

# RESTORATIVE

## practice toolkit

*Promoting*  
Attachment  
Regulation  
Competency  
& Health





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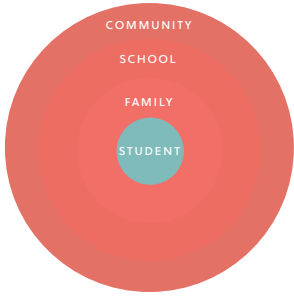
Finger Lakes Community Schools exists to support the development of culturally responsive, trauma-informed community schools which have the capacity to deliver a continuum of evidence-based and restorative practices organized using a multi-tiered system of support.

The resources provided in this toolkit are a compilation of collective restorative practice training efforts, including best-practice tools from Partners in Restorative Initiatives (PIRI), Restorative Justice Education, the Chicago Public Schools Office of Social and Emotional Learning, and the NYC Department of Education. These resources are intended to support teachers, administrators, mental health staff, and community partners in developing and maintaining restorative communities of practice in the school setting.

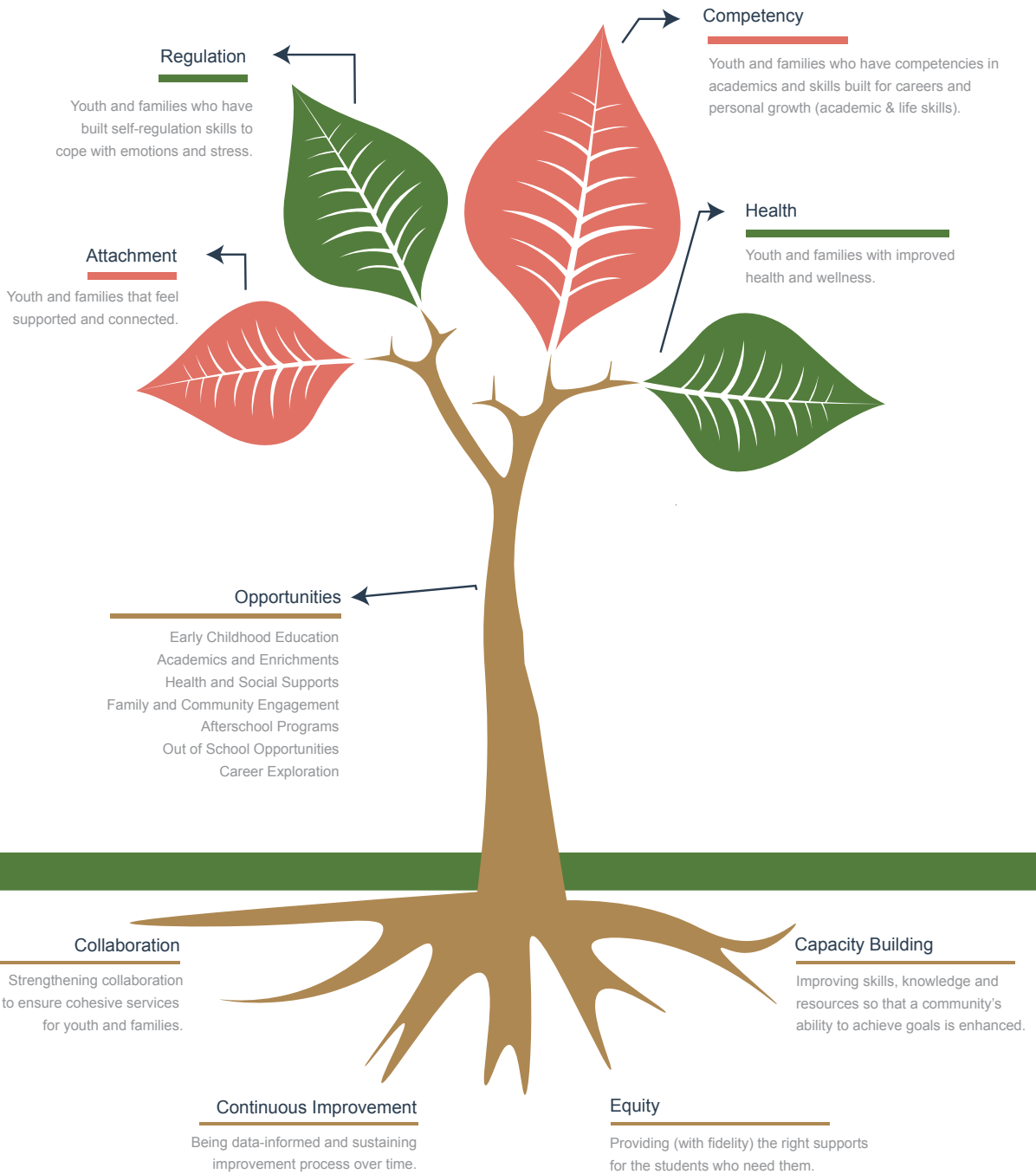
Students are at the core of everything we do. Thus, it is important that the tools in this resource guide be used by trained school staff, administrators, parents, and community partners. These tools are not intended to replace training and are not a platform to begin practicing formal restorative practices without support. Best practice requires ongoing professional development and coaching.

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# COMMUNITY SCHOOLS FRAMEWORK



Students are at the center of everything we do.  
Community Schools partner with service providers, weaving them into the fabric of the daily lives of students, families, and communities.



# ARCH

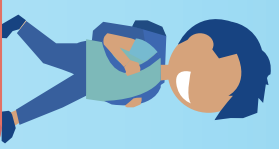


## ATTACHMENT

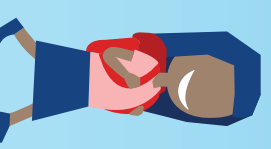
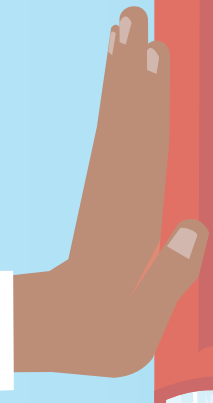
Youth and families that feel supported and connected.

## REGULATION

Youth and families who have built self-regulation skills to cope with emotions and stress.



## COLLABORATION



## COMPETENCY

Youth and families who have competencies in academics and skills built for careers and personal growth (academic & life skills).

## HEALTH

Youth and families with improved health and wellness.

