



**A Restorative Justice Guide for Teachers Entering Positions
at a New School**



Created by: Angela Earle



Table of Contents

Introduction

Section one: What is Restorative Justice in Education?

Section two: A Relationship with yourself

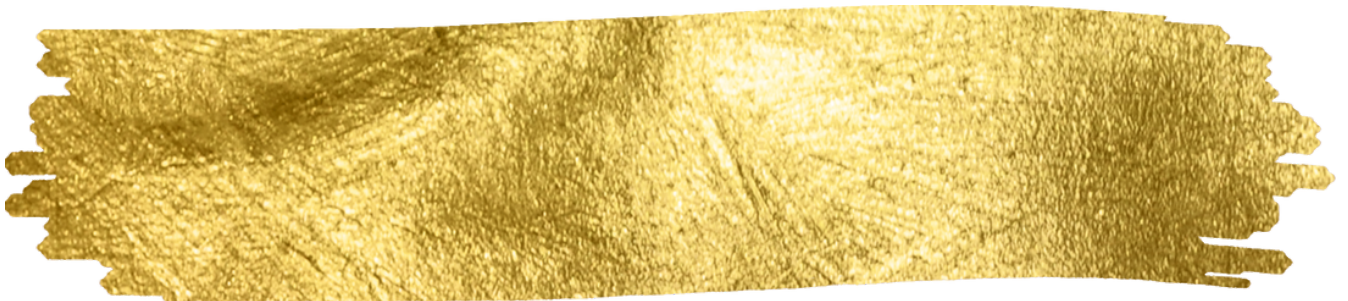
Section three: Before the school year begins

Section four: Meeting and collaborating with new fellow staff

Section five: Student engagement and relationships

Section six: Connecting with families

Conclusion



Introduction

In the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD) there are hundreds of teachers who accept both replacement positions and new permanent teaching positions every year. Many teachers move from job to job and start fresh in a new environment each time. Do you find yourself in this type of situation? Are you a teacher who has entered into a new teaching position at a new school? Are you passionate about building positive relationships with those around you? Do you believe in honoring and including others while providing opportunities for people to be at their best? If you have answered yes to these questions, then this is the guide for you and hopefully you will find the information helpful. Using principles of restorative justice in education, this guide will shape how you engage with others in your new context and role within your school.



Section one: What is RJE?

RJE stands for restorative justice in education. Each of these words can be broken apart and defined on their own. Evans and vaandering (2016) describe each as follows: ‘Justice’ is honoring the inherent worth of everyone through relationships. Primary (social) justice encompasses no wrongdoings to others, treating all with respect and dignity, while creating equal opportunities for all. Secondary (judicial) justice is a response to harm or crime. Being ‘restorative’ allows people to be fully contributing members of their communities due to their dignity, worth and interconnectedness being nurtured and protected. ‘Education’ includes learning in all contexts. RJE creates a vision for education where there is more of a focus on collective engagement and support, over an individual striving. Evans and vaandering (2016) define RJE as facilitating learning communities that nurture the capacity of people to engage with one another and their environment in a manner that supports and respects the inherent dignity and worth of all.

Note: This section is an overview of key concepts of what is written in *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education* by Katherine Evans and dorothy vaandering. This book is an incredibly valuable resource that I would encourage you to read in order to dig a little deeper into the world of restorative justice in education. For further information and resources you can also visit Relationships First (<https://www.rfnl.org>). Here you will find information on restorative justice in education, ideas on implementation and restorative resources suitable for various grade levels.

Relationships First Culture – Beliefs and Values

Thinking with a relationships first mindset means you believe that all people are worthy and interconnected. Relationships First is grounded in the key values of respect, dignity and mutual concern. There are three components that are embedded into a Relationships First culture in education: nurturing healthy relationships,

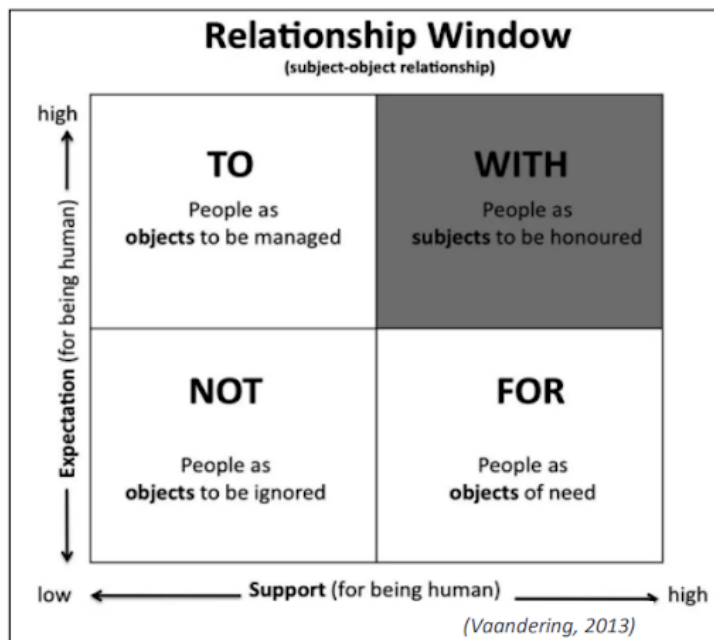
creating just and equitable learning environments, and repairing harm and transforming conflict. These components overlap each other and revolve around the belief that all people are worthy and interconnected.

Responsive Teaching and Learning - What glasses am I wearing?

Some very important questions to consider when thinking restoratively: Are you honoring those around you or are you measuring/judging them? What message are you sending others in your interaction with them? When implementing a restorative justice framework, it is important and valuable for you to consider others' perspectives. When you measure or judge individuals, you are showing that you are not accepting of who they are – you are diminishing who they are as individuals. On the other hand, when you honor someone, it means putting yourself in their shoes and accepting them as they are – we are all humans who benefit from making connections.

The Relationship Window

The relationship window serves as a framework to help us identify the types of relationships we are in and how to increase the quality of these relationships. Becoming aware of how we interact within our relationships is valuable. Are you doing things *for* someone (offering high support with low expectation)? Are you doing things *to* someone (offering low support with high expectation)? Or are you *not* doing anything at all (no expectations and no support in a neglectful way)? These are all examples of unhealthy, inhumane relationships. However, doing things *with* each other (high expectations and high support – reciprocated both ways) allows healthy relationships to flourish, and creates a sense of belonging for those involved. By asking yourself the question: 'am I honoring this individual and allowing them to be at their best?' you move away from using people or treating them as objects to be managed, to engaging *with* them and the gift that they are. See figure below on the relationship window:



Talking circles

Setting up routine and consistently running a productive talking circle can take a lot of practice and time. The amount of time can depend on a lot of different factors, including: the age of your students, the number of students in your class, the needs of your students, their previous experience with talking circles and/or the subject chosen for discussion within the circle. Using talking circles as a daily practice in your classroom is valuable in helping to create interconnected relationships with and amongst students. Doing so will set you and your students up with a good relationship when faced with difficult conversations, and prepares them and you for repairing harm when need be.

