Using Restorative Practices
Every Day in the Classroom

Strategies for classroom conflict conversations and resolutions

Lisa Ward
lkward2@ilstu.edu
Content Specialist For Learning Supports
Objectives

• Compare Punitive vs Restorative Practices in classroom management

• Connect strategies to SEL standards for Illinois

• Develop educator skills to facilitate a restorative conversation to resolve conflicts in the classroom
Punitive VS Restorative Practices

**Punitive Approach**
- School and rules violated
- Establishes Guilt
- Accountability-Punishment
- Adverse Relationship with Authority Figure in Power
- Attention to rules and due process
- Justice directed at offender
- No opportunity for remorse or amends

**Restorative Approach**
- People and relationships violated
- Identifies needs and obligations
- Accountability-Understanding
- Communication and cooperation
- Attention to relationships
- Contributor, receiver and school have roles in the process
- Opportunity for remorse and amends
Strategies for Classroom Conflict Conversations and Resolutions

www.ilclassroomsinaction.org
Human Nature and RULES
Why is it important to consider strategies for conversations and resolutions?

When a conflict happens in the classroom, in the lunchroom, or on the playground, usually the first act is to remove the student we believe has caused the harm. This type of discipline teaches students to avoid being caught more than following rules. If a conflict involves more than one student, the questions in this book can guide a small impromptu conference with those involved. By using these conversations when incidents occur it will allow students to take control of not only the situation, but their feelings and the feelings of others within the same context. Building this awareness will help develop the student’s ability to understand the consequences associated with reactions and how to approach situations in a positive way.

The strategies in this resource work best in conjunction with regular conversation practices such as morning circles or restorative circles. Using these styles of classroom conversations will build a sense of belonging and students will be more responsive and engaged in the conflict conversations when they arise. In this resource, notice that why questions are not included. Students often cannot respond genuinely to why they did what they did, but they can answer how and what questions.

W.A.I.T.

Why
Am
I
Talking???

Overview/ Goal

The main goal is to help students identify and control their emotions, understand other perspectives and resolve the conflict. The strategy described in this resource allows students to reflect, understand, respond, and accept their behaviors. The emphasis is to facilitate communication among those in conflict and give students a chance to be heard and understood. In this to be accomplished, educators need to know when they are talking too much. When adults call a student out, share what they think about what they saw and why it is wrong, before hearing the students’ perspective, it alters the process for resolution. Call the student(s) over, ask the first question suggested and wait. (W.A.I.T= Why Am I Talking?) for the students’ answers. Continuing with the appropriate questions can bring about the resolution and understanding of all involved.

The purpose of these strategies is to resolve a conflict in a relationship, not to decide who wins or loses an argument. Educators are responsible to facilitate the conversations, not decide. This requires everyone to learn how to reach an understanding and let go of the need to be right. Rather than punishing a student for his/her behavior, the strategies will help identify root causes and place responsibility on students to understand the impact of their behavior and take steps to make things better.
The following questions lay the groundwork for conflict resolution processes. These questions seek to discover the root causes of the challenging behavior, to determine its impact, and to repair the harm that was done, toward the goal of restoring the relationship that was damaged.

**All of these questions**......

- Are non-blaming and open ended
- Allow for storytelling and attentive listening
- Separate people’s behaviors from their intrinsic worth as a person
- Allow for all people involved to identify their thoughts and feelings associated with actions
- Provide a forum for meaningful expressions of emotions
- Focus on impacts and how other were affected by the action/s
- Are an inclusive and collaborative approach to problem solving, emphasizing finding solutions rather than assigning blame
- Requires people to take responsibility for their actions
- Attends to the needs of those harmed
- Resolves underlying issues that act as the root cause of challenging behavior

Once the first question is introduced, the educator (facilitator) can start to determine what role each person has within the conflict.

**CONTRIBUTOR**: Person who contributes to the harm of others  
**RECEIVER**: Person who is harmed
The first question in a restorative chat/conversation is the same for all participants.
Ask all students that are involved in the conflict.

What Happened?