# editorial note

To be well, young people need to be able to trust, to cope with strong emotions, develop academic and non-academic skills and care for their own physical and emotional wellness. We organize our thinking around those needs with the Collaboration ARCH. We encourage the question, “How can we work together to help young people build Attachment, self-Regulation, Competence and Health?” Restorative Practices is a tool we can share in common across disciplines to meet those developmental needs. We encourage anyone working with young people to familiarize themselves with Restorative Practices, pursue training for specific settings and professions, and also to develop and share techniques with colleagues. This toolkit is designed as an invitation and starting place. Thank you for taking interest in Restorative Practices and for investing in the well-being of our young people.

The foundation of restorative practices is the relationship that is built through community circles. Restorative practices exist along a continuum and community must be established before harm can begin to be repaired. Best-practice indicates that to be effective, restorative practices must be the norm which drive decision-making from the language we use with students, the language we use with families, and the language we use with each other as professionals.

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*“It’s relationships, not programs that change children...  
Young people thrive when adults care about them on a one-to-one level,  
and when they have a sense of belonging to a caring community.”*

Bill Milliken, Communities in Schools (CIS) Founder

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# Restorative Justice & Restorative Practices

Restorative Justice is a community-based approach to building, repairing, and restoring relationships. Restorative Justice provides a space for community members to be held accountable while participating in creating pathways to repair harm. It encourages participants to reflect upon how their values and beliefs impact the greater community.

Restorative practices are often used interchangeably with Restorative Justice. The difference is that Restorative Practices refer to specific responses within a community that aim to build capacity for members to discuss, reflect, and challenge individual perspectives. In schools, Restorative Practices use methods such as circles for community building, teaching, and conflict resolution. These circles promote inclusiveness, relationship-building and problem solving. Specifically, the circles connect students and their supporters to first build community and, once built, address wrongdoing.

The foundation of Restorative Practices is the relationship that is built before wrongdoing occurs!

## RESTORATIVE JUSTICE MINDSET

Intentionally builds relationships and trust within a community

Values and welcomes multiple perspectives

Acknowledges that healing is crucial to restoration and that it is a process.

When harm is caused, the harm-doer is asked to take an active role in repairing the harm.

Interpersonal conflicts are resolved by dialogue that gets at the root of the conflict and best ways to move forward. It includes all parties involved.

Asks that individuals are vulnerable.

When harm is caused, acknowledges that those effected often need support and healing opportunities.

Believes that ownership of a conversation or process should be collective.

Considers the individualized and personal experiences that define the event for those affected.

Asks individuals to focus on the facts of the event.

## NON RESTORATIVE JUSTICE MINDSET

Assumes relationships and trust automatically exist in a community.

Does not acknowledge healing.

When harm is caused, the harm-doer is punished.

Interpersonal conflicts do not need to be resolved; they “disappear”, or are resolved with unhealthy mechanisms (i.e. violence, screaming, etc.)

Considers only the behaviors that occurred during an event and assigns a predetermined response to the event regardless of how others are impacted.

Sides with perspective that aligns with their own values, beliefs, or truths.



# Foundations of Practice

Restorative practices is not a program.  
It is a social science, a mindset, a change of heart, and a philosophy.

Restorative practices reflect a philosophy that holds that all communities are based on relationships. The stronger the relationships become, the less likely wrongdoing will occur, and the more likely wrongdoing can be repaired if it does occur.

Restorative practices are considered a social science, a blueprint of how to build a network of relationships (social capital\*) and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision making.

Restorative practices require ongoing learning and reflection.

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## RESTORATIVE PRACTICES START WITH YOU!

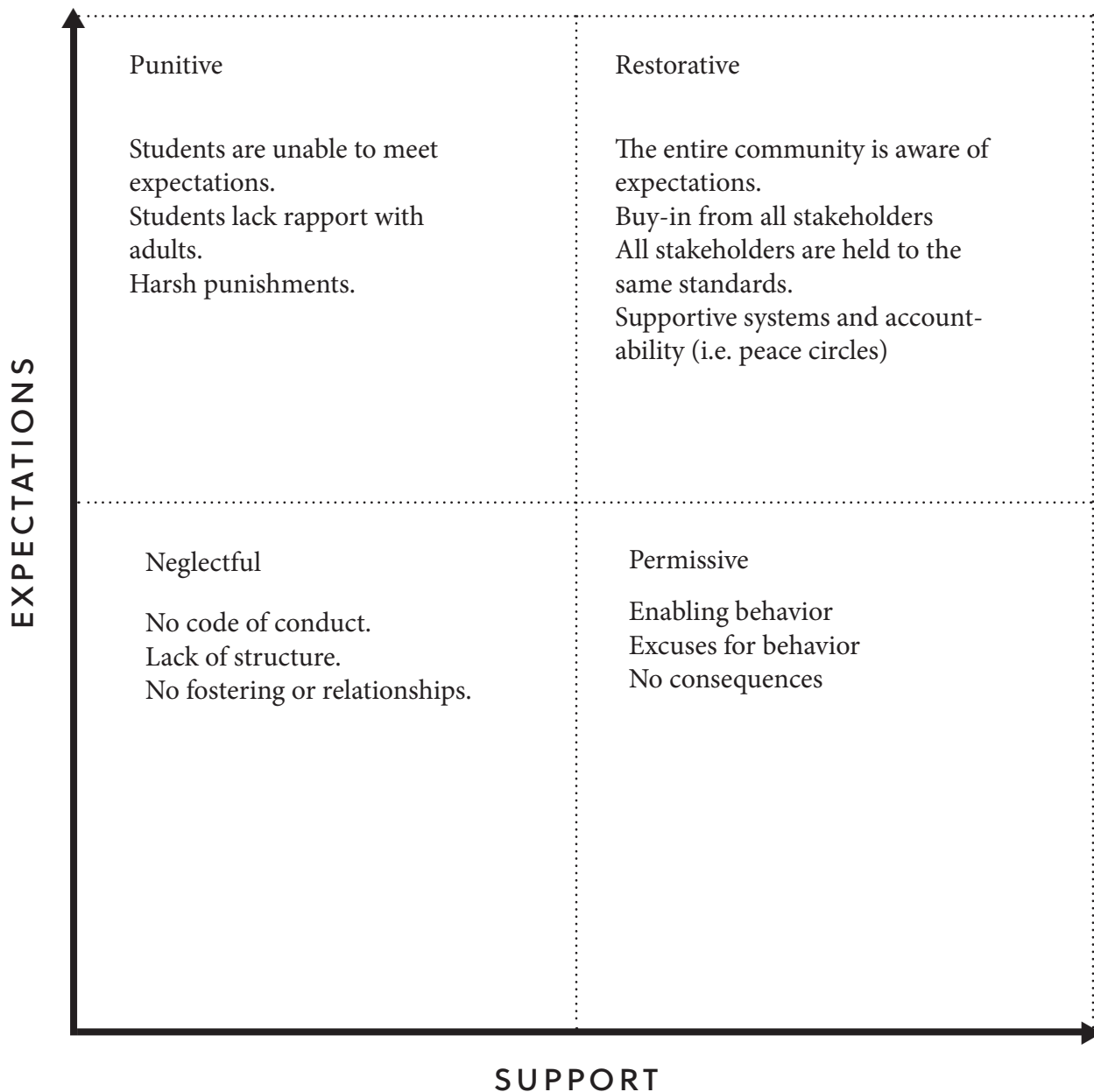
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“  
You can't make someone  
feel worse and expect  
them to perform better”