For further information on how to implement talking circles, please visit Relationships First <https://www.rfnl.org/>. I would also encourage you to read *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community* by Carolyn Boyes and Kay Pranis. See also section five of this guide for more information on talking circles and student engagement.

Ripples of Relationships

Thinking restoratively starts with caring for yourself. How can you build relationships with those around you (your students, co-workers, parents, etc) if you are not first caring for yourself? Creating and building healthy, positive relationships with others begins with honoring, respecting and caring for your own self. The ripple effect shown within the ripples of relationship below presents that once you believe that people are worthy and interconnected, beginning with you, it then allows you to engage in similar relationships with everyone else.



Restorative Justice Framework questions

When challenges arise between relationships within your class, the following RJE framework questions can help you value individuals through guiding dialogue. These questions are open ended and can lead to great conversation about the past, present and future of any given situation. They require training and education and are not as simple as asking and answering to solve a problem.

- What happened? [not WHY?]
- What were you thinking/feeling at the time?
- What are you thinking/feeling now?
- Who has been affected? In what way?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- What do you need [to do] to go forward?



Section Two: Relationship with self

Have you ever heard the expression: you can't pour from an empty cup? Thinking restoratively and using restorative practices, starts with yourself. Oftentimes as teachers, we are so overwhelmed with responsibilities and the well-being of our students that we don't consider our own needs. This is something that when you make a conscious effort to do so, you also build relationships with those around you, and you bring your true authentic self when interacting with others.

Building a relationship with yourself

What does it look like to build a relationship with yourself? Let's consider how you talk to yourself. Are you able to identify your own feelings? Can you recognize how or why you feel a certain way about something? Are you able to accept that these feelings are okay? Do you want to come up with a solution to your own problems? (Even if the solution is simply saying, "this is out of my control, there is nothing I can do about it, and that is ok.") Thinking about these questions, and how you would answer them in a positive, accepting way, is the first step to building a real relationship with yourself. It is important for you to allow yourself to feel your feelings, be kind and easy on yourself. The idea of community actually begins not within your surroundings, but within you. It is valuable to become aware of what you need and to realize that restorative

justice in education is not just another tool in your toolbox of teaching, but rather a shift in mindset that begins with taking care of yourself. To think restoratively, ask yourself the questions: Am I honoring or measuring myself? What message am I sending myself? If the answer is “I am measuring myself”, work to change your mindset and be more kind to yourself. Ask yourself the RJE framework questions below:

- What is happening now that shows me I am measuring myself?
- What am I thinking and feeling about this?
- What’s the hardest thing about measuring myself right now?
- What impact is this having on me? On those around me?
- What do I need to shift to honour myself?
- What can I do to make this shift?
- Is there anything I need from others that might help me? Can I ask them for this?

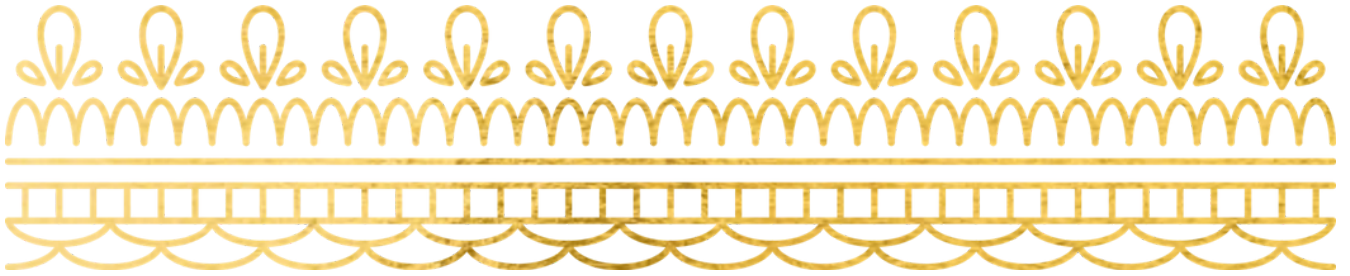
Think about how you answer these questions and how you can use them to ensure you are honoring yourself and valuing your needs. Realizing that this relationship with yourself matters, will hopefully encourage you to practice self-care. It is especially important to remember to care for yourself when entering into new teaching positions. It can be easy to get caught up in everything you must adapt to in your new environment, and constant change can create an overwhelming feeling. You must remember to care for yourself first.

Practicing self-care

Beginning a new position is a very time-consuming experience. Before you know it, every spare moment is taken up in preparing for your new students and the expectations of the new school. In this context, have you ever felt that practicing self-care was creating more work for you on an already full plate? Do you know any examples of self-care that seem so simple, but you never actually take any time to do them? Practicing self-care does not have to be a strenuous, stressful task, especially when you are already feeling some sense of burn out. Similar to building a relationship with yourself, practicing self-care is a change in mindset. It is realizing what you really need, and giving yourself just that. What you need at any given moment can change from person to person, and a list of examples of practicing self-care can be quite long. Some examples can look like but are not limited to the following:

- *Mindfulness practice*: close your eyes and shift your attention to different parts of your body. How are they feeling?
- *Breathing exercises*: close your eyes and focus solely on breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Deepen your inhales and exhales allowing yourself to relax and release tension. Focus on feeling your feelings.
- *A joyful activity*: do anything that brings you joy. Painting, singing, drawing, coloring, yoga, running, dancing, walking, etc. (Something that you do for the experience, not the outcome.)
- *Experience the outdoors*: feel the joys nature can bring and be in the present moment. Go for a walk in the woods or visit a park. Notice what is going on around you using your five senses.
- *Fill your empty glass*: take a break when you need it, get lots of sleep, ensure to eat nutritious food and to incorporate movement into your day.
- *Self reflection*: take time to reflect at the end of the day. What happened today, and how did it make you feel? What made you happy today?

As you practice self-care, remember that *you are worthy and interconnected* and because you are, you can care for and support others.



Section Three - Before the school year begins

Thinking restoratively begins even before your students enter the classroom on the first day, before meeting your new staff members or grade level partners and when thinking about creating relationships with your student's families. Reflecting on and anticipating how to be restorative can be valuable and proactive. Are you honoring or measuring/judging your students before meeting them?

