



Transforming School Discipline Collaborative

TRANSFORMING SCHOOL DISCIPLINE COLLABORATIVE

# The Restorative Approach and its Strategies

A component of the TSDC Toolkit for School Transformation

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## I. BACKGROUND

### What is a restorative approach?

A restorative approach to discipline offers schools, administrators, and teachers a different way to address discipline and behavioral issues and provides a consistent framework for responding to these issues.<sup>1</sup> The table below compares the traditional authoritarian approach to discipline to a restorative one:

<b>Traditional Authoritarian/ Punitive Approach</b>	<b>Restorative Approach</b>
<i>The focus is on:</i>	<i>The focus is on:</i>
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

*Table 1.1<sup>2</sup>*

### What is the difference between “Restorative Justice” and “Restorative Practice”?

Restorative Justice is a mindset.	Restorative Practices are tools.
A philosophy that values relationships and creates space for multiple perspectives to be understood, in order to repair relationships when harm happens.	A set of tools that allow one to practice Restorative Justice--from various types of circles, to specific language choices, to how we include people in spaces to resolve conflict.

### What is being restored?

This approach to discipline intends to restore:

Between those involved:	Within the individual:
<i>Effective communication;</i>	<i>Sense of security;</i>
<i>Understanding the impact of one’s own behavior on others;</i>	<i>Self-confidence;</i>
<i>Respect, empathy, and understanding for others’ perspective; and</i>	<i>Self-respect; and</i>
<i>Reparation for material loss or damage.</i>	<i>Dignity.</i>

*Table 1.3<sup>3</sup>*

Overall, the purpose of the process is to restore someone’s sense of belonging within the school or classroom community.<sup>4</sup>

### **Why use restorative practices rather than a traditional approach to discipline?**

Restorative Practices, when broadly and consistently implemented, will promote and strengthen positive school culture and enhance pro-social relationships within the school community. Restorative practices allow for a shift towards a culture that is inclusive and builds fair process into decision-making.<sup>5</sup> Restorative practices also facilitate students in learning how to address the impact of their actions through an approach that allows for true accountability, skill building, cooperation, and mutual understanding.<sup>6</sup>

Through restorative practices, members of the school community will:

1. Have an opportunity to be heard
2. Understand the greater impact of one's actions
3. Learn to take responsibility
4. Repair the harm one's actions may have caused
5. Recognize one's role in maintaining a safe school environment
6. Build upon and expand on personal relationships in the school community
7. Recognize one's role as a positive contributing member of the school community.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, people will learn to make positive, productive, and effective choices in response to situations they may encounter in the future after engaging in a restorative practice.<sup>8</sup>

Benefits of Restorative Approaches in the School Setting include:

- \* A safer, more caring, more inclusive environment.
- \* A more effective teaching and learning environment.
- \* An effective way to learn about and address the root causes of a behavior.
- \* A greater commitment by everyone to take the time to listen to one another.
- \* A reduction in bullying and other interpersonal conflicts.
- \* A greater awareness of the importance of connectedness to young people as well as the need to belong and feel valued by peers and significant adults.
- \* Greater emphasis on responses to inappropriate behavior that seek to reconnect and not further disconnect young people.
- \* Reductions in fixed term and permanent suspensions and expulsions with the goal of eliminating racially disproportionate discipline practices.
- \* A greater confidence in the staff team to deal with challenging situations.<sup>9</sup>

*The core of restorative practices is building and restoring  
**relationships.**<sup>10</sup>*

## II. FOUNDATIONAL FRAMEWORK

### **What are the principles of restorative justice practices?**

The following list of principles was largely developed by the San Francisco Unified School District. The principles reflect the values and concepts for implementing restorative practices in the school setting and under each principle are some of its important implications. The principles are

#### **1. Acknowledging that relationships are central to building community;**

- Restorative practices seek to strengthen relationships and build community by encouraging a caring school climate.
- Every student, teacher, administrator, staff member, and parent/guardian is a valued member of the school community.