——— *Randy Sprick, PhD*

# Key Principles of RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Restorative practices challenge us to reflect upon the traditional role that discipline plays in our school systems. As illustrated in the Social Discipline Window, discipline can be divided into four parts: punitive (authoritarian), restorative (authoritative), neglectful (irresponsible), and permissive (paternalistic). Restorative practices encourage schools to operate using well established and communicated expectations, buy-in from all stakeholders, and high levels of support, encouragement and nurture.



Restorative Practices also shift the way we convene and dialogue with each other. Restorative practices allow all stakeholders (students, families, allies, school staff, community members) to:

- Engage in a face-to-face meeting
- Create a comprehensive, well thought-out agreement
- Follow up to support the completion of this agreement
- Celebrate our successes
- External coercion to internal motivation

Restorative Practices shifts our dialogue from:

- Telling to Listening
- Knowing the answers to being curious
- The institution restoring balance to those affected restoring balance
- Focusing on the wrongdoer to focusing on those harmed and those who caused harm

# COMMUNITY

A school is a **Community**. Relationships are the heart of our school communities, and we must work diligently to build, strengthen, and restore these relationships. This means we must first use Restorative Practices pro-actively by providing all members of the community with voice, respect, and acceptance. While we often focus on how to respond after harm is done, we cannot “restore” a community when the community was not built in the first place.



# SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Students need **Social & Emotional Learning** to succeed in school, college, career, and life. Our schools and our disciplinary systems must intentionally teach students self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. These skills are shown to improve students' pro-social behaviors, reduce emotional distress, prevent conduct problems, and contribute to higher academic achievement. Social and emotional skills are also critical for adults to build the trusting relationships with each other and with students that allow them to engage in Restorative Practices.





# ACCOUNTABILITY

**Accountability** is achieved when someone understands the impact of his/her actions, takes responsibility for choices, and works to repair harm done. Adults help students hold themselves accountable by both setting high expectations and providing high levels of support. This is achieved when educators do things with students—not to them or for them. Restorative Practices do not eliminate consequences; they promote consequences that hold students deeply accountable for repairing and learning from the impact of their actions.



# HEAL AND REPAIR HARM

When someone does something that harms a community, the goal of an effective response is to **Heal & Repair Harm**. In order to do so, it is essential to identify the needs of all parties involved and provide them with opportunities to voice those needs. Actions taken in response to harm must address these needs and the root cause of any behavior incident or conflict, rebuild impacted relationships and communities, and provide opportunities for people to reflect on, heal, fix, and learn from their actions.



# RESTORATIVE SYSTEMS AND MINDSETS

Restorative Practices require **Restorative Systems and Mindsets**. We must align our school policies, procedures, and culture to a restorative philosophy that values every member of the community. This includes how we intentionally build a positive school climate, how we respond to disciplinary infractions, how we engage students in the classroom, and how we speak to and interact with one another. Restorative Practices are not a quick fix to student behaviors or disciplinary issues, but rather a school culture focused on relationships and high levels of support to create long-term impact.



# Restorative Mindset

A restorative mindset describes how a person understands community and one's role in the community.

The values and concepts that underlie a restorative mindset include:

- Relationships and trust are at the center of community
- All members of the community are responsible to and for each other
- Multiple perspectives are welcome and all voices are equally important
- Healing is a process essential to restoring community
- Harm-doers should be held accountable for and take an active role in repairing harm
- Conflict is resolved through honest dialogue and collaborative problem-solving that addresses the root cause and the needs of those involved

Through Restorative Practices, students learn to take ownership over their own feelings and actions. Restorative responses, including the use of "I" statements, promote **self-awareness** and **self management**.

Restorative Practices teach students the impact and consequences of their decisions. For example, Restorative Conversations focused on reflection and "making things right" promote **ethical decision-making**.

Restorative Practices are strong relationships and communities. Relationships are built and restored through specific practices, such as circles. The application of an overall restorative mindset involves the use of such social awareness and interpersonal skills as empathetic listening, as well as through developing an overall restorative mindset focused on **social awareness, interpersonal skills, and positive relationships**.

# Restorative Mindset:

## THE CARE PACKAGE

It is imperative that adults and students learn how to reflect upon their own thoughts, feelings, and behavior. The Care Package can be used as a quick check and reflect – it should be taken and talked about often, as our moods tend to shift and change in response to our environment. The Care Package can help to ground us in our practice of building community.

1 – NOT MUCH

2 – ON OCCASION

3 – OFTEN

\_\_\_\_\_ I smile a lot

\_\_\_\_\_ I have a sense of purpose

\_\_\_\_\_ I use students names

\_\_\_\_\_ I look at students

\_\_\_\_\_ I am enthusiastic

\_\_\_\_\_ I am available

\_\_\_\_\_ I make home contacts more positive than negative

\_\_\_\_\_ I separate the act from the person and use unconditional positive regard

\_\_\_\_\_ I use wait time – give students 3 seconds

\_\_\_\_\_ I praise sincerely

\_\_\_\_\_ I never give up

\_\_\_\_\_ I know every day is a new day

# Restorative Language:

## EMPATHIC LISTENING

Practicing empathetic listening allows the listener to remain non-judgmental and encourages the speaker to remain open and honest throughout any Restorative Practice.

### STRATEGY 1: LISTEN WITH YOUR EYES, HEART, AND EARS.

**Rationale** Only 7% of what we communicate is transmitted through words. 40% comes through tone, and the remaining 53% is through body language. Paying attention to tones and body language is just as important as hearing the words a person speaks.

### STRATEGY 2: STAND IN THEIR SHOES

Even if what we have experienced is similar to someone else, how we experience it may be very different. For instance, a loud, lively classroom activity may be stressful for one teacher and energizing for another.

### STRATEGY 3: PRACTICE MIRRORING.

Repeating the meaning of a person's words in a warm and caring tone assures the speaker that we seek to understand instead of judging or giving advice. By mirroring, we can help the speaker better understand him/herself and his/her emotions.