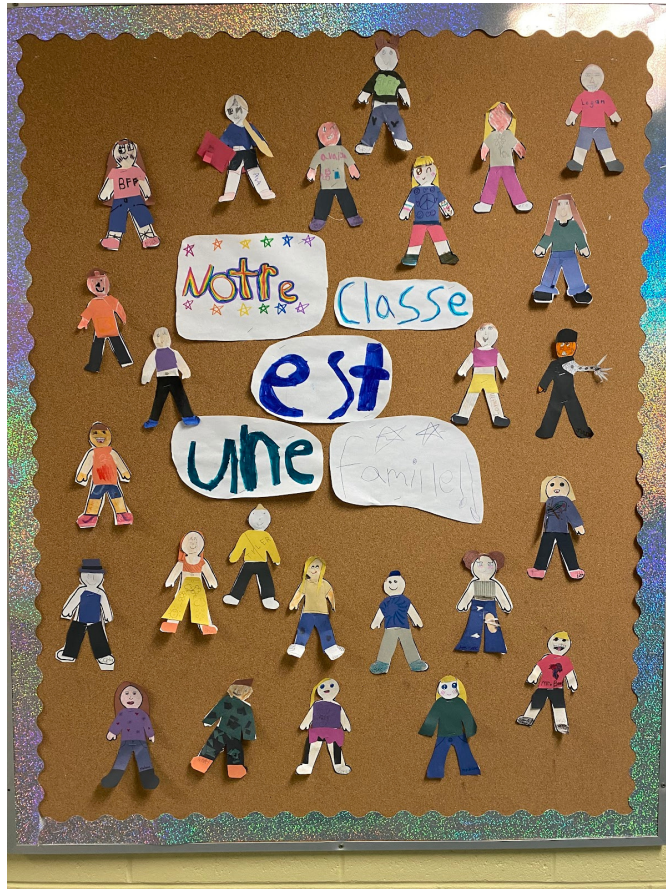
Anticipating student arrival

- *To read or not to read student files?*

Unless you hear from the guidance counselor about an urgent case with one of your students, refrain from looking deeply into student files before meeting them and getting to know them. The same can be said about speaking with your students' previous teachers. Meeting the students first, gives them the opportunity to present themselves without you having any preconceived notions about them or who they are. If you look at student files or speak with previous teachers, ask: how am I honoring this student by doing this? You could be honoring your students by preparing for their needs. Are there any life-threatening allergies to be aware of in order to keep them safe? Are there any students who may need a special space or seating in the classroom due to mobility or any special diagnoses? While it is important not to judge individuals or make assumptions, (because this diminishes who they are and does not value them or consider them worthy), preparing for their specific needs can be honorable.

- *Classroom decor, what should you do?*

Your classroom space sends messages to your students. When thinking restoratively in relation to your classroom space, questions to consider include: Are students welcome here? Does the classroom appear to be their space or yours? When you set up your classroom, it is okay that bulletin boards, walls, student desks and lockers are all bare. Oftentimes, as teachers we may feel the need to make everything look beautiful or label everything with our student's names; however, this does not have to be the case. For example, allowing students to create/decorate the classroom gradually on their own, and create their own name tags for their lockers and desks, shows that you believe they are worthy. Creating things together to display on the bulletin board and walls shows you are honoring them, their voice and their creative expression.



"Notre classe est une famille/Our class is a family"

Students created themselves using construction paper.

○ *Physical space*

Arranging the physical furniture and space before the students arrive can be helpful – think about where student collaboration can take place and designate a space for class talking circles. However, remain open to student suggestions once they have experienced it in the way you have it set up.

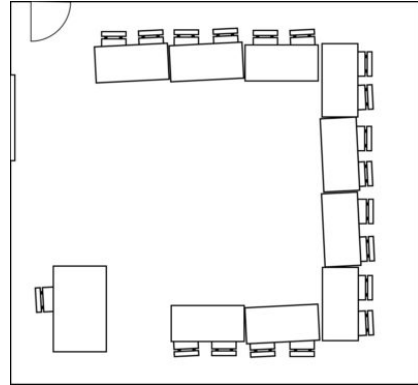


Some sample seating arrangements that allow for space to complete talking circles are in the table below:

Option 1: Horseshoe

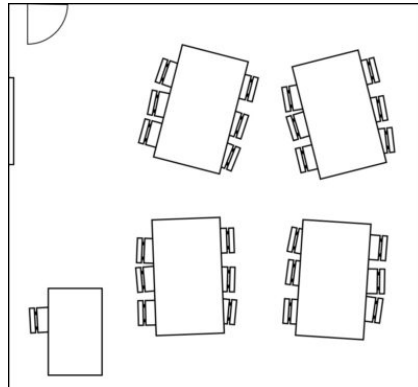
Depending on the space in your classroom and the number of students you have, this arrangement is quite inclusive in that everyone can see everyone.

It also has lots of room in the middle for daily talking circles. While placing your desk at the front of the room works, consider what is this communicating to your students? You may consider putting it elsewhere in the room.



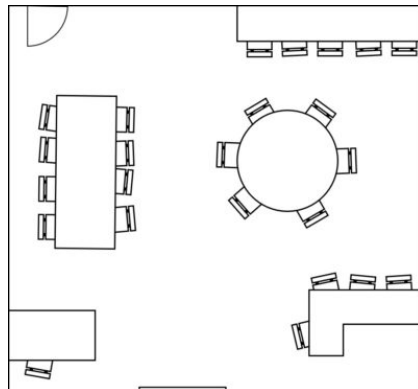
Option 2: Groups

This arrangement is good for those classrooms with tables and not individual desks. It allows for collaboration amongst students, with lots of space at the front of the classroom for daily talking circles.



Option 3: Free-flowing/Choice

Setting up various seating options and allow students to choose. In this case, you could move some furniture out of the way to complete talking circles and then move it back when finished.



○ *The first day of school*

On the first day of school, consider greeting your students at the classroom door and introducing yourself before asking their names and getting to know them. Once they've entered the room, you can begin by allowing them to create and decorate name tags for their lockers and desks. You will see what their interests are, get to know their names, and learning styles. By meeting them this way, you are showing your students that you believe they are worthy, you respect them and you value a relationship with them at school.

Pre-meetings with administrators and staff

Have you ever experienced a rush of emotions before meeting all your new fellow staff members on the first administration day? Do you enjoy attending those first staff meetings? Presenting opportunities for all staff members to get to know each other, and for new staff to introduce themselves is valuable for the school community. These introductions can be done through a talking circle with all staff members, or in other community/relationship building activities. In an activity like this, everyone will get the chance to meet those they will be working with. The relationships created and built among staff can affect the students and their education.