Substitution question ideas:
- Tell me about the incident.
- Can you tell me what happened?
- What was going on that led up to this situation?
- What is going on here?

(Purpose: For the facilitator to get a clear understanding of the incident. To help define the contributor/receiver.)

Empathetic Listening: Strategies for ALL questions.

Listen to the responses from all participants with your eyes, heart, and ears – only 7% of what we communicate is transmitted through words. 40% comes from tone, and the remaining 53% is through body language. Paying attention to tone and body language is just as important as hearing the words a person speaks.

ASK YOURSELF:
- What is the speaker’s posture?
- What is the look in the speaker’s eyes communicating?
- How loudly or softly is the speaker speaking?
- Which words are the speaker emphasizing?
Listening Barriers: Be mindful during these conversations!
ARE YOU.....

Multitasking while attempting to listen?
Thinking about what you are going to say next while someone else is speaking?
Thinking about how what the speaker is saying relates to our experiences when the speaker is talking about his/her own experience?
Are you judging the speaker or what the speaker is saying?

Response Pitfalls: Be mindful during these conversations!
ARE YOU.....

Letting the speaker know whether you agree with him/her? (Do Not Take Sides!)
Asking too many probing questions when the speaker is not ready to share?
Giving advice?
Providing interpretations of the speaker’s motives or behaviors?
Relating the speaker’s experience to your own experience?

Each of these pitfalls may be exactly what the speaker wants to hear. The strategy questions outlined in this flipbook are meant to allow students to come to their own conclusions, not for others to decide.

The answers to question 1 should allow you to understand who the “Contributor” and who the “Receiver” is in the conflict. The following strategy questions are divided to reflect this.
Why educators must be open and facilitate without judgement....
CONTRIBUTOR Question

What were you thinking at the time?

Substitution question ideas:
What were your thoughts?
What were you hoping would happen?
What were you feeling when it happened?
What was going on that led up to this situation?

(Purpose: Determine motive of the actions of the contributor. Encourage contributor to reflect on their thinking.)

Conversation Stoppers

Demand
Don’t you talk to me like that!

Diagnosis
The problem with you is that you’re disrespectful.

“Deserve” Thinking
He deserves to be punished.

Judgment
What did you do?
Why would you do that?
You never listen, do you?
You know what happens now, don’t you?
RECEIVER Question

What did you think when you realized what had happened?

Substitution question ideas:
What were you feeling when it happened?
What was that like for you?
What did you think when that happened?
(Purpose: To make clear to the contributor the impact of their actions on others.)

Teaching students to use “I” messages provide the foundation of affective statements. Affective statements are the easiest and most useful tool for building restorative classrooms and relationships.

Simply begin with an “I” statement and provide additional clarification with a feeling and a behavior. It is a personal statement made in response to someone else’s positive or negative behavior. It tells students how their behavior affects you or others.

Situation: A student calls another student a name.
Affective Response: “I don’t like how that makes me feel. That makes me upset and sad.”

“I think...”, “I feel....”, “I believe....”, “I want....”

Question #2
CONTRIBUTOR Question

What have you thought about since?

Substitution question ideas:
How do you feel about the situation now?
(Purpose: Gives the opportunity for students to discuss their actions and the impact they have on others.)

Reflection time for the contributor:
Makes them “aware” of the impact of their actions
Refers to the behavior not the person
Begins to teach empathy skills

Reflection is a vital piece of the process in conflict resolution. Reflection helps to guide students through the before/after looking at the situation. Reflection does not have to focus solely on how students “feel” about their actions. It can include this, but it should also focus on learning about other perspectives. It is also an opportunity for students to discuss their actions and the impact they have on others.

No matter how brief, each reflection provides an opportunity for children to understand the impact of their behavior and to learn empathy for those whom they have affected. Reflections can be written, drawn or even spoken to another student or adult.
**RECEIVER Question**

What impact has this incident had on you and others?

**Substitution question ideas:**

How did this situation affect you and in what ways?
How has it upset/hurt/harmed you?
(Purpose: Make clear the impact of the actions of the contributor.)

