by Mark Katz, PhD

Restorative Practices

Repairing Harm, Transforming School Climate, Building Community

AN INCREASING NUMBER OF SCHOOLS across the United States are embracing restorative practices as a guiding philosophy for creating a safe, respectful, and inclusive school culture. Many schools were initially attracted to these practices by studies showing their effectiveness in preventing and reducing suspensions and expulsions. Many have since learned of other benefits, including greater levels of trust among and between students, teachers, and others in the school community.

Effective implementation of restorative practices requires a schoolwide commitment to a very different way for individuals relate to one another. This is particularly apparent to students who either engage in or who are harmed by wrongdoing.

Several restorative questions are posed to those who engage in wrongdoing:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking about 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?



ISTOCK

Those who are harmed are also asked restorative questions:

- What did you think when you realized what happened?
- What impact has this had on you and others?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

These questions are typically posed during teacher-led group meetings referred to as circles, which also include other classmates and/or others in the school community. Circles occur continuously, not only in response to wrongdoing, but also as a way for students and staff to get to know each other better and to function more effectively as a group.

Students meet with staff in circles to collectively establish behavioral expectations; to help one another over academic, social, or behavioral hurdles; to help identify and discuss an important school issue; as well as to share thoughts and ideas about a range of other topics.

Circles build a sense of community. All voices are heard, all share in making important decisions, and all share in experiences providing opportunities for developing greater trust, respect, empathy, and mutual understanding. To learn more, read the article "The Power of the Circle."

Circles represent one of many restorative practices, which range from informal (such as affective statements) to formal (such as restorative conferences). Affective statements are personal interactions that communicate feeling statements when emotions are triggered, in response to either a positive or negative behavior. For example, a teacher who witnessed a student speaking disrespectfully to a classmate would pull the student aside to tell him she feels hurt and saddened to hear him speak this way to a classmate. Simple affective statements practiced daily represent one of several ways to help a school community learn to think restoratively. Restorative conferences occur in response to a serious incident. The process requires preparation, and is always facilitated by a trained restorative practices facilitator, who guides participants (those who caused harm and those were harmed) through restorative questions. All who were involved

in or affected by the incident are invited. Read about other informal and formal restorative practices on the IIRP website.

Restorative practices and EF challenges

Restorative practices may match up particularly well with at least some students whose executive function challenges impact self-monitoring and emotional self-regulation. By its very nature, these practices provide students ongoing opportunities to examine how their behavior impacts the people around them. Furthermore, these experiences occur in a restorative milieu focusing on trust, safety, and self-respect. Rather than being summarily suspended or expelled for their misbehavior, restorative practices provide students with new opportunities to alleviate underlying feelings of shame, learn from their behavioral mistakes, and change their behavioral ways.

Restorative practices are based upon a simple premise: Human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do thing *with* them, rather than *to* or *for* them.

An accredited graduate school in Pennsylvania, the International Institute for Restorative Practices grants an advanced degree in restorative practices and provides schools and communities in the United States and abroad with information, resources, and training. The IIRP traces its origins to the Community Service Foundation and Buxmont Academy, which since 1977 have provided education, counseling, foster care, and other services to help young people and their families to grow and change through restorative practices.

To learn more about restorative practices and the studies exploring their effectiveness, visit the IIRP website (http://www.iirp.edu) or email Laura Mirsky, Assistant Director for Communications at IIRP (lauramirsky@iirp.edu) or Craig Adamson, PhD, Associate Professor at IIRP and Executive Director of CSF Buxmont (craigadamson@csfbuxmont.org).

A clinical and consulting psychologist, **Mark Katz, PhD**, *is the director of Learning Development Services, an educational, psychological, and neuropsychological center in San Diego. He is a contributing editor to Attention magazine and a member of its editorial advisory board, a former member of CHADD's professional advisory board, and a recipient of the CHADD Hall of Fame Award.*

ADDITIONAL READING

Bob Costello, Joshua Wachtel, and Ted Wachtel, *The Restorative Practices Handbook for Teachers, Disciplinarians, and Administrators*. Bethlehem, Pennsylvania: International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2009.

Bob Costello, Joshua Wachtel, and Ted Wachtel, *Restorative Circles in Schools: Building Community and Enhancing Learning*. Bethlehem, Pennsylvania: International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2010.

Laura Mirsky, "The Power of the Circle," in *Educational Leadership*, Summer 2014.

Laura Mirsky, "Restorative Practices: Giving Everyone a Voice to Create Safer Saner School Communities," in *The Prevention Researcher*, December 2011.