**How to:** 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?

Ask the speaker:  
 What is that like for you?  
 How did you feel when...?  
 What did you enjoy about...?  
 What has been the hardest part of...?

Mirroring Phases:  
 Do I understand that you feel...?  
 What you're saying is...?  
 What I hear you saying is...?  
 I can see that you're feeling...?

### LISTENING PITFALLS

- Multitasking while attempting to listen
- Thinking about what we are going to say next while someone else is speaking
- Thinking about how what the speaking is saying relates to our experiences when the speaker is talking about his/her own experience.
- Judging the speaker or what the speaker is saying

### RESPONSE PITFALLS

- Letting the speaker know whether or not we agree with him/her
- Asking too many probing questions when the speaker is not ready to share
- Giving advice
- Providing interpretations of the speaker's motives or behavior
- Relating the speakers experience to your own experience.

# Restorative Language:

## AFFECTIVE STATEMENTS

Affective statements are personal expressions of feelings in response to another person's positive or negative behaviors. Affective statements help connect students with how their behavior is affecting themselves and others.

Here are some examples:

(Adapted from the Restorative Practices Handbook, IIRP)

Example Response	Problem with Response	Affective Statement
Stop teasing Sophia.	Teasing is a judgement. Response is given without space for learning or growth.	When I heard you talking to Sophia in the way that you did, I felt worried because I value respect. Would you be willing to tell me what you were talking about?
Talking during class is inappropriate.	Accuse the student of not listening instead of expressing you need to be heard.	When I hear you talking at the same time I am talking, I feel frustrated because I would like to be heard. Would you be willing to raise your hand to talk?
You shouldn't do that.	This statement includes blame and accusation. It is not specific and does not allow for student voice to be heard and understood.	When I heard what you said to Carter, I felt sad because I value respect. Would you be willing to tell me what you were thinking about when you said that?
Sit down and be quiet.		When I see you walking around the room and talking while I'm teaching, I feel angry because I value collaboration in our class. Could I ask you how that sounds to you?
I don't want to see you fighting with him.	Makes a judgement about what happened perhaps without knowing the facts.	When I saw you put your hands on Dan, I was scared because I want safety for everyone in our class. Would you be willing to tell me what happened between you two?

# Restorative Conversations

Restorative Conversations or “chats” may be formal or informal structured one-on-one discussions that use restorative questions, “I” statements, and empathetic listening to guide someone through reflection, problem solving, and repairing harm. Rather than chastising a harm-doer for his/her behavior, Restorative Conversations help identify root causes and place responsibility on the harm-doer to understand the impact of his/her behavior and take steps to make things better. This restorative practice can be used with 2 or 3 people. When 3 people are present, one person can be used as a facilitator. It should be used before an issue becomes serious. Teachers, administrators, school staff, students, and parents can be trained to use restorative conversations.

## THERE ARE FOUR QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED, FRAMED IN THIS MANNER AND IN THIS ORDER:

### 1. What is the problem?

Coming to agreement about what is the problem among the participants in this restorative practice is often the hardest part of the conversation. However, it is critical that consensus be reached among the participants as to what the problem is by coming to agreement as to how to name the problem.

### 2. What are the effects of the problem, on the persons involved and the community as a whole?

The answers to this question need to be framed as “I” statements. These answers need to include emotional, psychological, and/or physical effects.

### 3. What is it like when the problem does not exist?

The response to this question is meant to explore the ideal situation, when the problem no longer exists.

### 4. What can I/we do to move from this being a problem to that more ideal place where the problem does not exist, reconciliation occurs, and harmony returns to the community?

In this answer a plan of action is agreed to and perhaps written down so it can be referred to later.

# Building a Restorative Practice Framework



Finger Lakes Community Schools promote the use of Restorative Practices through a multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) framework to support all students' academic development, social emotional wellness, and career and college readiness. Restorative Practices are not a “program,” instead it is a way of speaking with each other, working together, and resolving conflict as part of the process to develop a compassionate, safe, and supportive school environment. To accomplish this, a school-wide approach to Restorative Practices must be implemented intentionally and systematically to create cultural change.

*The following implementation guidelines are adapted from our experiences, best-practices for Restorative Practices at Chicago Public Schools, and our own regional school climate development.*

# OUR SIX IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

# 1

## Establish BOE and administrative support & Introduce Restorative Practices core components to all staff.

- Meet with administrators (and/or school leadership teams) and identify supporters and potential supporters. For school-wide Restorative Practices to be implemented and sustained, school leadership must support and participate in this effort.

- Meet with BOE members to introduce Restorative Practices. It can be helpful to facilitate this introduction using a community building circle.

- Establish and share MTSS baseline data (i.e., grades, attendance, discipline) with stakeholders. This can include additional regional data sources such as the School Climate, EYS, and CAMI surveys. This data can help “build the case” for Restorative Practices and school climate development.

- Present an overview of Restorative Practices for the school community including families and key stakeholders. Schools may ask for feedback from the community and/or ask staff to take a vote on whether they would like to adopt Restorative Practices (if it will increase buy-in).

## Identify Restorative Practices Leaders. This step may come before or after establishing administrative support and introducing Restorative Practices philosophy to staff.

- Establish a team with all school-wide approaches, implementing Restorative Practices and improving the climate of your school building requires a team that is invested in creating systemic change. This team can be your Tier 1 MTSS Team or a part of your Instructional Leadership Team. Your team should meet regularly to drive the implementation of Restorative Practices.

- This team should reflect the organizational makeup of the school community and include: an administrator, teacher representation, mental health staff, non-teaching staff such as paraprofessionals or secretaries, students, and family members.

# 2



## Identify restorative practices champions.

•Your school may choose to identify 1-2 members of this team who will serve as your school’s Restorative Practices Lead(s). This person will be responsible for training other staff and serving as a champion of Restorative Practices throughout the building. The Restorative Practice Lead(s) may serve any position at the school but should be well-respected and have the capacity to lead change. The RP Lead should also have time freed up to engage in Restorative Practices with both staff and students ( for example, leading Talking Circles), as well as attend ongoing professional development and professional learning communities.

# 3

## Develop community building systems as practices.

# 4

•Before identifying a menu of restorative disciplinary responses, it is important that schools establish practices to build relationships and community. Restorative disciplinary practices cannot “restore” a community when the community was not built in the first place.

•Integrate Restorative Language and Practices into all aspects of daily school life. Create clear shared agreements that all members of the school community agree to uphold, and hold Talking Circles that allow students and staff to build relationships, share their joys and concerns, and solve problems together.

