

The Center for Dispute Resolution at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law (C-DRUM) advances conflict resolution processes to transform relationships, systems, and the world.

Restorative Approaches Lesson 5: The Restorative Philosophy

Key Takeaways:

Restorative approaches focus on healing the harm that conflicts and misconduct can cause. Traditional discipline uses punishment as the primary tool to keep students from misbehaving. Studies show that punitive and exclusionary discipline can sometimes make problems worse and cause long-term negative impact.

Participants' Learning Objectives:

Students will understand the foundations of the restorative justice philosophy and how it differs from a more traditional punitive approach to addressing misconduct and conflict.

Materials:

1. Choose an object to serve as a talking piece. The object should fit in students' hands and can be easily passed from person to person. The object should have some meaning to you that you can imbue it with by telling a story or describing its value to you and why it has that value.

Examples:

- a. "This diploma cover represents the goal of our work."
- b. "I am going to use this brain stress ball for our talking piece because we are going to be thinking and sharing a lot."
2. Have enough copies of the info graphic for each small group of 3 to 5 students for this lesson.
3. Pull up Lesson 5 PowerPoint on your computer and project it on your classroom screen so everyone can see it.

Procedure:

1. Begin the lesson in your regular classroom arrangement so students can all see the movie and slides. No circle is needed at the start of this lesson.

2. Follow the instructions on the PowerPoint slides as you take your students through the exercise.
3. When it is time to consider the infographic, invite students to form groups of 3 to 5 to read it together and discuss the questions on the PowerPoint slide.
4. After the students have shared their thoughts in small group, they can move their chairs or desks into one large circle so that everyone can see and hear each other when they are facing the center.
5. Bring your chosen object into circle so you can use it as the talking piece and explain why you chose it.
6. Once you have completed the lesson, have students return their chairs to the regular configuration.

Approximate Time: about 20 minutes

You can adjust the timing to give your students time and space to discuss these situations and their feelings about them.

Pro Tips:

Restorative approaches can be difficult to understand if you have only experienced a punitive discipline system. It is easiest to help people understand the paradigm if they can apply the philosophy to their own life or the life of one of their peers. This case study attempts to do that. It is helpful to allow students five to seven minutes to unpack it and talk informally in small group before discussing it in circle. If time is tight when you go into circle, adjust the circle prompt to ask students to give short or one-word answers.

Extend the Learning:

Numerous studies illustrate the negative effects of exclusionary practices such as suspension and expulsion on students. The Maryland Commission on the School-to-Prison Pipeline and Restorative Practices Final Report outlines some of the consequences on pages 20-23.

Encourage your students to explore scholarly articles and reports identifying the effects suspension and expulsions can have on students. [The “Opportunity Youth Playbook” by The Forum for Youth Investment](#) discusses young adults left behind by the educational system, the impact of failure on the youth and society, and how many can recover. This article, [Promising Pathways from School Restorative Practices to Educational Equity](#), by John Gomez, Christina L. Rucinski and Ann Higgins-D'Alessandro, addresses how exclusionary discipline affects the Access Gap in academic performance and how restorative approaches are helping schools narrow it in some systems.

You can check in with your students to see if they know other students whose experience mirrors some of the findings. They can also [see the legislation, HB 725](#), which redefines

school discipline under Maryland Law. They can also learn more about restorative approaches on the [Restorative Approaches in Education website](#) maintained by the Center for Dispute Resolution at the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law.

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