

Strategies
for

Classroom
Conflict
Conversations
and Resolutions



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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. This conversation could lead to the root cause of the disruption. Students sometimes feel threatened or misunderstood. 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 develop the student's ability to think through prior to getting into the conflicts as the grow.

This procedure works best in conjunction with regular conversation practices such as morning circles or restorative circle conversations. Using these styles of classroom conversations will build a sense of belonging and students will be more likely to be involved and present in the conflict conversations when they arise. Notice that **why style** questions are not included. Students often respond genuinely to **why** they did what they did, but they can answer **how** and **what** questions.

The main goal is for students to identify and control their emotions, understand other perspectives and resolve the conflict. For this to be accomplished, educators need to know when they are “talking too much”. The strategy in this book is used to allow students to reflect, understand, respond, and accept their behaviors. If adults talk too much, how can students have a chance to speak? Calling a student over, telling them what you just saw, and why it is wrong before asking the first question in the strategy will not work. Calling the student(s) over, ask the first question and wait.... wait.... (W.A.I.T= Why Am I Talking....) Then continue with the appropriate questions to guide the conversation.

Another goal of these conversations is the ability to resolve a conflict in a relationship, not to decide who wins or loses an argument. Educators are available to facilitate the conversations, not decide. This requires us to learn how to reach an understanding and let go of our need to be right. Rather than chastising a student for his/her behavior, help identify root causes and place responsibility on students to understand the impact of their behavior and take steps to make things better.

2

Overview/ Goal

RECEIVER- Person who is harmed

CONTRIBUTOR- Person who contributes to the harm of others

The following questions lay the groundwork for all forms of 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.

When using restorative style questions, you:

- Ask the contributor to identify who has been harmed
- Ask the contributor to describe what harm was done (not all harm is physical)
- Ask the contributor to describe what needs to be done to make things right
- Require a verbal or written response from the contributor
- Ask the person harmed to express their feelings by using “I” statements to describe the harm done and to identify what needs to be done to make things right

Strategically use these questions....

- In a non-judgmental way that communicates a genuine desire for understanding.... NOT to win.
- In an appropriate public or private setting

These style questions can be an effective approach to many conflict/problem behaviors.

Inside the classroom

Bullying	Interpersonal Conflict
Student-teacher conflict	Tardies/chronic absenteeism

Outside the classroom

Hallway skirmish	Student defiance
Counseling office/interventions	Student conflict

Restorative Style Conversations

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.

6

Question #1

What were you thinking at the time?

CONTRIBUTOR Question

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 makse me upset and sad.”*

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

8

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?

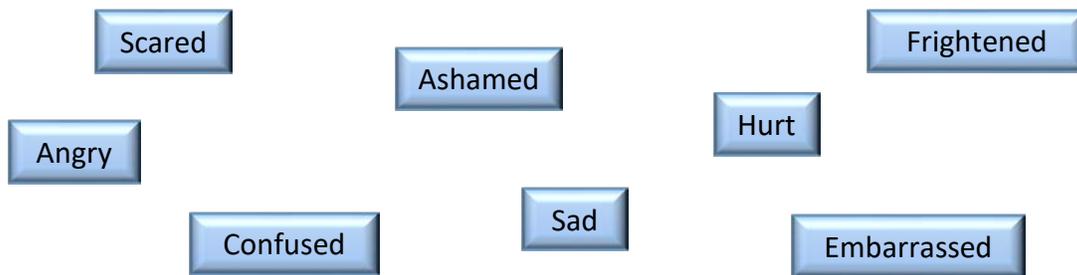
How has it upset/hurt/harmed you?

(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.



10

Question #3

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.

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

What role do you think you played in this situation?

Substitution question ideas:

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

CONTRIBUTOR Question

RECEIVER Question

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.

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.

14

Question #5

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?

- ❖ 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

The following pages have scenarios depicting Restorative Practice Strategies in action. You may notice some word changes to some of the basic questions (the blue words). However, the focus of the question stays the same. Making small adjustments without changing the function of the question is possible. (Reproduced with permission from C.Cranston at Restorative Practices & Talking Circles Facebook Group.)

BUS SITUATION

I always reassure the student that they are not in trouble. I start the conversation by saying, "Hi, I am Mrs. Cranston. Thank you for coming with me. You are not in trouble. Your bus driver asked me to come talk to you today. She is really worried about you. [What is happening on the bus?](#)"

This little girl looked at me and said, "She is worried about me? Why"

I answered, "She told me that you are standing up then sitting down then standing up over and over on the bus and she is afraid if she needs to stop quickly you will go flying around the bus and get hurt."

The girl is quiet then she softly says, "Yeah, I do stand up and sit down all the time and she tells me to stay in my seat."

I asked, "[What are thinking about that now that you know your driver is scared you might get hurt standing up?](#)"

She answered, "Well, I can't really stop, because I am scared that I will miss my stop and I can't see the stops if I am sitting."

I smiled and said, "Oh, that makes sense. I would be afraid to miss my stop too. [Now think about how you can fix that because we want you to be safe.](#)"

"Well", she said, "I could move to the other side of the bus maybe I could see better from there? and then I wouldn't be so worried about missing my stop."

"Yeah", I replied, "That sounds like a great idea. Let's go talk to your driver and see if she can help or if she has any ideas on how to fix this."