#### **2. Acknowledging that Restorative Justice is a “values based approach;”**

- Values are created for most circle practices. The values become the container, or the foundation, of the circle.
- Values can be decided upon for each classroom and for the whole school.
- Students should be involved in a process of naming the values and principles to live by within their school community.

#### **3. Building systems that address misbehavior and harm in a way that strengthens relationships;**

- Schools establish policies to provide a safe place for learning. Real safety however comes from fostering and maintaining caring relationships.
- Policies should reflect the values and principles agreed to by the school community.
- Policies need to address the root causes of discipline problems rather than only the symptoms. There may be multiple causes of misbehavior and each should be addressed.

#### **4. Focusing on the harm done rather than only on rule-breaking;**

- Misbehavior is an offense against people and relationships, not just rule-breaking.
- The solution to the offense needs to involve all of those harmed by the misbehavior.
- The person harmed is the center of the primary relationship that needs to be addressed. Secondary relationships that may have been impacted might include other students, teachers, parents, the administration, and the surrounding community.
- Much misbehavior arises out of attempts to address a perceived injustice. Those who are victimized also feel they have been treated unjustly. Discipline processes must leave room for addressing these perceptions.

#### **5. Giving voice to all involved such as the person who was harmed, the person who harmed and anyone else who was impacted;**

- The immediate safety concerns of any person harmed is primary.
- Those harmed must be given an opportunity to have a voice in the resolution of the harm.
- Those who created the harm also have space to take responsibility for their actions by engaging in conversation (when appropriate) with those they have harmed.
- The secondary recipients of harm (such as the members of the larger community that are impacted by the harm or its effects) are also recognized as essential participants to be involved in the healing process.

## 6. Engaging in collaborative problem solving;

- All of us act to satisfy our human needs (for belonging, freedom, power, and fun). Students choose behaviors to meet these underlying needs.
- Family, students, and communities are encouraged to help identify problems and solutions that meet needs.
- Misbehavior can become a teachable moment if everyone is involved.

## 7. Empowering change and growth; and

- In order for students to change and grow, we must help them identify their needs and assist them in finding alternative, life giving ways of meeting those needs.
- Interpersonal conflict is a part of living in relationship with others.
- Conflict presents opportunity for change if the process includes careful listening, reflecting, shared problem-solving, trust, and accountability structures that support commitments to work at relationship building.

## 8. Enhancing Responsibility.

- Real responsibility requires one to understand the impact of her or his actions on others, along with an attempt to acknowledge and take corrective steps when that impact is negative.
- Consequences should be evaluated based on whether they are reasonable, related to the offense, restorative, and respectful.
- Students should continually be invited to become responsible and cooperative.
- Some students choose to resist participation in a process that will allow for change and may need adults to support and guide them in decision-making concerning their accountability.<sup>11</sup>

## What is the mindset that is necessary to build and sustain restorative practices?

Restorative Justice is more than a program or practice; it is a mindset, a way of doing business and approaching every day work. The Umoja Student Development Corporation has developed a list of the key values and concepts that are outlined below.

### The “Restorative Justice Mindsets”:

1. Place relationships at the center, recognizing that relationships are critical for making progress whether on large community issues or for an individual who is going through personal challenges.
2. Value collaboration and collective voice, recognizing that all peoples’ voices are important and that we must have structures and protocols in place that engage all stakeholders rather than a few individuals, even in times of conflict.
3. Recognize that communities are responsible for the individuals in the community and vice versa. Restorative justice mindsets look to a community to solve its own challenges and support individuals in the community in healing and repairing harm they may have caused.
4. Acknowledge multiple truths and that each individual has a unique perspective which should be shared, honored, and heard.
5. Believe that respectful dialogue is possible in any given situation. While certain topics may cause tension or vulnerability, a Restorative Justice mindset believes that with the right space and values a respectful dialogue can take place.
6. Ask that individuals be vulnerable and willing to engage in honest conversations with others.

