

Restorative Responses To Bullying

Essential Considerations for Restorative Practices & Bullying

Bullying is qualified as behavior that is (1) intended to cause harm, (2) repeated or likely to be repeated over time, and (3) the result of an imbalance of power (age, size, ability, race, social capital, etc.).

Formal conferencing and harm circles are the two most common forms of formal restorative interventions used in schools. However, **these perpetrator-victim dialogues are rarely appropriate in instances of true bullying**. Before using either of these practices, assess the appropriateness by using the following chart. You should be able to fairly confidently answer “yes” to each question.

Principle	Questions to Consider
If the crime hurts, justice should heal.	Is the purpose of this practice to repair the harm that was caused? Is everyone clear on that purpose? Are any necessary investigations/disciplinary actions completed?
Nothing about us without us.	Do those impacted feel welcome, safe, and empowered to speak and participate? Will they still feel that way when all the parties are brought together?
This can work. I can live with it.	Are the participants aware that any agreements will be made by consensus of all group members? Is that actually the case?
I am willing to do this.	Do participants understand the process? Is their participation voluntary? Are they willing to admit accountability? Are they able to listen to the other person’s perspective and practice empathy?

*Adapted from Oakland Unified School District’s Restorative Justice Implementation Guide.

Even if formal conferences & harm circles are not appropriate, there are other options that are still restorative in nature that would not put the bullied at risk. Keep reading for more information.

Oftentimes, the term “bullying” is used in schools to reference teasing, mean moments, or conflicts among students. These situations are often highly appropriate for restorative conferencing and harm circles.

As we address individual students’ language and behavior, please reference the following tools to support holding students accountable in a way that also facilitates learning and fosters empathy and understanding.

Some considerations as we hold students accountable:

- Many adults in our communities are modeling similar choices to those that our students have made. Use this as an opportunity to model adults being empathetic and supportive, even as we engage in difficult conversations.
- While some students may be remorseful and voluntarily want to apologize, avoid requiring students to apologize as this can often reinforce the notion that people get away with being unkind as long as they apologize after the fact.
- We can and should continue to have proactive conversations about this behavior for all students.

Framework for Conversations with Individual Students

The process outlined below is designed to support students in understanding the impact of their behavior and creating a plan for repairing any harm that may have been caused. Adults supporting a student through this process should use neutral tone and body language to avoid escalating the student, to support reflection & learning, and to model self-regulation skills. These conversations should be done as privately as is reasonable for the situation.

1. **Connect:** Begin your interaction with the student by connecting on something unrelated to their behavior. A simple “how are you doing today?” or “did you sleep well last night?” will often lower a student defensiveness and make them more open to a tough conversation.
2. **Name the Behavior:** Explain to the student that it has come to attention that another student was harmed by something they said or did, whether or not they intended to cause harm. Be wary of labeling the behavior as bullying, especially if it does not qualify (intent to harm, repeated over time, power differential), as that may cause defensiveness.
3. **Understand the Student’s Perspective:** Ask the student to reflect on their behavior and share their perspective with one or more of the questions below:
 - What happened before or after that moment that would be helpful for me to know?
 - How are you feeling as you hear that your classmate felt hurt by what happened?
 - What do you remember thinking or feeling in that moment?
 - What do you remember influencing your decision to say/do that?
4. **Process the Impact:** Support the student in understanding how their behavior has impacted themselves and others through one or more of the following questions:
 - Who do you think is harmed or impacted by this behavior?

- Who else witnessed this behavior? How might they be impacted?
 - How do you think your behavior is impacting your relationships with your classmates and teacher?
5. **Taking Ownership:** Ask the student one or more of the following questions to encourage taking ownership of their behavior. Note that some students will own their behaviors as soon as this conversation begins. Thank them for already taking accountability for their actions.
- How might you get your needs met differently if put in this situation again?
 - Looking back, what do you wish you had done differently?
 - Is there a choice you made that you can acknowledge wasn't the best choice?
6. **Create a Plan to Repair Harm:** Ask the student "How will you make things right?" If they struggle to identify an appropriate response or an actionable next step, share the suggestions on the following page for them to choose from.
7. **Create an Accountability Plan:** Ensure that the student has a timeline for their repair plan. Consider asking the student:
- Are there supports you need from adults in this building to complete your plan?
 - What do you think would be an appropriate consequence if you don't complete the repair plan by that date?
8. **Follow Up:** Be sure an adult is assigned to follow up on the student's completion of their repair plan.

Meaningful Ways to Repair Harm

Below are some options for how students might repair the harm caused by their behavior. These are designed both to support student learning and to reconnect the student to the larger classroom and school community.

- I will research the negative impacts of bullying and develop a plan to share them (presentation, paper, social media post) with others so they might learn with me.
- I will write letters of appreciation to those who were harmed by my actions, have an adult review them, and find a way to give them to those I harmed that won't make them feel uncomfortable.
- I will find three examples of my peers at recess or lunch being kind to one another and develop a plan to share them with others (presentation, paper, social media post).

- For younger students, this could look like a scavenger hunt. For example, find one student including someone they don't always play with in a game. Find students talking through a problem in a respectful way.
- I will come up with a list of three Random Acts of Kindness that I can do to bring positivity back to our school community. Use this list for inspiration.
- I will use what I've learned from this experience to teach my peers about ways they can demonstrate kindness and inclusivity through an advisement lesson, posters that can be displayed around our building, or planning a community-building circle.

Classroom Conversations for All Students

Classroom circles can be a powerful tool to reflect on bullying or mean moments for all students, not just those who are currently exhibiting this behavior.

Outlined below is a four round circle that educators might be encouraged to facilitate for all students in your building. Consider providing students with think time and even writing time ahead of the circle to encourage more thoughtful responses.

1. What does it feel like to be bullied? Or when someone is unkind to you?
2. What strategies have you developed for getting out of a gossip conversation?
3. Think of a time that you felt left out. How did that make you feel? What do you wish someone else had done in that moment?
4. What could you do the next time you see someone being a bully or being mean?
 - Consider providing the students with this list of strategies to choose from:
 - Say "stop."
 - Walk away and find a trusted adult.
 - Ask the person being picked on if they are okay.
 - Invite the person being picked on to come do a different activity with me.

*This circle was adapted from *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community*, by Carolyn Boyes-Watson & Kay Prannis.