



## Evidence-Based Intervention: Restorative Practice

### Introduction

At its core, restorative practice (RP) is a relational approach to understanding and responding to human behaviour. At a whole-school level, RP looks to avoid relational hurt or rupture via modelling and promoting respect, compassion, forgiveness and other values underpinned by a good trauma-informed culture, alongside the use of supportive, meaningful and helpful dialogue and related techniques to work through situations where individuals have, in spite of best efforts, still experienced hurt or relational rupture. Rather than focusing on punishment, RP encourages accountability, empathy and shared problem-solving. It aims to build a positive school culture where relationships are central to learning and wellbeing.

### Purpose of Intervention

The purpose of RP is two-fold. Firstly, it can be used in a preventative sense to inform interaction styles alongside, as stated above, good relational, trauma-informed practice (also commensurate with the principles of Therapeutic Thinking). Secondly, it can also be used to repair harm and restore relationships when conflict arises. It shifts the focus from retribution to resolution, fostering a sense of shared understanding, responsibility and community. RP also proactively strengthens relationships to prevent future issues arising.

### Target Audience

RP works best at a whole-school level, informing the interaction ethos and style of the whole school community. This includes all staff and all pupils; it can also be used to support interactions with parents / carers.

### Who Can Deliver the Intervention

RP is more of a 'way of being with others' rather than an 'intervention to be delivered'. Adopting a 'restorative practice' way of thinking might include learning to use some new turns of phrase, or responses to interactions / behaviours, which should be modelled by all staff, and which, if it is to work at a whole school level, must also be bought into by the setting's senior leadership. In terms of holding more formal restorative conferences to help resolve more significant episodes of conflict, these can be facilitated by any member of trained staff but also, if well managed and trained, by the students themselves (as peer mediators).

### Session Structure

In terms of using RP to specifically address and resolve conflict, sessions can vary depending on context:

- **Restorative Conversations:** One-on-one or small group discussions following an incident
- **Restorative Circles:** Group sessions to build community or address shared concerns
- **Conferences:** Structured meetings involving all parties affected by a serious incident

Each session involves 3 key components: What happened? Who has been affected? How can we make things right?

### Key Principles

- **Relationships First:** Where there is meaningful prioritisation of relationships, situations that cause hurt are minimised and more easily recovered from



- **Mutual understanding, Empathy and Respect:** Emotional literacy is authentic, modelled and nurtured
- **Communication, Voice and Dialogue:** The above 2 principles are embodied within daily interactions; where hurt has been caused, everyone is given a chance to speak and be heard
- **More accountability and less 'Blaming and shaming':** Everyone takes responsibility for their actions and agrees a meaningful way of 'making things right'
- **Repair and Resolution:** There is a focus on moving forward on the basis of shared understanding to facilitate where possible, relational repair

## Training and Implementation

Effective RP requires:

- Whole-school commitment and leadership buy-in
- Integration into behaviour policies and pastoral systems
- Initial and ongoing staff training
- Time and space for reflection and dialogue

Introductory training on the principles and processes that are central to RP is available from the Psychology and Therapeutic Service. More in-depth training over time is available from organisations such as <http://www.restorativejustice.org.uk/> (although there are others).

## Evidence and Outcomes

Studies and evaluations (e.g. Bristol RAiS project, Leeds University research) show RP leads to:

- Reduced exclusions and detentions
- Improved attendance and behaviour
- Enhanced emotional literacy and empathy
- Stronger relationships between staff and pupils
- A more inclusive and respectful school climate

However, successful implementation requires time, consistency, and cultural change.

## Further Information and Resources

For other general summary examples of the approach explained by other services in the UK see: [RA in the UK](#); [The Ultimate Guide to Restorative Practice in Classrooms | Greenhouse Learning](#); [Restorative-Practice-OMG-March-2023.pdf](#)

For some helpful video clips to build understanding of the approach: [Michelle Stowe: Empathy: the heart of difficult conversations | Michelle Stowe | TEDxTallaght | TED Talk](#); <https://youtu.be/dYtZBisgs3s> (Mark Finnis)

For examples of evidence of impact see: [An evaluation following the introduce of RP from Leeds University](#); [RJ-Briefing-Paper-WS3-Briefing-Paper.pdf](#); [Reducing conflicts in school environments using restorative practices: A systematic review - ScienceDirect](#)

For further reading examples see: [Restorative Approaches in Schools](#) by H. Flanagan; 'Just Schools: A whole school approach to Restorative Justice' by Belinda Hopkins; 'Restorative Practice' by Mark Finnis.