•Create visual reminders of Restorative Practices throughout the school building: in posters, bulletin boards, lanyards, and written communications with staff, students, and families. These reminders should explicitly reference the values of the school community, such as positive relationships and respect.

•Train and encourage all staff and students to use restorative language (“I” statements, empathetic listening) to express their feelings and reflect on other’s feelings.

•Establish a restorative discipline system. Develop a clear discipline system that provides opportunities to address root causes, repair harm, and allow students to take ownership over their behaviors. This discipline system should follow your code of conduct. If your code of conduct does not align with Restorative Practices, develop a committee to revise, update, and share with all stakeholders.

•Train ALL staff in using restorative language and Restorative Conversations to de-escalate behavior incidents, promote reflection, and prevent disciplinary referrals. This includes administrators, teachers, mental health staff, paraprofessionals, secretarial staff, security, lunch monitors, and transportation.

•Identify a menu of instructive, corrective, and Restorative disciplinary interventions and staff who can deliver these interventions. These interventions may include Restorative Conversations, Peace Circles, Peer Conference, and/or Alternatives to Suspension.



- Develop written protocols for disciplinary procedures and Restorative Practices, including a clear referral process, procedures for assigning students to restorative interventions, schedules for restorative circles and/or peer conferences, and procedures for tracking and following up on agreements.
- Identify a process for communicating outcomes back to staff who refer students for restorative interventions, and re-integrating students who are removed from the classroom or school community.
- Establish procedures for staff, students, or families to request Restorative Practices.

## Continuously Improve

- Track and monitor data to reflect and improve practice. Creating a restorative school culture takes time, and successful implementation often requires a three to five-year roll out. Collecting and monitoring implementation and outcome data is a necessary part of successfully implementing and sustaining Restorative Practices.
- Engage in ongoing professional development and coaching. Provide opportunities for staff, students and family to reflect on their practice.

5

6

## Develop a shared vision and support staff in developing their practice.

- The Restorative Practice Lead and Tier 1 MTSS team should lead development of a shared vision and shared agreements amongst all staff. A shared vision is intended to provide staff with a sense of collective responsibility and unity around developing a restorative school climate. A shared vision should articulate the community's shared values, direct all restorative practice and climate improvement efforts, including school policies and procedures, and provide motivation and direction to both new and veteran staff.
- Develop a set of shared agreements among staff and students. These agreements should establish how all members of the school community agree to interact with each other, work together, and resolve conflict. These agreements also help to build shared values and a larger sense of community among staff and students.
- Once developed, the school vision and agreements should be posted throughout the school environment and in communications with staff, students and families. The vision and agreements should be explicitly taught and reinforced throughout the school year.

# Restorative Practice and Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

*Adopted from <https://casel.org/core-competencies/>*

Social and emotional competencies are critical skills that students need to succeed in school, college, career, and life. Restorative practices support the development of core social and emotional benchmarks.



# Restorative Practices and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

## WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

### TIER THREE:

Conferencing Circles

### TIER TWO:

Referral Based Problem Solving Conversation  
Classroom Problem Solving Circle  
Restorative Conversations

### TIER ONE:

Affective Statements  
Community Building  
Curriculum/Academic Circles

Restore Relationships

Repair Relationships

*Managing difficulties  
and disruptions*

Create Relationships

*Developing social emotional capacity*

In the classroom, Restorative Practices may be implemented through daily rituals and practices, disciplinary responses, or simply through the interactions between teachers and students. Classroom practices may include Talking Circles or other community-building activities, teaching students self-awareness through “I” statements, resolving conflicts through restorative questions and conversations, and providing opportunities for reflection.

## Tier One

ALL STUDENTS

### RESTORATIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

A restorative school climate focuses on building a strong sense of community and positive relationships among all stakeholders. In a restorative environment, all community members feel safe and welcome, and adults support students in developing social and emotional skills.

#### Practices that Support Tier One:

- Restorative Mindsets
- Restorative Language
- Talking Circles
- Restorative Conversations

## Tier Two

SOME STUDENTS

### RESTORATIVE DISCIPLINE

After harm or conflict, restorative responses address the root cause of the problem, promote healing, and ensure that students are held accountable and take ownership over the process of repairing harm.

#### Practices that support Tier Two:

- Restorative Conversations
- Peer Mediation
- Peace Circles
- Skill-Building Alternatives

## Tier Three

FEW STUDENTS

### RE-ENTRY AND RESTORATIVE HEALING

In the most serious incidents of harm or conflict, restorative practices ensure that students who have been removed from the school are welcomed back to the community. When needed, intensive one-on-one interventions promote healing.

#### Practices that support Tier Three:

- Re-entry Procedures
- Restorative Conferencing

# Roles & Responsibilities

Each and every member of the school community is valued and integral in the development of a restorative practice culture.

Some examples of this include:

Board of Education:

District Administrators

Teachers

Mental Health Staff

Nurses

School Resource Officers

Teaching Aids and Assistants:

Secretarial Staff:

Cafeteria Workers and Lunch Monitors:

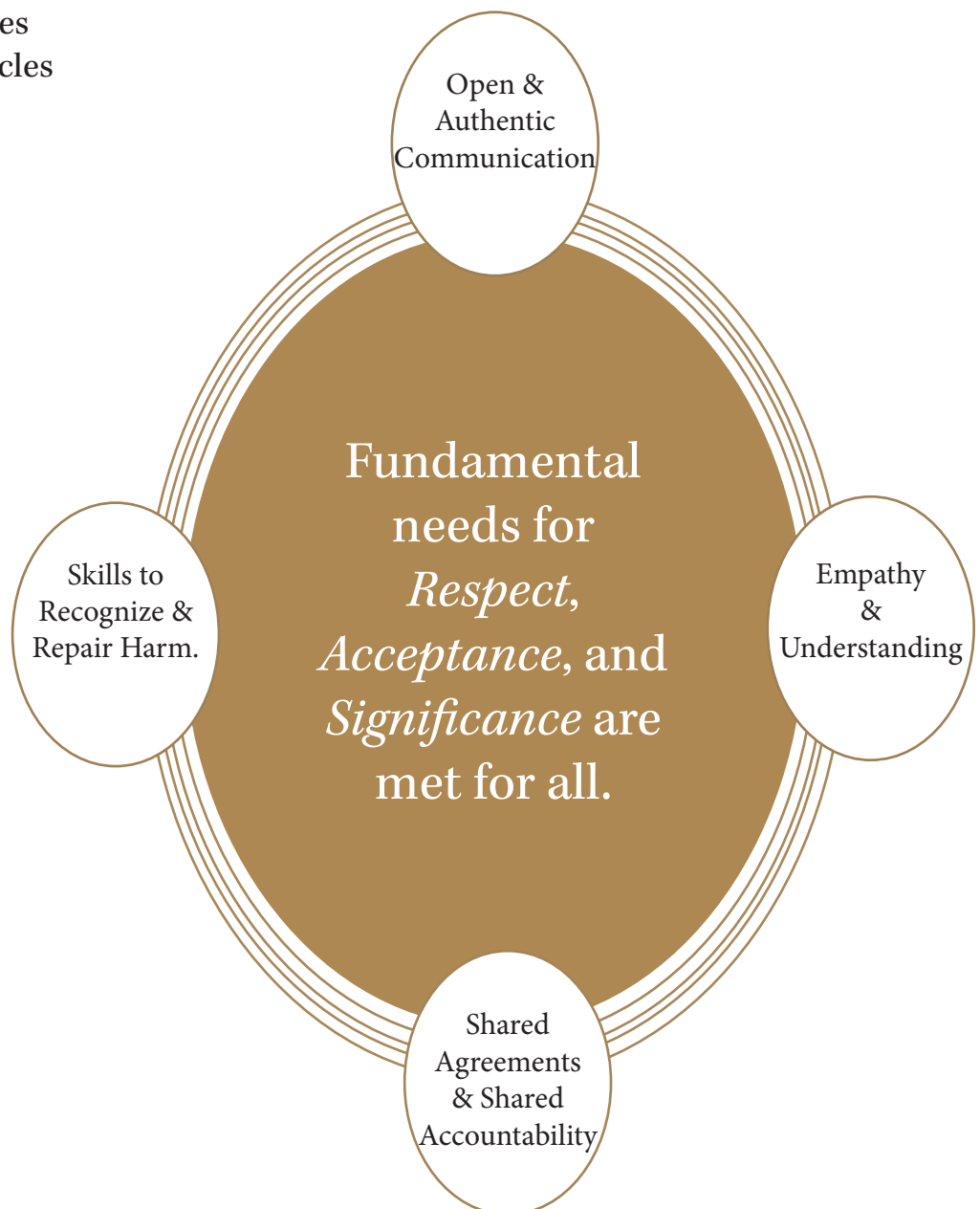
Transportation and Bus Drivers:

# Tier One Strategies

At the Tier 1 level, restorative school climate focuses on building a strong sense of community and positive relationships among all stakeholders. In a restorative environment, all community members feel safe and welcome, and adults support students in developing social and emotional skills.

## PRACTICES THAT SUPPORT TIER ONE:

- Restorative Language: Empathic Listening, Affective statements, “I” statements
- Restorative Mindsets: Care Package
- Community Building Circles
- Curriculum/Academic Circles
- Restorative Conversations



# Tier One

## Community Building Circles

The Community Building Circle process is drawn directly from the tradition of Talking Circles of the indigenous people of North America. It has been and still is used by many indigenous people around the world. We are deeply indebted to those who have kept these traditions alive and so appreciate the wisdom and inspiration that has come with these practices *(Pranis, 2005)*.

### COMMUNITY BUILDING

these circles are designed to create bonds and build relationships among a group of people.

### TALKING

these circles allow exploration of a particular topic or issue from many different perspectives.

### UNDERSTANDING

the purpose of these circles is to understand and/or develop a more complete picture of a particular event or behavior.

### SUPPORT

support circles assist a specific group of people through a major life change, crisis, or difficulty.

### HEALING

the intent of a healing circle is to have participants share the pain with someone who has experienced a trauma or loss.

### CELEBRATION

a celebration circle provides a way to recognize an individual or a group by sharing joy and a sense of accomplishment.

### ACADEMIC

academic circles, typically facilitated by teachers in a school setting, provide a way to incorporate learning activities into a circle setting while also building community among a group of students.

### FAMILY CONFERENCES

these circles bring family members together for a variety of reasons – to support, to understand, celebrate, heal and/or enhance relationships.

*(adapted from Piri, 2018)*

# Key Components of Community Building Circles

## THE SHAPE

Sitting in a circle is a structured way of bringing people together. The circle represents equity and community as everyone can be seen and the circle shape is continuous and unbroken. In restorative circles, participants work together to create the safe and supportive space needed for authentic dialogue.

## THE CIRCLE KEEPER

The facilitators, or circle keepers, are responsible for emphasizing equity, setting a safe and respectful tone, keeping the flow moving, and introducing prompts. Circle keepers address concerns in a supportive and respectful way that participants are accountable for their actions.

## THE TALKING PIECE

The talking piece is an object used to let participants know whose turn it is to talk while everyone else listens. Only the person with the talking piece talks, which increases respectful listening and models the importance of every voice. Restorative practices are never forced on people. Everyone has the right to pass. A talking piece is even more meaningful when it is something of value to circle participants.



## THE CIRCLE CENTERPIECE

The centerpiece represents the center of community, reminds us of our collective nature, and provides a space for participants to rest their eyes. Like the talking piece, center pieces are even more meaningful when they represent something of value to circle participants.

## THE SHARED AGREEMENTS

Unlike rules, which are focused upon individuals and groups, shared agreements represent what participants are willing to do in their time together. Each participant is accountable for upholding the shared agreements. Some shared agreements are standard for circles (often called guidelines), while others are individualized for circle participants.

### Shared Agreements for Circles

- Only the person holding the Talking Piece may speak in the circle and everyone else is invited to listen.
- Show respect to everyone in the circle at all times.
- Speak honestly and from the heart.
- Stay seated while in the circle.
- Keep everything said in the circle confidential.
- You have the right to pass

# Community Circle Check-In Questions

A Check-in is the initial component of Restorative Circles. Check-in questions are used to build and strengthen relationships, assess the “temperature” of the group, reinforce agreements, identify issues, and support reflective thought processes and follow up.

Some sample check -in questions are:

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On a scale from 1-10 with 1 being terrible and 10 being wonderful, how are you feeling today and why?

Use a weather word to describe how you are feeling today and why.

What is your favorite movie and share two reasons why you like it

If you could be any animal, what would you be and why?

What is your favorite food and why?

What is your favorite season and why?

What is your favorite holiday and why?

If your life were a book, what would be the title?

# Community Circle Prompts

Community circle prompts are purposefully chosen to increase safety, participation, and belonging. Questions may be related to academic content, draw on prior experience, or connect to social emotional learning. Circle prompts can be used to introduce new material, celebrate accomplishments, build connections and discuss difficult topics.