7. Ask individuals to be held accountable for their actions. This means that individuals should be able to acknowledge their role in any harm and take steps to repair any harm that they have caused.
8. Acknowledge that healing is a process and that it must take place after harm happens to individuals and/or communities. Without an appropriate healing process, additional harm may be caused.
9. Ask how conflicts and harm can be restored after they have taken place. The goal of restoration is to rebuild relationships, restore the communities and individuals after harm, and work with those who caused the harm to prevent a similar incident from happening in the future.
10. Believe that constructive solutions are always possible and work towards discovering those solutions together.

### **What is the language of restorative practices?**

The San Francisco Unified School District has found that utilizing the language of Restorative Practices consistently among the school staff and the parent/family community is a simple and effective approach to reinforcing the core values of relationships, responsibility, accountability and community.

- We are a **community**.
  - Recognizing that the strength and health of the community (among students, staff, and families) directly impacts school climate and academic achievement. Every member of the community is important and contributes greatly. Each person's actions affect the health of the community.
  - *Recommendation*: Constantly refer to the student, staff, and family groups as a "community" and stress the importance of having a strong, healthy community.
- What is the **relationship** like?
  - Reinforcing the importance of positive relationships is essential to the development of a strong community. Positive relationships lay the foundation for cooperation, skill development and learning.
  - *Recommendation*: Constantly inquire about the strength of the "relationship/s" between/among students, staff, and families. Celebrate positive relationships, and when challenged, specifically ask, "what is the relationship like between... (students, yourself and your students, a particular student and his/her classroom peers, staff members...etc.)." Self-reflect on your own relationships with school community members and ask others to reflect on their relationships.
- What **happened**?
  - Ask open-ended questions that allow for a genuine retelling of an experience.
  - *Recommendation*: Do not ask the "why" question. Instead, ask "what happened" when inquiring about specific actions or behaviors.
- Who was **impacted** (harmed) by what happened?
  - For both positive and negative actions, recognizing impact helps to teach that one's actions affect the greater community. It is equally important to reinforce positive impact, as it is to teach that negative behavior harms relationships and the health of the community.
  - *Recommendation*: Consider age-appropriate language to use in response to students and staff actions/behaviors that reinforce the importance of positive relationships and community.

- What **needs** do those involved have?
  - When conflict or harm occurs, it is important to recognize that ALL parties involved have resulting needs. Often times the needs of those “harmed” and those who “harmed” are similar. Giving individuals an opportunity to voice their needs is an important step towards identifying what must happen to repair the relationships.
  - *Recommendation:* Use age-appropriate language to ask ALL individuals involved in an incident (including the teacher/family member) to share/reflect on what needs they have/had (both during the time of the incident as well as after the incident).
- What needs to happen to **repair the harm** (make things as right as possible)?
  - Reinforcing the importance of repairing harm (when one’s actions have negatively impacted the community) is a critical component for the restoration of community/relationships when harm has occurred. Giving those involved in the incident an opportunity to identify what they are going to do to make things right teaches responsibility and holds one accountable for their actions.
  - *Recommendation:* Allow for the people involved in an incident to share what they need to see happen in order to address and repair the harm caused by hurtful/negative behavior. Accountability stems from following through with the identified plan after taking into consideration all that everyone needs to feel satisfied with the situation.<sup>12</sup>

“The underlying premise of restorative practices is that people are happier, more cooperative, more productive and more likely to make positive changes when those in positions of authority do things **with** them rather than **to** them or **for** them.”  
 (The Restorative Practice Handbook, Costello and Wachte)<sup>13</sup>

**Given the key language of restorative practices, what does communication between parties look like for restorative practices?**

The San Francisco Unified School district explains the type of communication used in restorative practices.

