

What is Restorative Discipline?

In schools, Restorative Discipline is multifaceted in nature. Restorative Discipline could include interventions when harm has happened, as well as practices that help to prevent harm and conflict by helping to build a sense of belonging, safety, and social responsibility in the school community. The table below highlights the differences of traditional discipline compared to Restorative Discipline.

Traditional Discipline	Restorative Discipline
Misbehavior defined as breaking school rules or letting the school down.	Misbehavior defined as harm (emotional/mental/physical) done to one person/group by another.
Focus is on what happened and establishing blame or guilt.	Focus on problem-solving by expressing feelings and needs and exploring how to address problems in the future.
Adversarial relationship and process. Includes an authority figure with the power to decide on penalty, in conflict with wrongdoer.	Dialogue and negotiation, with everyone involved in the communication and cooperation with each other.
Imposition of pain or unpleasantness to punish and deter/prevent.	Restitution as a means of restoring both parties, the goal being reconciliation and acknowledging responsibility for choices.
Attention to rules and adherence to due process.	Attention to relationships and achievement of a mutually desired outcome.
Conflict/wrongdoing represented as impersonal and abstract; individual versus school.	Conflict/wrongdoing recognized as interpersonal conflicts with opportunity for learning.
One social injury compounded by another.	Focus on repair of social injury/damage.
School community as spectators, represented by member of staff dealing with the situation; those directly affected uninvolved and powerless.	School community involved in facilitating restoration; those affected taken into consideration; empowerment.
Accountability defined in terms of receiving punishment.	Accountability defined as understanding impact of actions, taking responsibility for choices, and suggesting ways to repair harm.

Restorative discipline can 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. Impromptu 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.

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Restorative discipline is a prevention-oriented approach that fosters consensus-based decisions to resolve school conflict such as bullying, truancy and disruptive behavior. It focuses not only on rule-breaking and discipline but focuses on changing the entire school culture. Restorative Discipline:

Acknowledges that relationships are central to building community.

Ensures equity of voice among all members of the community. All voices are valued, everyone is heard.

Establishes a culture of high expectations with high support, emphasizing doing things “WITH” not “TO” or “FOR”.

Builds systems that address misbehavior and harm in a way that strengthens relationships and focuses on the harm done rather than only rule-breaking.

Engages in collaborative problem solving.

Enhances accountability, responsibility and empowers change and growth for all members of the community.