Students don’t always understand what “harm” is outside of being physically hurt. Educators may need to guide this response, being careful not to place assumptions on the answers.

“How are you feeling after the incident?” could be a prompt used to guide the student. Modeling or explaining feeling words may be needed for younger students.

Scared  Ashamed  Frightened
Angry
Confused
Sad
Embarrassed

**Question #3**
CONTRIBUTOR Question

Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way have they been affected?

*Substitution question ideas:*

*What role do you think you played in this situation?*

(Purpose: Allows the contributor to show their understanding of how their actions have impacted others.)

Students can help each other with this question. Some students have a very limited understanding of another person’s perspective and may need help. If a student answers “I don’t know,” say to them, “Why don’t you go ask some of your classmates and report back to me at the end of class?” This allows you to avoid an impasse or confrontation when the questions don’t work. This will also allow the student some more reflective time and build relationships with other students. This MUST be followed up on in the same day.

This approach allows for a change of practice which encourages student reflection rather than more typical disciplinary responses that can place too much emphasis on punishment and identifying those who have broken the rules. We must let students understand and repair the harm done to the relationships and restore a feeling of security and peace.
What has been the hardest thing for you?

Substitution question ideas:
What has been the worst thing for you?
How did this make you feel?
(Purpose: Allows the receiver to express their feelings and emotions safely with the guidance of a facilitator.)

People like to have their say. By allowing students to express their emotions and responses to the other person’s choice in behavior creates confidence in speaking up about their thoughts and feelings. This also shows the contributor another perspective that they may not have even considered.

Students often find it intimidating and feel vulnerable when they speak on a personal basis and express feelings to each other, and adults in the school. In truth, most adults also struggle with openly expressing their true thoughts and feelings. Be prepared for this struggle and model ways to express these emotions through conversations, circles and other connections with students.
Identifying needs can be tricky for our students

Think of a time when you were harmed by someone.

On a scale from 1 - 10 on the level of harm choose something that is around a 6.

What did you need from them to move on?
Identifying needs can be tricky for our students

Think of a time when you harmed someone.

On a scale from 1 - 10 on the level of harm choose something that is around a 6.

What did you need to do to move on?
CONTRIBUTOR Question

What do you think you need to do to make things right?

**Substitution question ideas:**

*How can you make things right?*
*What can you do to fix this?*
*How do you think you could demonstrate that you are sorry?*
*Do you have any ideas on how you could make it up to ...?*

(Purpose: The contributor can begin the discussion on how to repair the harm done by their actions.)

Sometimes students struggle with responding to this prompt. Here is some guidance to help:

- I know you don’t know but take a guess.
- If you did know the answer, what would you say?
- Who else can you ask for suggestions?
- Pick two students who will sit with you at lunch today and ask them for suggestions. Come back to me after lunch with the suggestions.
- If you were me, what would you want a student in this situation to do?
- If this happened to you, what would you want to have happen now?

Educators may still need to assist in deciding the consequence; merely punishing a student forgoes a critical learning opportunity. Since the teacher may not be the one harmed in the event, they should be only a guide in what needs to happen to make things right.
RECEIVER Question

What (do you think) needs to happen to make things right?

Substitution question ideas:
What end result would you like to see?
What would you like to happen as a result of our chat?
(Purpose: Allows the receiver to voice their needs to repair the harm done to them.)

Accountability and Natural Consequences vs. Punishment

When wrongdoing/misbehavior occurs, it is important that consequences are identified and required. The restorative questions allow for deeper exploration of impact and involve all stakeholders in the process of determining the most appropriate consequences along with the person who caused the harm. With natural consequences, students become active participants by recognizing the harm they caused and by taking responsibility to make things as right as possible by following through with the identified consequences.

Consequences are defined as a result or effect of an action or condition, while punishment is defined as something that is imposed on someone, generally with the intention of creating pain and discomfort.