Have you left a staff meeting on administration day where you felt like you never had a chance to introduce yourself or meet anyone that you will be working with? Think about creating an inclusive environment amongst all staff where both new and returning members feel valued. As a new staff member you may feel like an observer and not be given the chance to introduce yourself where you feel like part of the team. Revisit the RJE framework questions in section one to help you. If you feel left out of the situation, how does it make you feel? What can you do to ensure you are still honoring yourself and the relationships with those around you? You can create other opportunities to get to know your administrator and staff after these initial meetings, perhaps with lighthearted questions upon your other interactions. Over time, hopefully you will get to learn more about your fellow staff members.

Grade level

Have you ever been nervous to meet other teachers who will be teaching with you at your grade level? These will be people that you will most likely be working closely with each and every day. When meeting fellow grade level partners or staff, you may learn about certain beliefs and values they have. Sometimes, you may not share the same beliefs and values, and this may create tensions or become intimidating for those around you. In a restorative justice mindset, you can challenge yourself to respect where people are coming from. This includes their culture or previous experiences, their teaching philosophy and/or daily practices. Rather than being pushy and judging your fellow grade level teachers, you may choose to listen to them and share with them instead. Upon initial meetings, you can present what is important to you and your teaching, and share some ideas with your fellow staff. Over time, you can share the value in using talking circles, or the value in focusing on relationships before curriculum, and guide them or collaborate with them if they wish to share in this journey. Sometimes, people will be intimidated by things that they are not familiar with, such as talking circles, and may need time to see it in action before they want to try it themselves. Always remember that in order to honor those around you, you must not judge them for their own beliefs, values, and experiences.

Parent contact

As a new teacher in this community, the parents are likely to be wondering who the new teacher will be this year. Therefore, creating initial contact with parents shows them early on that you care that they know who you are. This contact can be via email, a video message or a phone call. Included in the interaction – introduce yourself and share some information about you, while also gathering some information about their child prior to the first day. How will their child be getting home? Do they have any allergies? Are there needs that you should prepare for prior to meeting their child on the first day? It is also valuable to tell parents how they can connect with you before the first day of school. This would include your email address, your Google Classroom link or any apps, such as Remind, that you will be using to communicate with families throughout the year.



Section Four: Meeting and collaborating with new fellow staff and administrators

After you have anticipated the arrival of your students, you will most likely be meeting your new future co-workers for the first time. Co-workers can include fellow teachers, administrators and other staff such as custodians, secretaries, and student assistants. When meeting new people, it is valuable to be yourself, and be cognizant of thinking restoratively with these initial interactions.

Interacting with your new administrators

In many hiring situations, your new administrators may be some of the first people you meet at your new school because in most cases in order to fill replacement positions or permanent positions (where no previously permanent teachers apply), administrators will be the ones receiving a shortlist of names and conducting the interview for the job. During an interview, or once you accept a new position, you may learn more about the school and routines they have in place. Are there strict school rules, with punitive measures in place? Are there any school wide reward systems? Is the school already thinking restoratively? If not, do you believe the school will be willing to embrace a change? Remember to ask yourself the questions: Am I judging/measuring this person or am I honoring them? If you find that you are judging them, reflect on this. In order to go beyond – you must change your thought process to ensure you are respecting and valuing everyone you work with. In this way you are modeling restorative justice and planting seeds. How can

schools implement restorative practices if there is no one aware of what these practices are? Administrators are often doing what has “always been done” simply because they know no different.

- *School rules that enforce punitive measures*

Unfortunately, there are many administrators that still enforce strict school rules with punitive measures as discipline for breaking school rules. Have you ever been a part of a school or staff like this and did not know what to do? One thing to remember is that thinking restoratively can begin in your classroom, and ultimately ripple out to the rest of the school. Especially when staff members witness the benefits of thinking and acting in a restorative manner. If you are using talking circles in your class, your students are working on effective communication, active listening and being respectful of others. Students who participate in a talking circle each day not only build relationships with each other and you, but learn skills they can use in instances where there may be a need to resolve conflict and repair harm. Through listening and taking turns while speaking, they are then able to answer the RF - RJE questions in any given situation.

While you may find it difficult to speak with administrators on ways to change, it is always valuable to share with others the benefits of thinking restoratively and ideas on how to do so. Sometimes, the sharing can happen organically and in the moment. Let me present you with an example:

- *Imagine that after practicing daily talking circles for some time, your students are becoming more and more independent in the process of addressing issues and repairing harm with their classmates. One day during lunch time, an instance occurs between a group of students in your class. Someone has said something harmful to another student, and then a few other students got involved. You are not in your classroom at the time and the teacher on duty “doesn’t want to deal with it”. They contact the office and send the students there to receive punishment from administration. The students involved are placed in separate rooms and interrogated one at a time so that the administration can get down to “what really happened”. They claim that this is the only way to find out the truth and ensure no one is lying. After the administrator talks to each student individually, the students are all then punished and given lunch time detention for the remainder of the week for simply being involved in the situation.*

This is an example of when you can talk to your administrators about the benefits of RJE. What window of the relationship window are you in? Using the students as objects to be managed, like in the example above, is in the *to* box. How can you move this to the *with* box? You can present what you have been doing in your classroom, the skills the students have been learning through talking circles, and the benefits of restorative practices in repairing harm in situations like this one. You can even invite administration to participate in a circle with you and the students who were involved in order to address and repair the harm from this incident.

- *Saying no to school wide or classroom “reward systems”*

A positive behavior reward system means that when a student displays a positive behavior, or follows specific expectations, they receive either an individual reward or something to go towards a reward for the whole class. Some examples I have seen include collecting tickets, points, buttons, tokens, etc. that classes can redeem for an award after a certain amount of time. Rewards can be tangible or intangible, and are sometimes created around student interests and what they would be motivated to work towards.

What I have noticed with the use of reward systems is that while they may seem to show positive short term results (i.e. students following expected behavior), they do not reinforce or support your long term goal of a relational, restorative justice mindset. When using reward systems, students become more concerned about getting a reward for their actions than understanding how and why they chose these actions in the first place. Using rewards places you in the *to* and/or *for* box in the relationship window. A restorative goal of building a stronger classroom community where all individuals are worthy and interconnected goes out the window when you begin to hear students say things like, “we don’t have to do that because we’re not going to even get anything if we do.” Continue to ask yourself the following questions: How are students honoring themselves and each other? Are they measuring themselves and their peers? Creating a classroom community that your students value being a part of, where they feel worthy and enjoy coming to school everyday, is the goal of restorative justice in education.

