

# Restorative Conversations

## Description

**Restorative Conversations are about restoring relationships.** They are an effective intervention when one student behaves in a way that directly harms an individual or the group, or when two or more students are involved in an interpersonal conflict. This is an informal intervention that can take place in as little as ten minutes or less, depending upon the context. (See Student-Student Mediation when a more protracted or intense conflict occurs between students.)

Restorative Conversations ideally occur as soon as possible after an incident or a pattern of persistent unskillful\* behaviors. The intentional sequence of questions in a Restorative Conversation helps students take responsibility for what happened, reflect on the impact of the incident, and arrive at a solution that mends relationships and helps to leave the past behind and move ahead. Adult mindsets will impact the efficacy of a Restorative Conversation. Demonstrating curiosity, taking a listening stance, and expressing greater interest in the future than in the past will model a belief in the student's capacity to resolve the situation.

\*Unskillful: There is a skill gap. The student doesn't know how or when to use a desired target behavior.

## Protocol: What it Looks Like

1. "What happened?"  
(This question encourages students to take responsibility and own their behavior. If a student needs support in unpacking their part in the conflict, consider asking, "What was your role in this?")
2. "How did your actions/your words make \_\_\_\_\_ feel?" **Or**, "How did your actions/words impact the class?"  
(This question supports students to take the perspective of the other and reflect on the impact of their behavior.)
3. "What can you do to make it right?"  
(This question encourages students to take an action that will repair the relationship with an individual or a group. Asking the student what they **can** do promotes student agency.)
4. "Thank you for listening and thinking with me. I appreciate how you \_\_\_\_\_. One way I can support you is \_\_\_\_\_."  
(Closing the conversation with an appreciative comment and an offer of support builds good will and demonstrates optimism in the student's ability to mend relationships.)

\*Follow-up questions will naturally surface as you move through this protocol.

## Examples

**Example A:** One student has sucked the energy out of the room by "going off" on the teacher, railing about how boring the class is, and how dumb their classmates are.

1. "What happened? What was going on for you?"

2. "How do you think your actions impacted the class?"
3. "What can you do to make things right?"
4. "Thank you for reflecting on the situation with me. I appreciate how you \_\_\_\_\_. Moving forward, I plan to support you by \_\_\_\_\_."

**Example B:** Over the past week, one student has been distracting other students during independent work time, making noises, moving around the classroom and grabbing papers, and engaging in sidebar conversations. The teacher has used First Responses and Behavior Check-Ins and the behavior has continued.

1. "What's been going on for you during independent work time this week?"
2. "How do you think your actions impacted the class?"
3. "What can you do to make things right?"
4. "Thank you for reflecting on the situation with me. I appreciate how you \_\_\_\_\_. Moving forward, I plan to support you by \_\_\_\_\_."

\*If the behavior subsides for a short period of time and resurfaces, a Behavioral Problem-Solving and Planning Conference will support the student in replacing the unskillful behavior with an Life and Learning Competencies target behavior.

**Example C:** Two students have had a verbal disagreement that turns into a shouting match.

**Joint conversation:**

1. "What happened? What role did each of you play?"
2. "How do you think your words might have made \_\_\_ feel? How do you think your words might have made \_\_\_ feel?"
3. "What can each of you do to make it right between you and move on?"
4. "Thank you for really listening to one another. I appreciate how you \_\_\_\_\_. I commit to supporting both of you by\_\_\_\_\_."

**Example D:** One student has clearly done or said something that has harmed, embarrassed, or hurt the feelings of another student.

**Individual conversation with the targeted person:**

1. "What happened?"
2. "How did this make you feel?"
3. "Thanks for sharing with me what happened. I'm going to meet with \_\_\_\_\_ and give them an opportunity to

**Individual conversation with the aggressor:**

1. "What happened?"
2. "How do you think your words/actions made \_\_\_\_\_ feel?"
3. "What can you do to make it right?"
4. "Thank you for taking a step back to think about how \_\_\_\_\_ might have felt. I appreciate how you\_\_\_\_. One way I can

<p>think about what they can do to make it right. I'll bring you together, so ____ can share with you what they plan to do. How does that sound? I appreciate your willingness to work it out with ____."</p>	<p>support you is____."</p>
<p>Meet with the targeted student first. Bring the students together for the aggressor to share with the targeted student how they plan to make it right.</p>	

### Considerations

1. Students' emotional states will influence whether you conference immediately after the incident has occurred or later in the day.
2. The history and quality of the relationship between conflicting students will determine your choice to conference with students individually or together.
3. Depending upon the student's level of self-awareness, consider using more tentative, exploratory language, for example, "How do you think your actions **might have** impacted the class? How do you think your words **might have** made \_\_\_\_\_ feel?"
4. Taking an action to make it right might look like:
  - a. A sincere verbal or written apology that expresses regret or remorse and expresses a commitment to change how the student will treat the other person or group in the future.
  - b. An apology of action that is a gesture of kindness and goodwill intended to put the past behind and repair the relationship. This can be any action from offering to do something nice for the other person, to an action that helps a teacher or makes the classroom a better place.
5. If a student is unwilling to take responsibility for their words/actions, consider identifying an adult ally in the school who might engage the student in a *Restorative Conversation*.
6. Parent/Caregiver Communication: The decision to contact a parent/caregiver via phone, text or email after a *Restorative Conversation* requires us to use our best judgment whether this communication will add value to the situation at hand. Factors that can influence this decision include:
  - a. Age of the students - If the student is an adolescent and they have arrived at a solution for moving forward, there is often no need to reach out to a parent/caregiver.
  - b. Family Dynamic - If there is clear knowledge that calling home could complicate the situation, and there has been resolution, it is not necessary to call home.
  - c. Protracted Conflicts - Contacting the parent/caregiver after a Restorative

Conversation in these situations can be strategic. Sharing the plan and partnering with the parent/caregiver on how to support their child at home and school can build relational trust and support the students' efforts going forward.

### Sample Parent/Caregiver Script

"I am reaching out to share that \_\_\_\_\_ (name of student) has been having some difficulty with another student in class.. They \_\_\_\_\_ (describe the behaviors neutrally). Today, I facilitated a Restorative Conversation to help your son/daughter/child work through the conflict. The conversation went very well. Your son/daughter/child has committed to \_\_\_\_\_ (describe what the student has resolved to do to mend the relationship and move on). We will keep an eye on the situation. Please reach out with questions or suggestions you might have for supporting your child."