoming active members of a learning community.
- The model aligns naturally with **IB philosophy**: inquiry, reflection, student voice, and ethical community building.

DISCLAIMER

This work has been developed independently following participation in the professional development “Restorative Practices for Educators” delivered by the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP). No endorsement by the IIRP is implied or claimed.

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Email info@elisaprisco.com
Website www.elisaprisco.com
Phone +39 3358366775