Some examples include:

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1. If you could be a superhero, what superpowers would you choose and why?
2. If you had an unexpected free day, what would you like to do?
3. If you could have a face to face conversation with anyone, who would it be and why?
4. Describe your ideal job.
5. Describe your favorite vacation.
6. If you could change anything about yourself what would it be?
7. Imagine you are in conflict with a person who is important in your life. What values do you want to guide your conduct as you try to work out that conflict?
8. What is your passion?
9. Share A time when you had to let go of control
10. Share A time when you were outside of your comfort zone
11. Share An experience in your life when you “made lemonade out of lemons”.
12. Share An experience of transformation when, out of a crisis or difficulty, you discovered a gift in your life.
13. The best/worst thing about this science project is...
14. The main character in the book we are reading is like/not like me when...
15. These math problems make me feel...

# Common Challenges & When Good Circles Go Bad

It takes too long for students to get in a circle...

- Practice getting in and out of the circle before holding an actual talking circle.
- Figure out alternative furniture and room arrangements.
- Use a timer and build in an incentive for meeting the time expectation.
- Have students sit on top of desks in the circle.
- Consider holding the circle outside, or another location.

The circle process takes too long...

- You can do a check in a circle in a few minutes with 32 students. You could ask for a one or two word check in on how their weekend was or how they are feeling at this moment.
- Time spent up front building relationships and coming up with shared values and guidelines will save time in the long run dealing with problem behavior.

No one is talking or English may be a second language for my students and they are hesitant to speak...

- Using alternative methods of expression such as drawing, journaling, movement, etc.
- It is okay not to share as long as everyone participates by being present in the circle.
- Use a partner-share icebreaker so every student can have a chance to talk without speaking to the whole class.
- Try to set a fun and community-building tone.
- Build in incentives for participation
- Ask students to brainstorm why they or others aren't talking.
- Ask questions students are more likely to want to answer, like "What is it you want adults to understand about you?"

There are misbehaviors that derail the circle...

- Revisit the shared guidelines and values you created together.
- Engage the students that are misbehaving and ask them to think of questions.
- Have 1-on-1 restorative conversations at another time with the misbehaving students.

One or a few students do all the talking...

- Have students bring their own talking pieces that are meaningful to them.
- Consider giving the "natural leaders" the role of being circle keeper.
- In private conversations with quiet students, ask if there is something they need.

Students make rude facial expressions...

- Clarify unacceptable non-verbal behaviors as not following the shared guidelines.
- Acknowledge kind, respectful non-verbal behaviors.

Students talk about family issues, drugs, suicide, etc...

- When you start facilitating, be clear as to what issues you are mandated to report.
- Be sure to clearly explain the limit of confidentiality as anything related to danger.
- Follow-up with administration, school-based mental health counselor, or school nurse immediately to make a mandated report as necessary.

The circle just doesn't seem to go over well...

- Consult with colleagues for ideas, suggestions or coaching.
- Have a colleague co-facilitate a circle with you.
- Ask students what they thought about the circle, and how it could be made better.

# Community Circle Planner Sample

Facilitator:

Date:

Objective:

Materials Needed:

1 Opening/Welcome/Introduce Talking Piece

2 Introduce/Review Agreements: Remember our circle guidelines:

3 Check-In:

4 Community Building Prompt:

5 Connection Round:

6 Clarifying Round:

7 Check-out Question/Closing:

# Curriculum/Academic Circle Sample Lesson Plan

*Community building circles can be used to deliver academic content across all subjects.*

Date & Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Facilitators: \_\_\_\_\_

Participants: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Circle: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic of Circle: \_\_\_\_\_

Any special people, knowledge,  
or skills required? \_\_\_\_\_

Materials or setup:  
(Circle center, talking pieces) \_\_\_\_\_

Element: \_\_\_\_\_

Opening: \_\_\_\_\_

Round 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

Connection/Clarify: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

Opening: \_\_\_\_\_

Round 1: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

Connection/Clarify: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: \_\_\_\_\_

Closing:

# Community Building Circles: GOING VIRTUAL

As we continue to adapt to social distancing, virtual community circles provide a safe space for students and staff to build and enhance relationships outside of the classroom.

Some best-practice tips for virtual circles include:

CIRCLES SHOULD INCLUDE A WELCOME MESSAGE THAT CLARIFIES HOW THE PROCESS WILL WORK AND THE ORDER OF SPEAKING. THE CIRCLE KEEPER CAN SHARE A MESSAGE LIKE THE FOLLOWING:

*Hi everyone and welcome to our Community Circle. We are so grateful to have you all with us today. The purpose of today's circle is to process some fears and hopes related to Covid-19. I will assign each member of our circle a number, so you know when it is your turn to share. Because we do not have a talking stick, I will also prompt each of you when it is your turn.*

NEXT, THE CIRCLE KEEPER WILL REVIEW CIRCLE NORMS AND INCLUDE NEW NORMS FOR VIRTUAL SPACES.

These include:

- Speak from your heart.
- Listen with your heart.
- Speak with respect.
- Listen with respect.
- Remain in the circle.
- Honor confidentiality.
- Right to pass.
- Respect the virtual talking piece or prompt.

EXPLAIN THE CIRCLE FLOW:

As the circle keeper, I will begin with a quote or prompt. I will then call on each member by their assigned number. Rounds will include a prompt, a connection round, and a clarifying round.

### REMAIN PRESENT.

This includes not engaging in the chat, multitasking, or muting to attend to another task.

### BE CLEAR ABOUT THE CAMERA.

Choose to request the camera be on or allow the camera to be off.

### INFORM MEMBERS OF THE TIME FRAME OF THE CIRCLE.

Include the circle keeper's contact information for follow up and support.

### THE CIRCLE KEEPER OPENS THE CIRCLE WITH AN INTENTIONAL EXERCISE TO ENCOURAGE PRESENCE.

This can include deep breathing, meditation, inspirational reading, or some stretching and movement.

### BEGIN WITH A CHECK-IN ROUND.

Please use a weather word to describe how you are feeling today and tell us why you chose that word.

### THE CIRCLE KEEPER CONTINUES WITH THE FIRST PROMPT, FOLLOWED BY THE CONNECTION AND CLARIFYING ROUND.

Depending on the length of the circle, multiple prompts can be used.

### THE CIRCLE KEEPER ENDS THE VIRTUAL CIRCLE WITH A SENSE OF POSITIVE POSSIBILITY AND HOPE EVEN IN EXCEEDINGLY DIFFICULT SITUATIONS.