*Affective Statements:* The starting point for all restorative processes involves active non-judgmental listening and expression of feelings and impact. They allow for students and staff to build strengthened relationships by genuinely presenting oneself as someone who cares and has feelings. This authentic expression offers one the opportunity to learn and reflect on how their behavior has affected others.<sup>14</sup>

**In what settings can restorative practices be used?**

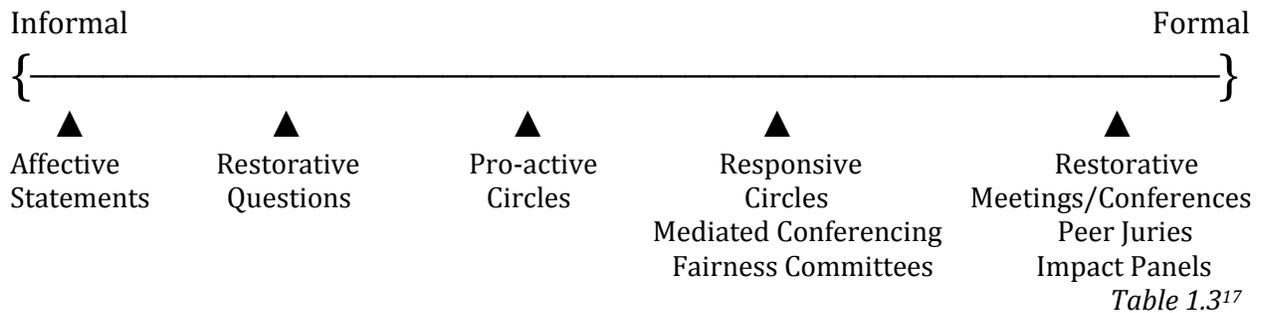
Restorative practices can be used in a wide range of formal and informal contexts. Dignity in Schools describes several practices:

A one way conversation, with one person listening and asking questions and the other talking.
A two-way conversation, with both people taking turns to ask and answer questions.
A small meeting when one impartial person - a facilitator - poses questions to two people who have had a difficulty, or where harm has been done, and who want to repair their relationship.
A larger, facilitated meeting involving children, parents/guardians, colleagues or others who have an important role to play.
A facilitated circle involving part or all of a class or team.

*Table 1.2<sup>15</sup>*

The San Francisco United School District offers the following illustration related to restorative practices and their uses. Restorative practices range from informal to formal. On a restorative practices continuum, the informal practices include affective statements and questions that communicate peoples’ feelings and allow for reflection on how their behavior has affected others. Restorative conferences and circles are somewhat more structured while formal conferences require more elaborate preparation. Moving from left to right on the continuum, as restorative processes become more formal, they involve more people, require more planning and time, and are more structured and complete.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to note that “although a formal restorative process might have dramatic impact, informal practices have a cumulative impact because they are part of everyday life.”  
(Hanson, 2005)



*Table 1.3<sup>17</sup>*

**For what purposes can restorative practices be used?**

Restorative practices can be used to prevent behavior or discipline issues, as well as address behavior and discipline issues.

