

Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice is a philosophy we use in our behaviour management system. It involves high levels of control (limit-setting, discipline) and support (encouragement, nurturing). Conflicts in human relationships will occur and the challenge is to have processes that enable the restoration of relationships that result in learning and personal growth for all concerned. Parents and teachers have the opportunity to develop a positive school environment that enables students to learn from mistakes and still feel positive about themselves and others. To be effective all involved need to play an active role in restorative justice. This can be done in a number of ways but revolve about these principles.

The Principles of Restorative Justice are:

1. Foster awareness in the student of how others have been affected.
2. Avoid scolding or lecturing.
3. Involve the student actively. Instead of simply doling out punishment, which the student is expected to accept passively, in a Restorative intervention the student is asked to speak. They need to listen to how others have been affected by their inappropriate behaviour. They help decide how to repair the harm and make a commitment to this. The student is held accountable.
4. Accept ambiguity. Often fault is unclear and people can agree to accept the ambiguous situation.
5. Separate the deed from the doer.
6. See every serious instance of wrongdoing and conflict as an opportunity for learning.

The use of Affective Questions and Statements are important strategies.

Affective Questions:

1. Focus on the specific behaviours or incident without blaming.
2. Use "relational" questions to draw out who was affected and how they were affected.
3. Direct questions toward problem solving what needs to happen to "make things right"?
 - a. What happened?
 - b. How did it happen?
 - c. What was your part in it?
 - d. Who do you think was affected?
 - e. How were they affected?
 - f. How were you affected?
 - g. What needs to happen to make things right?
 - h. How can this be implemented?

Affective Statements: Reflect on the impact that the behaviour or incident has had on you and others.

Often Restorative Justice is viewed as a behaviour management system that does not contain consequences. This is not correct as an important part of learning is accepting that we are accountable for our behaviour and that consequences should accompany inappropriate behaviour. This is not only an exercise in changing behaviour, but a vital aspect of developing resilience and helping students to be able to cope with reality. It is an activity that will be of benefit to the development of long term self esteem. It is about being better equipped to deal with reality and therefore the development and maintenance of sound mental health. However, Restorative practices assist us to link behaviour, consequences and the need to focus on restoring and building positive relationships.

All of the above takes time, which is often a scarce resource in a busy school. However, evidence strongly suggests that time invested early on saves in the long-run.