This will foster a strong sense of connection and support for one another.

### THE CIRCLE KEEPER ENDS WITH A CLOSING OR CHECK-OUT RITUAL.

Examples include asking members to share one feeling or action word, deep breathing, music, meditation, inspirational reading or another positive or calming ritual.

Members can also share their thoughts and feelings on today's virtual circle.

### REMINDE MEMBERS OF YOUR CONTACT INFORMATION AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO REACH OUT IF THEY NEED SUPPORT.

### PROVIDE MEMBERS WITH THE DATES AND TIMES OF THE NEXT COMMUNITY CIRCLE.



# Covid-19 Community Building Circle Prompts

The social emotional wellness of students and families are critical components to mitigate the traumatic effects of Covid-19. Community circles offer a safe environment dedicated to processing thoughts and feelings about school building closures, physical and emotional health, safety, and academic needs.

The following circle prompts can aide in these important conversations:

If you had to choose one word to describe your experience during Covid-19, what would it be and why?

What is one academic challenge you have experienced because of Covid-19?

What is one thing that surprised you about yourself during this time?

Name one thing you miss about life pre-Covid-19?

How have you been most deeply impacted by Covid-19?

What is one question you have had to ask yourself due to Covid-19?

What is one thing you are disappointed you won't be able to attend or engage in?

Share a peak and a valley from this last week.

What is one way you have changed or had to change during this time?

What have you been thinking or feeling during the Covid 19 crisis?

Share one thing you are doing to move forward.

Who is one person you can reach out to and connect with during this time?

What is something in your control you can do in the coming days and weeks?

In what ways do you see potential growth happening as a result of this global pandemic?

What is one resource you have found helpful the last couple weeks?

What are you proud of that your community has done during Covid-19?

Name a strength that you have had to lean on in adjusting to our current time.

What gives you hope during this time?

What practice have you started or continued that has helped you through this time?

Everyone is experiencing their "first time" together right now. What messages do you tell yourself that are helpful when you're doing something for the first time, and what messages do you need to be your best self?

What is your favorite thing to do to relax?

# Community Building Circles:

## CRITICAL CONVERSATIONS ABOUT RACE AND EQUITY

CREATE AUTHENTIC AND BRAVE SPACES FOR STUDENTS TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE LAYERS OF STRUGGLES IN OUR CURRENT MOMENT AND THE EFFECT THAT IT HAS ON THEM, THEIR FAMILIES, AND THEIR COMMUNITIES.

HELP STUDENTS ACCEPT AND PROCESS THEIR EMOTIONS AND THE EMOTIONS OF THEIR PEERS IN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT COMMUNITY STRESSORS AND INJUSTICES IN A PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY SAFE SPACE.

CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT FOR DISCUSSION THAT DOES NOT TOKENIZE STUDENTS IN RACIALLY ISOLATED SCHOOLS OR CLASSROOMS.

HELPS STUDENTS TO DISCERN FACTS, ANALYZE IMPACT, AND LOOK AT BIAS CONNECTED TO COVID-19 AND THE NATIONAL MOBILIZATION AGAINST SYSTEMIC RACISM IN DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE WAYS

ENGAGE IN DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE CONVERSATIONS THAT HELP STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THE EXPERIENCE OF OTHERS AND DEVELOP AGENCY OVER THEIR OWN WELL-BEING AND AWARENESS OF AVENUES FOR SUPPORTING OTHERS.

## Community Building Circle Prompts for Race and Equity Elementary Students

*(adapted from Teaching Tolerance at tolerance.org)*

What do you wonder about yourself?

What do you wonder about your family?

How are the students in our school different? How are they the same?

What do you like about being different from your classmates? What do you like about being the same as your classmates?

What does the word diversity mean to you?

What does it mean to include others?

Think about the characters in your favorite movie, TV show or book. How are the characters like you and how are they different? Would you say the characters are diverse?

## Community Building Circle Prompts: Secondary Students

*(adapted from the Office of Student Diversity, Engagement, and Success at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater)*

One word to describe how I feel about talking about race is....

On a scale from 0-10 with 0 being not at all and 10 being extremely, how comfortable are you talking about race?

One word that comes to mind when I hear the term “privilege” is....

What are your earliest memories of race?

What messages did you hear about your own race as you were growing up? What messages did you hear about other races? Where did these messages come from?

How often have you thought about your race in the last 24 hours? How about the last week?

How does your race factor into the way you make everyday decisions?

If you could change one thing about your school that is related to race, what would you recommend and how would you implement it?

How would you compare the attitudes about race you see in our school to those you see in our town? our state? In our nation?

What thoughts and feelings have you had about the recent protests that have taken place?

What is one thing we could do individually, as a group, or as a society to show support for one another in the wake of these events?

# Self Care Circle:

## SCHOOL STAFF

### OPENING

*Thank you all for joining us today. We know how important your time is and are so grateful you chose to share it with us. The focus of today's circle is on self-care. We recognize and acknowledge how difficult it has been for school staff during the Covid-19 closures. We invite you to use this safe space together to process your thoughts and emotions and set an intention of hope for the upcoming school year. Just as a reminder, we have some norms for our circle today. These norms are:*

- Speak from your heart.
- Listen with your heart.
- Speak with respect.
- Listen with respect.
- Remain in the circle.
- Honor confidentiality.
- Right to pass.
- Respect the virtual talking piece or prompt.
- Add virtual norms as needed.

*We are going to begin our circle with a breathing exercise. Please close your eyes and take a deep breath... in through your nose for six seconds ...and out through your nose for six seconds. Let's practice this breathing technique together for the next minute or so.*

### Opening Prompt:

*Please introduce yourself to the group and share with us on a scale of 1 – 10, with 1 being terrible and 10 being extraordinary, how are you feeling about being here today and why?*

**Prompt 1:** *Think about your career as an educator. Why did you choose this path?  
Connect & Clarify*

**Prompt 2:** *What has been hard in your work as an educator over the last six months?  
Connect & Clarify*

**Prompt 3:** *Tell us about a proud moment in your career.  
Connect & Clarify*

**Prompt 4:** *What strength do you draw on to continue your work as an educator?  
Connect & Clarify*

# THE GUEST HOUSE

*BY RUMI*

This being a human is a guest-house  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
Some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
Who violently sweep your house  
Empty of its furniture, still,

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
Meet them at the door laughing.  
And invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
Because each has been sent  
As a guide from beyond.

## Closing prompt:

Today I invite you to close our circle by sharing one intention  
you will set for the upcoming school year

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