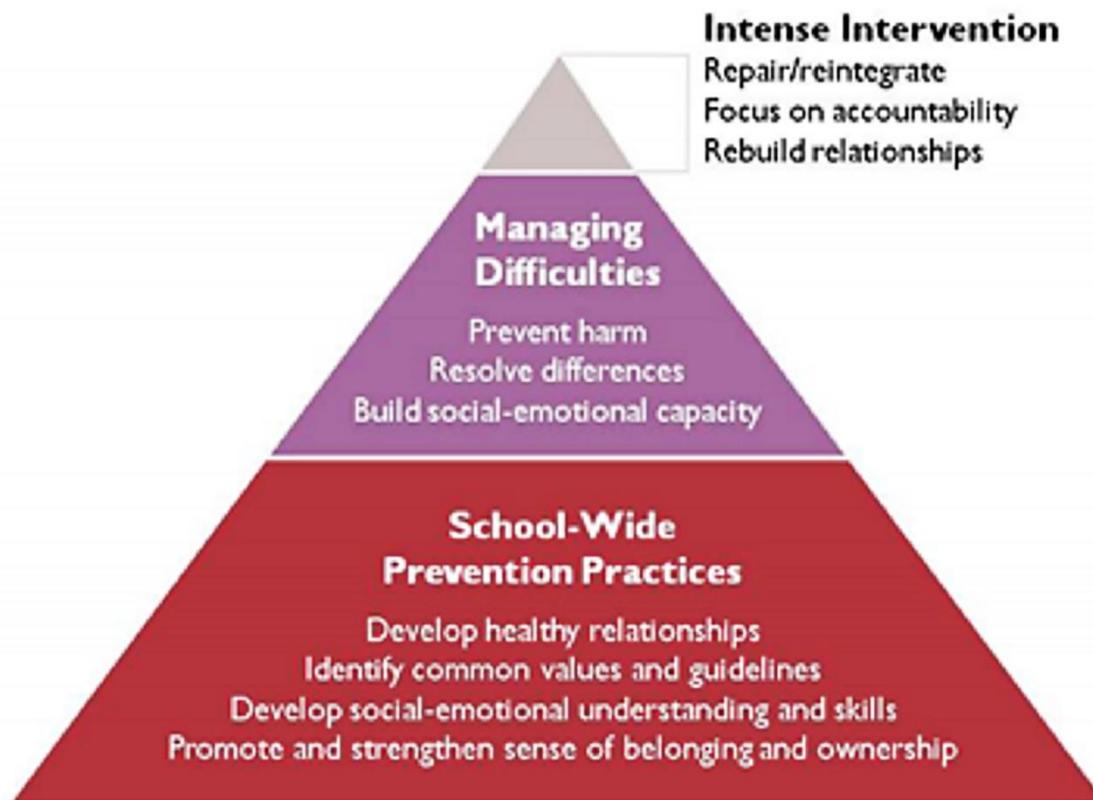
**How can restorative practices be used to prevent discipline or behavioral issues?**

In order to prevent disciplinary issues, schools should actively create a positive school climate for all members of the school community.<sup>18</sup> Schools can do so through the regular and ongoing use of classroom and school-wide restorative practices that build community, strengthen relationships, promote inclusiveness, and enhance communication and problem solving skills.<sup>19</sup>

Restorative Justice is a whole school approach which includes both **proactive** and **reactive** strategies.

### III. STRATEGIES FOR PRACTICE

Brenda Morrison, of the Centre for Restorative Justice at the Australian National University, developed the pyramid below which serves as a model to inform a school-wide approach to restorative practices. Taken together, the pyramid represents a continuum of both proactive and reactive practices that moves from universal interventions aimed at the entire school body to those interventions that are more targeted and intensive.<sup>20</sup>



Whole School Restorative Justice

**Proactive Restorative Approaches:**

Restorative Justice for Schools delineates several strategies for preventing behavioral issues. The table below includes some of these strategies.

<p><b>School-wide</b> restorative practices built into the school climate and culture include, but are not limited to...</p>	<p><i>Facilitating discussions in the classroom and school-wide forums about how members of the school community should treat one another</i></p>
	<p><i>Designating time to share the highs and lows of the day in advisory classes, homerooms, or forums</i></p>
	<p><i>Creating a welcoming environment where parents or guardians and community members are invited to volunteer and participate in the school community</i></p>
	<p><i>Establishing routines and procedures for students to check-in when they enter school each day to share concerns and/or request a meeting with a counselor to discuss problems they are facing</i></p>
<p><b>Classroom-level</b> restorative practices built into the school climate and culture include, but are not limited to...</p>	<p><i>Morning “Check-in” Circles for teachers and students to share what is going on in their lives, center themselves and focus on the day ahead</i></p>
	<p><i>Discussion Circles to talk about a topic they are currently studying and delve into more depth on the subject</i></p>

Table 1.4<sup>21</sup>

**Circles**

The Embrace RJ in Schools Collaborative, a collaborative of over 25 organizations that work with Chicago Public Schools to support the development and growth of school-based restorative justice programs, highlights that Circles are at the core of Restorative Justice Practices.