Create and build relationships with your fellow staff members

As a new teacher in the building, you will meet fellow teachers, administrators, custodians, school secretaries, cafeteria staff, student assistants, speech language therapists, bus drivers, etc. Valuing each member of your school community and honoring them and what they believe is important. Having genuine conversations and interactions with people who work in the school on a daily basis will strengthen your relationships and create an environment where everyone feels needed and valued. This may include speaking with the custodian at the end of the day while they are in your classroom, with the bus driver while traveling on school trips, or with the school secretary while you pass by on your lunch break. The culture created within the working relationships of staff sets the tone for the work environment within the school. You will recognize that you may not share the same values and beliefs with everyone working within the school, but honoring everyone’s differences will allow for individuals to work together in harmony and in an inclusive environment where people feel welcome. Each person has an important role, contributes to the functioning of the school and is worthy of respect.

Sharing RJ with others in your school

Have you ever come across or experienced something that you find so valuable that you wish for others to share in it with you? As teachers, this can be a common trait. Unfortunately, this also creates the feeling of: “Oh no! Here is a new initiative that I have to become a part of that I don’t really know anything about or feel drawn to do.” While I have presented that restorative justice is a mindset shift, and not actually a tool in your teaching toolbox, it may take time for others to see the effects and adopt a similar mindset. Oftentimes, embracing change and future development can be challenging, and difficult for people. If you keep working to establish an RJE mindset within your classroom, trust that it will ripple out to other classrooms and the school over time. Everyone wants part of a good thing!



Section Five: Student engagement and relationships

In addition to meeting and interacting with your new staff, you will also need to think about how you will build relationships and engage with each one of your students. What makes RJE unique is that in all that you do, the focus will be on the interconnectedness of your group and that each person is treated with respect and dignity.

Talking Circles

Introducing talking circles to your classroom will be a powerful experience. In circle, students are practicing respect, equity, empathy, self regulation and self awareness, shared leadership, responsibility and problem solving skills. Students learn to be present, while building positive relationships with their peers and the teacher. Students are also practicing speaking from the heart and learning to deal with certain emotions. The key components of a circle include: space for a circle, a talking piece, a centerpiece and everyone on the same level, including the teacher, if at all possible. In order to get a better understanding of how circles work, I would highly recommend reading pages 27-37 in *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community* by Carolyn Boyes and Kay Pranis. These pages highlight the structure and key elements of learning the circle process. Also, visit Relationships First <https://www.relationshipsfirstnl.com/videos> and watch the video “Circle Formations”. Circles are an incredible experience and I would highly recommend and encourage you to learn more about them in order to be able to incorporate them into your classroom.

○ *Your first circle*

For your very first circle, begin with getting in a circle formation – on chairs or on the floor without a table/desk in front of them – with two simple guidelines (speak from the heart and listen from the heart), a centerpiece and a talking piece present. Explain the centerpiece, any objects you have placed there and their significance. Then explain the talking piece, it’s purpose (allowing each student to speak and listen), and that those who hold the talking piece has the opportunity to share without interruption. The talking piece is to be passed around the circle, where people only share when holding it. Explain that they may also hold or pass the talking piece along without speaking. Your first circle question can be to become better acquainted to everyone in the class. You may choose to simply ask: What is your name and favorite color?

○ *Your second circle: create circle values and guidelines*

Your second circle can be used to generate values and to create circle guidelines. The circle values should be discussed and created as a group. Again, depending on the age of your students, what you choose as guidelines for your circle can look drastically different – yet they are strikingly similar. If you are teaching younger students, it is best to keep it simple so that they can understand. Use a circle to ask your students the following questions: What do we need from our friends while we are in circle so we all will want to share? How can we ensure we are being respectful to our classmates while we are in circle? They may say things like “don’t be mean” or “we have to be nice”. You could then suggest that one guideline could be: “we listen with an open heart” simply drawing a heart on the centerpiece for your circles. In older classrooms, you may choose words the students come up with themselves. As students share values in circle, write them down and place them in the center. These may include words such as: “patience, empathy, kindness, respect”, etc. You may choose to take these values and create guidelines together such as: “I look at the person who is talking. I

listen respectfully. I share when I can.” It is always valuable to remember that guidelines can be changed at any time. Especially when what we need from each other may have changed. Some day the students may say they need “patience” from their classmates, and another day they may need “guidance”. It is important to remain flexible, and continuously remember – am I still honoring both my students and myself?



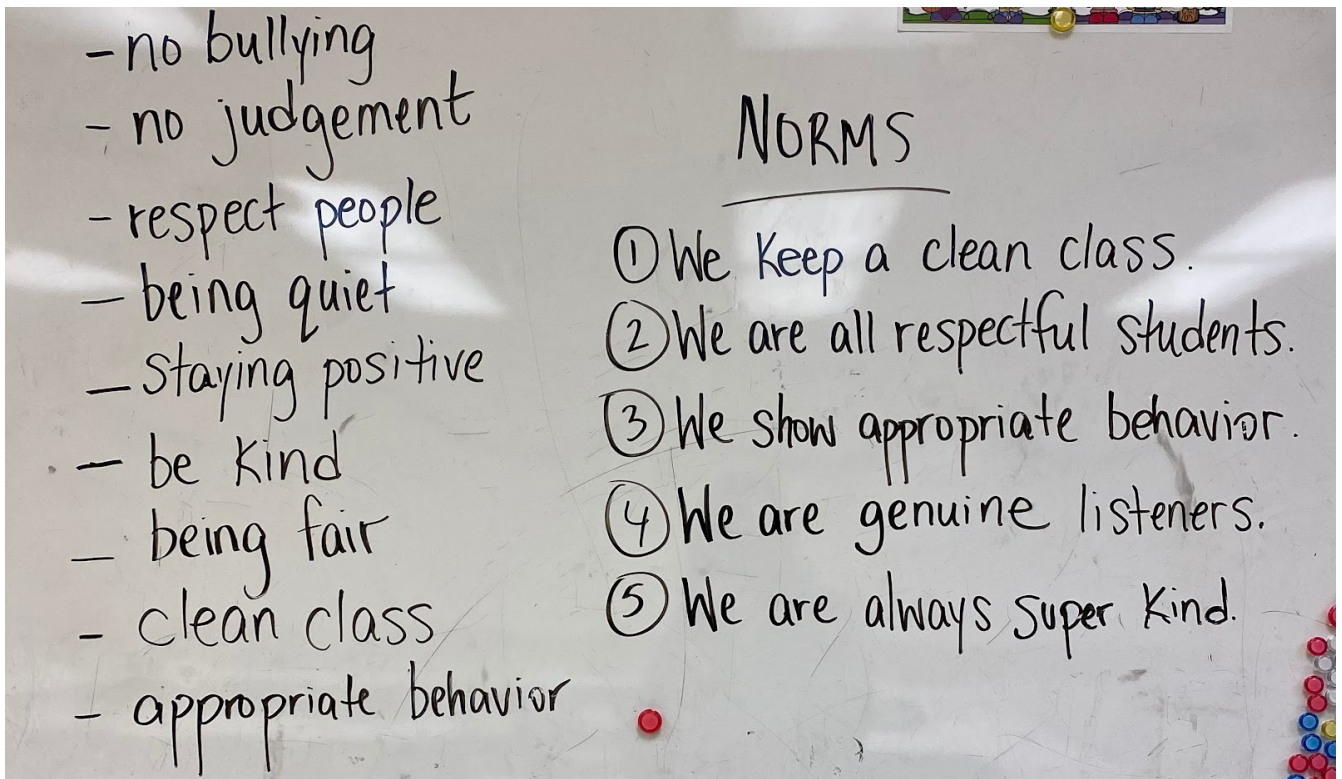
Talking piece – a talking piece is an object that is passed around the circle. It should be meaningful for the students or the facilitator. Start out with things that are special to you, remembering to explain why they are special. You may later choose to assign a student per day that can bring in their own talking piece to share with the circle.