"I am scared to talk to her", she said as I took her hand and headed out to the bus pickup area. I leaned down and said, "I know, that's why I am here with you. I will help you talk to the driver."

We walked out to the bus and spoke with the driver. The little girl was so quiet I think the driver couldn't quite make out her words. So, I repeated the girl's words. The driver smiled leaned down toward the little girl and said, "How about if you sit on that side right up here in this seat so you can see really well." Then she leaned in real close to the little girl's face and said, "And I know everyone's stops...I promise that I will never let you miss your stop."

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.)

I asked them **what they were thinking about** sneaking lunch food into the classroom and they said they didn't have enough time to finish their food. So I asked them, "**What are you thinking about** the time you have in the lunchroom. What are you doing in the lunchroom that you run out of time to finish your lunch?"

That got them thinking....then one girl looked at the other and said, "Well, I think we talk too much. I think that starting today I can eat, then talk, then eat, then talk, then eat, that should give me more time to eat."

I laughed and said, "Wow, that sounds like a great idea!"

I turned to the other girl and said, "**What do you need** to do to finish your lunch on time?"

She grinned and said, "Hey, I have an idea...let's be first in line from recess to wash our hands so we are first in line for lunch! That will give us more time!"

The three of us were really excited to figure out how to fix this problem! We decided that their teacher could help them solve the breakfast issue, but they were going to need to fix the lunch problem.

Bullying Situation

Parent comes into school concerned about a possible bully situation on the bus. Parent identifies the student who is doing the bullying (3rd grader). The victim is a kindergarten student who has a 5th grade sibling also on the bus who is reporting the bully behavior to the parent. So that's the background. I seek out the 5th grader and the kindergarten. We sit down and I ask...

"What is happening on the bus?"

5th grader reports that the 3rd grader is swearing, yelling, hitting and name calling his kindergarten sibling while they are on the bus. After hearing this I turned to the kindergarten student and asked the same question, "What is happening on the bus?"

Kindergarten student was very shy and pretty much nodded and just said, "Yeah, he/she scratched me today." So I restated, "So name calling, swearing, hitting and scratching are happening to you on the bus?"

Both students nodded so I looked at the 5th grader and said, "Now that we know what is happening...what do you think?" The 5th grader got a little choked up and said, "I think my little brother/sister isn't safe on the bus because of....(name of student doing the name calling etc.)"

I looked at the kindergarten student and said, "What do you think now?" He replied, "I think he/she should stop being mean to me."

I said, "How does all this make you feel?" Both students said, "Scared". Then the 5th grader said, "It makes me mad that my brother/sister can't ride the bus and be safe."

"Well", I said, "What do you need so that you aren't mad or scared anymore. So you can feel safe on the bus today."

Kindergarten said, "I need for her/him to stop hitting me and be nice."

5th grader said, "I need for her/him to stop name calling, hitting and swearing at my little brother/sister."

Bullying cont.

"Ok", I said, "Do you want me to go get her/him (the person doing the bully behaviors). "No", said the 5th grader. He then put his head in his hands and murmured, "I can't face her/him. I can't do it."

Right away I said, "That is OK you don't need to face her/him. I will do that for you and tell her/him what you need." At that point the kindergarten student came out from under the blanket he/she had been hiding under...and said, "I do! I want to talk to her/him. I want to tell them to be nice and stop swearing and hitting me."

I smiled and said, "You bet, let's go get her/him. I then sent the 5th grader back to class.

The student who was exhibiting bully behaviors (3rd grader) came into the discussion room to see the Kindergarten student back under the blanket hiding in a big round chair. I offered the 3rd grader a chair and said, "What has been happening on the bus?is really scared of you." The 3rd grader didn't say one word, then just immediately started to tear up and said, "I don't want to talk about it."

I said, "Ok, but (kindergarten student) does want to talk about it with you. I turned to the K student and said, "Can you tell her/him what is happening to you on the bus?" "Yes", he/she said, as they peeked over the blanket. "You called me a, you scratched me here (pointed to a scratch) and you have been hitting me."

By this time the 3rd grader is crying. I asked her/him again, "So what is happening on the bus?" She/he just stared at me, but there was no denial. I asked the kindergarten student, "How does it make you feel when this happens on the bus?" He/she said, "I feel really sad and scared."

So, at this point I looked at both students and said, "So we know what is happening..." I gave the 3rd grader one more chance to speak and asked, "Now that you know he/she is scared of you...What do you think now?" I got more tears.

So, at this point I looked at both students and said, "So we know what is happening..." They both nodded. I turned to the Kindergartner, "What do you need her/him to do on the bus today, so you feel safe?"

Kindergartner looked right at the 3rd grader and said, "Be nice to me. No hitting, swearing, or being mean to me. Just be nice." We both then looked at the 3rd grader and I asked, "Can you do that? Be nice, no hitting or swearing?" He/she was silent a moment, so I reminded her/him that this was their chance for a redo. "I can tell you are really feeling bad about this...now is your chance to make it right to fix it!"

Finally, with trembling lips she/he said, "Yes". I looked toward the Kindergartner, who was sitting straight up now and said, "Do you need more? Can you give her/him a chance on the bus today to be nice?" "Yep", he/she said. We decided to check in tomorrow after the morning bus ride.

This situation would also call for follow-up conversations with each student individually to make sure there are not other behaviors going on between the 5th grader/3rd grader/Kindergartner that didn't come out of this conversation.