“Peace circles encompass different types of circles with different functions including a broad range of proactive circles. Circles are held to build relationships and promote dialogue in areas that otherwise might not be discussed. Some topics could be considered sensitive. Using a safe space and a restorative approach brings value to these topics. Peace Circles use circle rituals and structures to help heal all affected parties and build a collective and holistic understanding of what occurred and the underlying factors that contributed to the incident. Peace Circles are used to de-escalate or resolve conflicts that involve and/or affect individuals and/or multiple persons.”

– *Embrace RJ in Schools Collaborative in partnership with Chicago Public Schools*

Circles can be used to:

- build intra-class relationships;
- check in or reflect;
- safely discuss topics with multiple opinions or sensitive topics;
- heal from a loss;
- celebrate; and
- process a shared event.

**Reactive Restorative Approaches:**

Reactive Restorative Justice is BEST practiced when:

- there is a community to restore back to;
- there is strong, relational rapport present;
- there is on-going, active community-building present;
- restorative language is valued, modeled, & regularly used; and
- a restorative mindset is modeled consistently by adults.

Restorative Justice for Schools delineates several strategies for responding to behavioral issues. The table below is a non-exhaustive list of some of those strategies.

<b><u>Restorative Strategy</u></b>	<b><u>Strategy Description</u></b>
<b>Restorative Discussion</b>	One-on-one informal conversations, to help the student correct the behavior in the present and in the future, that are held as an immediate response or follow up to an action that has somehow caused harm.
<b>Restorative Meetings/ Peace Circles</b>	Spaces in which participants take turns speaking on a topic. The discussion is guided by at least one circle keeper using a talking piece that goes around to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to speak. There are many different types of circles that can be used to promote a positive learning environment and address issues as they arise. Some of the main circles that schools can utilize for discipline include (1) <i>Discipline Circles</i> to address what occurred, repair the harm and develop solutions to prevent reoccurrence, involving relevant parties and support people if helpful; and (2) <i>Proactive Behavior Management</i> circles used to role-play and work with students to develop positive behavioral models.
<b>Fairness Committees</b>	A Fairness Committee is made up of students, teachers and other school staff who have been trained in restorative practices to work with students or staff who have violated core community norms and values. The Committee creates appropriate consequences for violations through dialogue and by consensus. The committee takes referrals from staff or students to: <i>(1) inspire empathic and critical self-reflections by confronting a member of the community with his or her actions and how they have affected others;</i> <i>(2) collectively determine how best to restore and mend the community in the wake of actions inconsistent with its values; and</i> <i>(3) determine how to reintegrate the member of the community who has violated the shared values back into the fabric and culture of the school.</i>