Circle centerpiece – a centerpiece is used as the focal point in the middle of the circle. It supports speaking and listening from the heart. You may choose to make a piece of the centerpiece as a class. Use a piece of bristol board, have each student trace their hand, and write five things that they need from their friends in the circle on each of their fingers. They then decorate their hands and you place their hands in a circle and laminate it once finished. This then becomes one of the things used as part of the centerpiece for your circles.

○ *Your third circle: create class norms*

Have you ever thought it important to create a set of classroom rules on the first day of school? It is beneficial for students to understand expectations within the classroom; it is most beneficial when they work together to create them. A restorative approach for creating a set of classroom norms is where each person's voice is acknowledged and their voice respected. Creating these norms together where everyone has input, shows that you value each student voice. When in circle, ask the class: What do we need from each other to be at our best when we are together? How can we ensure to honor and respect everyone in the classroom on a daily basis? Write down what each student says as they pass the talking piece. Depending on the age of your students, while you brainstorm ideas with them, you may choose to create a list of words or phrases that best suit their needs and their environment. They also may need some assistance forming the norms into positive and complete thoughts. For example, one student may say "make sure you put your garbage in the trashcan", while another student may say, "we need to clean up our toys when we're finished playing". Move the power to the students and ask them how they can say this in a summarizing way... or you could then suggest that one norm could simply be: "we keep a clean classroom". This way, you are still honoring both student suggestions, and are creating a reasonable, attainable expectation. Once norms have been created, pass the talking piece around the circle and ask: Can you accept these norms and commit to them?



An example of what a small brainstorming circle can look like with possible classroom norms.



You may choose to place your classroom norms in the center of the student's traced hands.

Engaging Newcomers to NL

Have you ever had a student transfer into your class from outside of Canada? The term “newcomers” is a term that includes various categories of immigrants that are born outside of Canada. Newcomer families may be EAL (English additional language) learners, while others may already know English as a first or additional language.

It would be a good idea to establish communication and build a partnership with the student's family as soon as possible. If there is a language barrier, technology is a wonderful tool that can aid in communication through the use of translators. It is important to gather as much knowledge and information as you can about this student before they enter your room. Have they experienced some sort of trauma? Have they fled from a war-torn country? What can you do to honor them before and after they arrive? Knowing what language they speak, what country they are from, what their recent experiences are will prepare you for their arrival. It is important to also be aware of sensitive days or celebrations, such as Remembrance Day. You can show you honour and respect them by reaching out to their family members to discuss these before you discuss anything in the classroom.

Recognizing that the student may be learning English as an additional language, you will most likely be treating it like an English immersion classroom. The student will be learning the language and additional subject areas at the same time. It is valuable to recognize that newcomers to Canada come with knowledge, experience and a unique global perspective. Every effort should be made to make students feel welcomed in your classroom while respecting and honoring where they may have come from and their prior experiences. Allowing students the opportunity to share with their classmates is important, and as newcomer students become more comfortable with you and their classmates, they will most likely be willing to share more about their experiences. Using talking circles in your classroom allows newcomer students to have a voice and an opportunity to share on their own time. Other ideas to honor them include embracing their culture and language in the classroom: singing or sharing literature in their native language, using certain crayons/markers they enjoy, etc.



Restorative justice and teaching curriculum

With practice, you will find that circles help create a safe place for students to learn. They build relationships and are more comfortable taking risks, asking questions, and admitting when they may be confused about something. Using circles to teach curriculum is another incredible way to develop student voice and critical thinking. The value of circle for teaching is limitless and over time all members of the circle will participate. There are endless possibilities and a number of ways you can incorporate many different curriculum outcomes and ideas into your class circles. The key is to ask open ended questions where students can share their understanding in various ways. Some examples include:

- *All areas of the curriculum circle ideas:*
 - Discover student’s prior knowledge on a subject. Ask: “What do you already know about _____?”
 - Discover what we would like to know about a topic. Ask: “What would you like to know about _____?”
 - Check for understanding on any topic. Ask: “What did you learn about _____?”

- *Math curriculum circles:*
 - Math facts. Ask: “Which two numbers make ____?” These can include subtraction, multiplication, addition, division, etc.
 - Geometry - differentiating shapes. Ask: “You have two shapes that have a different amount of sides. Which two shapes could you have?”
 - Counting. Ask: “What is a number that is greater than ____?” “What is a number that is less than ____.”
 - Classification - in groups. Hand around a bucket of objects. Ask: “Can you make a group of similar objects? What feature is it they have in common?”

- *Science curriculum circles:*
 - Observation circle. Pass an object around the circle. Ask: “What do you see? What do you wonder?”
 - Using circle dialogue to discuss what happened before a science experiment in order to make predictions. Ask: “What do you think is going to happen?”
 - Using circle dialogue to discuss what happened after a science experiment in order to make conclusions. Ask: “What happened?” “What did you notice?”

- *Language curriculum circles:*
 - Story sharing circle - students with the talking piece get to share a piece of writing. Then ask: “What helpful feedback can we give ____ on their writing?”
 - Respond to a reading or storybook circle. Ask: “What does it mean to ____?” Or “Can you share a time when you ____?”
 - Descriptive word circle. Ask: “Describe _____ in one word.” For example: “Summer” (warm, exciting, vacation, etc).
 - Story creation circle. Each person says one word at a time. Beginning with the first person, each person following them will add a word and build onto the story.