Punishment allows for the person to remain a passive recipient without having to take responsibility for their actions. Allowing students to determine and accept consequences for their actions build a better understanding of how their actions can affect others.
Conversation Conclusion Steps
(These can be done as a group or individually if necessary, based on the circumstances.)

Ask contributor- “Is that fair?” or “Could you do that?”
Ask both – What else needs to happen to fix this?

Formally record the agreements
Congratulate the students for working it out
Follow up to see how things are going

ASK EACH PERSON:
Is there anything else you would like to say?

Receiver Needs:
- An opportunity to express emotions and tell their story
- Empowerment
- Acknowledgment from loved ones and colleagues (friends)
- Assurance that what happened was unfair and undeserved
- Seeing the offender held accountable
- Financial restitution and/or vindication
- Possible contact with the offender:
  - Apology
  - Having questions answered
  - Assurance of safety

Contributor Needs:
- Accountability
  - Addresses the resulting harm
  - Encourages empathy and responsibility
  - Transforms shame
- Encouragement to personal transformation
  - Healing of the harms that were a result of the behavior
  - Opportunity for help
  - Enhancement of personal qualities
- Encouragement and support to re-integrate to the class/school community
Punishment works only superficially, primarily when the misbehaving students are in view of those in authority. But punishment does not create empathy in students and encourage them to internalize a commitment to behave properly, so as soon as they are out of sight the inappropriate behavior surfaces again. When we punish students by excluding or humiliating them, they do not feel connected to school administrators, teachers or their well-behaved peers. Rather, they feel shame. When a student is “caught” in a situation they most often display behaviors such as withdrawal, attack self, avoidance or attack others.

The Compass of Shame
Adapted from D.L. Nathanson, Shame and Pride, 1992

Withdrawal:
• isolating oneself
• running and hiding

Attack Other:
• ‘turning the tables’
• blaming the victim
• lashing out verbally or physically

Attack Self:
• self put-down
• masochism

Avoidance:
• denial
• abusing drugs and alcohol
• distraction through thrill seeking
Mystery Food Caper...

Two little girls had been sneaking food from the cafeteria both at breakfast and at lunch (back into the classroom). This was creating a mess and the girls were sneakily eating throughout the day. The teacher had twice talked to the girls about school rules for leaving food in the cafeteria. Unfortunately, both girls continued sneaking food into the classroom.

I asked both girls to come out into the hallway. We found a private spot and sat down. I turned to the girls and thanked them for coming with me and I introduced myself. Luckily, I had been in circle with them on Monday and they remembered me from that circle experience.

I turned to the girl closest to me and asked, “What is happening after breakfast with your extra food?”

She nodded and said, “Oh, that’s what this about. Yeah, I have been stealing food from breakfast and bringing it up my classroom.”

“How about you?” I asked the other girl. “What is happening with you and the breakfast food?” She nodded and said, “Oh, yeah me too. I sneak food in my hoodie and then I eat it later when I am hungry.”

I said, “Well, first of all, you aren’t really stealing that food. It’s yours. You paid for it. I think you are sneaking food that you want. Is that right?”

“Oh, yeah,” replied one girl. We both ride buses that come really late and we only get 5 mins in the diner for breakfast we never get to finish our breakfast.”

I nodded as I did remember that two of the buses that morning were quite late.

I now say to the other girl, “So are you also thinking that you don’t have enough time at breakfast to finish and you sneak the food to the classroom because you are hungry?”

She nodded and said, “Yes, I know our teacher doesn’t want us to bring food up the classroom, but I want to eat my breakfast.”

I leaned forward and said, “Gosh, you guys are right. I noticed those buses really come late and I believe you that you don’t have time to eat your breakfast. I think your teacher can fix that for you.

What if she talks to the workers in the cafeteria and on the days when your bus is late you both can stay in the diner an extra 5 minutes to finish your breakfast.”

They both nodded and actually thanked me.

Then I asked what is happening at lunch (because they were both sneaking food into their classrooms from lunch too.)
Tools and Resources for

ELA
MATH
Science
Social Science
Social Emotional Learning
Technology
Fine Arts

www.ilclassroomsinaction.org