<p><b>Restorative Group Conferencing</b></p>	<p>A facilitator leads those who were involved in an incident, whether they were harmed or did the harm, as well as their supporters in a face-to-face process. This process aims to address the harm, make things right and prevent reoccurrence. It is based on the ideas of restorative practices and mutual accountability.</p>
<p><b>Restorative Peer Conferencing (formerly known as Peer Juries)</b></p>	<p>The peer jury is about creating a space where students can be respected and heard and can engage in a corrective process for behaviors. Juries shall be convened for restorative purposes as an alternative to other interventions or consequences, and shall not be conducted in an adversarial manner (restorative Peer Conferences are different from student courts). The Peer Conferences may be held in the school that is attended by the student who caused harm. In order to appear before a school Peer Conference, the student who caused the harm must admit to committing the misconduct; the student and parent/guardian must agree to abide by the decisions of the school Peer Conference; and they must complete the corrective actions it recommends.</p>
<p><b>Impact Panels</b></p>	<p>A forum for students or adults who were harmed by an incident to tell other students who have caused harm, about the impact of the incident on their lives and the lives of their families, friends and neighbors. Panels typically involve three or four speakers who have experienced harm. Each speaker spends about 15 minutes telling their story in a non-judgmental, non-blaming manner. These forums are used to educate other students about the impacts of harm in the school community. While some time is usually dedicated to questions and answers, the purpose of the panel is for those impacted by the harm to speak, rather than for those who have caused harm to engage in a dialogue.</p>
<p><b>Mediated Conferencing</b></p>	<p>A process that provides those harmed by an incident an opportunity to meet the person who caused the harm, in a safe and structured setting, and engage in a mediated discussion of the offense. With the assistance of a trained mediator, those who were harmed are able to (1) tell the person who caused the harm about the incident’s physical, emotional and other impacts, (2) receive answers to lingering questions about the incident, and (3) be directly involved in developing a plan for the harm to be repaired.</p>

Table 1.5<sup>23</sup>

Dignity in Schools states that a restorative response to behavioral issues or conflict involves a dialogue between the individuals affected by the given behavior to share (1) what took place, (2) what the impact has been on those involved, (3) who has been affected and in what ways, and (4) what needs to happen in order to restore the relationship between those involved.<sup>24</sup>

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As an administrator or teacher, this type of process requires the ability to:

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- establish an environment of respect, safety and trust;
- listen and respond calmly, empathically and without interruption or judgment to all sides of an issue;
- encourage people to appropriately express their thoughts, feelings and needs;
- appreciate the impact of people’s thoughts, feelings, beliefs and unmet needs on their behaviors; and
- encourage those involved in the problem to find their own solutions

*Table 1.5<sup>25</sup>*

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In response to disciplinary infractions or conflict, schools should use a continuum of strategies that are restorative rather than authoritative or exclusionary. Dignity in Schools describes the reactive restorative process in the following ways:

1. All individuals who are impacted by a behavior conflict shall collectively identify the harm done, develop solutions for how the harm will be addressed, and identify the needs and obligations of all involved in order to heal and repair the situation as fully as possible.<sup>26</sup>

2. If appropriate, the students who committed the behavior or were involved in the conflict may participate in a restorative process to hear from all stakeholders and determine actions that meet restorative practice principles. Restorative processes should be conducted in a student-friendly space with both students and staff trained to mediate the discussion.<sup>27</sup>

## IV. RESOURCES

### **Illinois Balanced and Restorative Justice Project (IBARJ)**

Sara Balgoyen  
Executive Director  
Phone: (217) 778-3351  
[sarab@ibarj.org](mailto:sarab@ibarj.org)

### **Great Lakes Equity Center**

Phone: (317) 278-3493  
[www.greatlakesequitycenter.org](http://www.greatlakesequitycenter.org)  
[glec@iupui.edu](mailto:glec@iupui.edu)

### **Advancement Project**

Phone: (202) 728-9557  
[www.safequalityschools.org](http://www.safequalityschools.org)  
[www.advancementproject.org](http://www.advancementproject.org)

### **Illinois Safe School Alliance**

Phone: 312-533-2624  
[www.illinoissafeschools.org](http://www.illinoissafeschools.org)

### **Dignity In Schools**

[www.dignityinschools.org](http://www.dignityinschools.org)

### **Umoja Student Development Corp.**

Ilana Walden  
Chief Operating Officer  
Office Phone: (773) 312-3898  
[www.umojacorporation.org](http://www.umojacorporation.org)

### **Mansfield Institute for Social Justice and Transformation, Roosevelt University**

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[nmichaels@roosevelt.edu](mailto:nmichaels@roosevelt.edu)

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