- *Health curriculum circles:*
 - Compliment circle. Ask: “What is a compliment?” Then, while standing, ask the students to take turns giving each other a compliment and then sitting down. This allows for every one in the circle to receive a compliment from someone. (Alternatively, get a ball of string/yarn, hold onto the end and roll it to someone in the circle as you give them a compliment. In the end you will have created a compliment web.)
 - Relationship Circle. Ask: “What are the qualities of a friend?”
 - Feelings circle. Ask: “What type of weather do you feel like today?” “What type of animal do you feel like today?”

Thinking restorative about student assessment

○ *Formative & summative assessments*

How can you think restoratively when it comes to assessment? Do you just give everyone the same test at the end of a unit and call it a day? While that may seem like an option that takes up less time, it does not honour each of your students and their learning. When assessing students in a restorative manner, first, students need to know that their learning has purpose. Expectations should be clear and learning outcomes understood. Ask: Share one thing about how you are learning this? What do you find confusing? Assessment should also include a variety of work samples from the student. Simply assigning a test on a given day, giving it a mark and returning it to the student with no feedback is not productive or restorative. Assessing student learning should consist of multiple types of evidence, with timely and specific feedback that document the student's growth. Ask: How can you show your learning in a variety of ways? Students rely on their strengths and can sometimes overcome weaknesses by self-reflection. Ask: How can you improve in this area? Assessment should be fluid and ongoing. Using talking circles can be very valuable to teach curriculum and to assess outcomes. When in circle it gives you quick insight into which students are struggling with an outcome, and allows you to provide timely feedback to promote learning.

Using the RF-RJE questions in assessing your students' learning experiences could look like:

- When you were working on this activity, what happened for you?
- What were you thinking while you were working? What are you thinking now that it is done?
- What was the hardest thing for you? The best thing for you?
- How has this activity impacted you? Others?
- What do you feel you need to do differently if you were to do it again?
- What might you need help with from someone else? Or the teacher?



Section Six: Connecting with families

Equally as important as meeting your new staff and engaging your students is ensuring you connect with your students' families. How can you be sure to honor and include everyone?

Engaging families

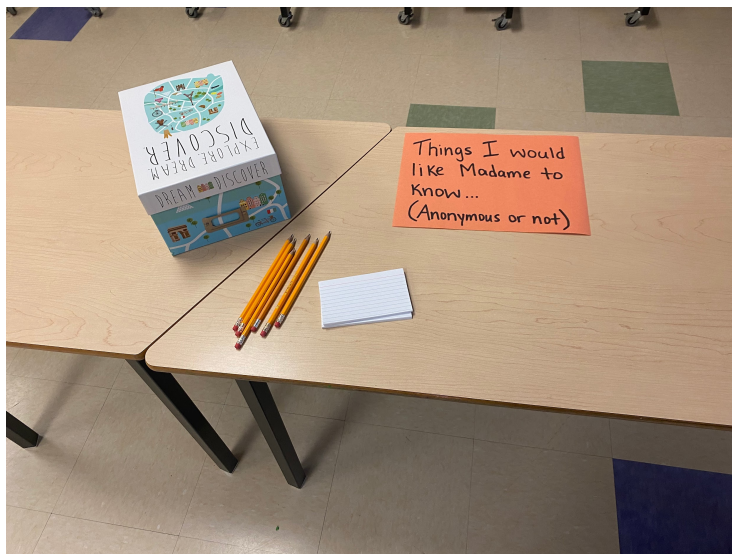
How can you interact with families in a restorative way? First, create a welcome environment for them. Encourage them to visit the classroom or volunteer with the class whenever possible. It is important to communicate with family members frequently and keep them included in everything that is going on with

their children in the classroom. Please be mindful with your terminology in your communications that address the group as a whole. Are you using the word “parent”? Consider that perhaps not all those who care for our students are their parents, and it may be more honorable to use the word “families”. In addition, instead of using the terminology “parent/teacher interviews” you could use “family/teacher conferences”. Or, rather than beginning an email with “Dear parents” you could try “Dear families”. This language is more inclusive and values all those individuals who may be raising our students in parenting roles. Writing communication where it is accessible to the students is beneficial as well. Technology has created this wonderful platform for online communication and allows for easy interaction between home and school. There is email communication, Google Classroom, Twitter, and many other educational apps for families to connect with you and your class online.

“Making Connections Night” or “Curriculum Night”?

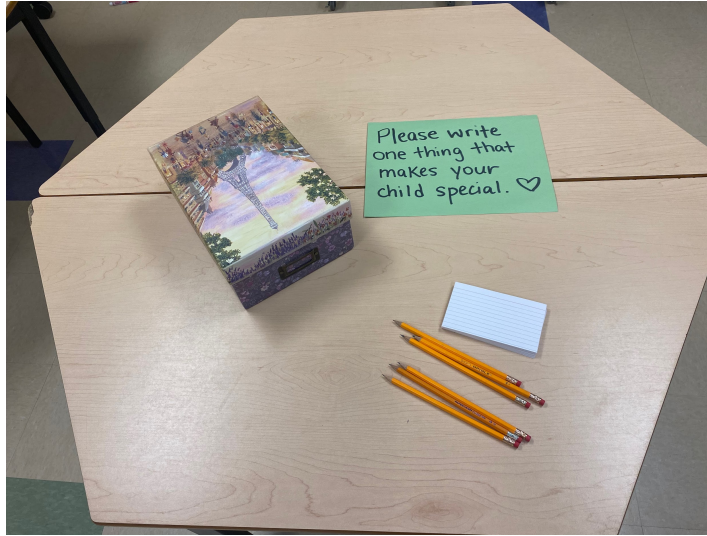
What can it look like to host “Curriculum Night” for families in a restorative way? Have you ever wanted to meet families and introduce yourself, while also allowing the families to get to know each other? Try hosting a “Making Connections Night” instead. Recognizing that there may be things you wish to communicate with families prior to this night related to dismissal protocols, classroom procedures, or any other related information, it may be beneficial to create a brochure/handout to send home with all students the afternoon before “making connections night”. This way, all families are guaranteed to receive the information and anyone can contact you with questions they may have. For the night, you can set up a variety of stations for family members to rotate through, talk with each other, talk with you, all while building connections. Some examples of stations include:

- *“Things I would like the teacher to know.”*



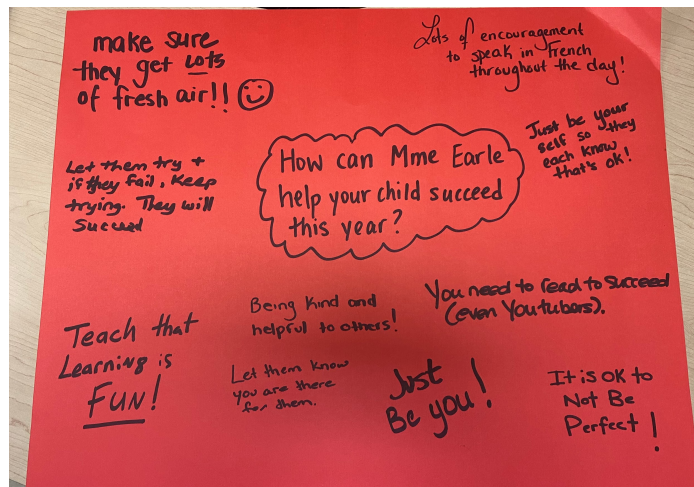
Here, you will include a mailbox and cards for family members to fill out and slip in the box once completed. These can be anonymous or not. Some family members will feel comfortable knowing that their names are not attached.

- “One thing that makes my child special.”



Here, you will include a mailbox and cards for family members to fill out and slip in the box once completed.

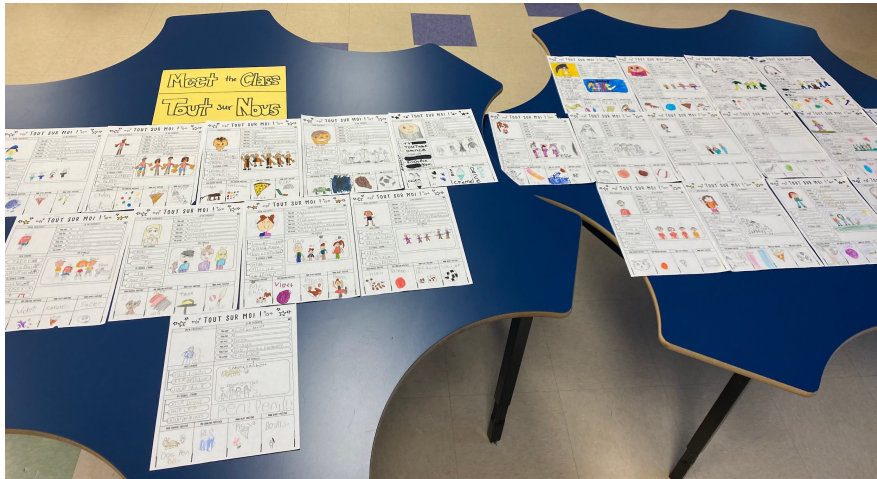
- “How can the teacher help your child succeed this year?”



This can be done on a Smartboard where you can save the file electronically afterwards, a whiteboard, or a piece of bristol board. Placing this question in the middle, family members will place their answers all around it.

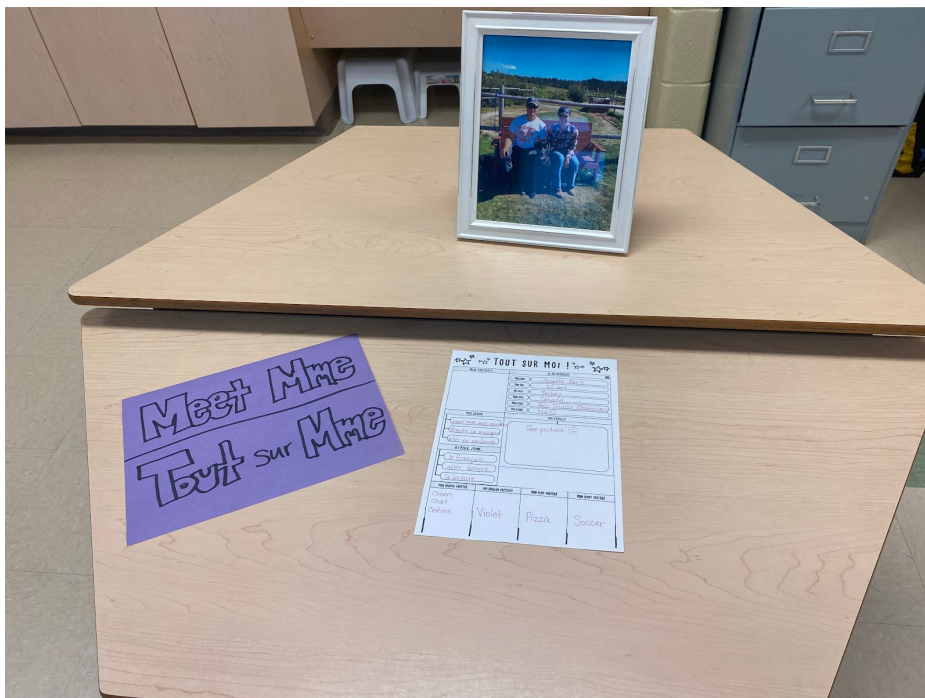


- “All about us (the students).”



This station will include some photos and/or facts about the class. These can be laid out flat for everyone to see, or made into a book that can be viewed and passed around. This allows parents the opportunity to get to know their child’s classmates.

- “All about the teacher.”



This station can include photos and facts about the teacher. This allows the families to learn about who will be teaching their child.

- “My class makes me feel...”



Here, the students will have the opportunity to share with their family members how being in this classroom makes them feel. You can do this activity with the students and display it for the parents. You can even do a similar activity with the parents while they are there that evening answering the question “What I like about your classroom is...”

Family-teacher conferences

How can you host family-teacher conferences in a relational way? Restorative justice focuses on each person in the interaction and ensures that everyone’s opinion is valued and respected. Allow family members to share first, openly and without judgment. There should be no hierarchy during these interviews, and everyone involved should be made to feel comfortable and included. Often each family-teacher conference is only between 10-15 minutes long, therefore, it may be helpful to follow a guided script to ensure that the conversation is successful in the time allotted. The following steps listed below were taken and adapted from the *Relationships First Implementation Guide* by Dorothy Vaandering and Deenaree Voelker. This is an excellent read and I would encourage you to review this resource for other ideas of implementing RJE practices within your classroom.

Step 1: Introduction

“Hi, my name is _____ and I am (student’s name)’s teacher. I’m glad you came to talk with me today about _____’s report card, and progress this term. I’m looking forward to hearing your perspective and sharing my perspective too.”

Step 2: Questions for Family members

- How's it going with _____ (student's name) this term?
- What do you think some of the successes and/or challenges have been this term?
- How do you feel about this?
- How has _____ (student's name) been affected by this?
- What do you think the main issues are for _____ (student's name)?

Step 3: Answer the above questions from your (the teacher's) perspective in statements.

“From my perspective, what I have observed has been happening is...

_____’s successes have been...

_____’s challenges have been

the main issues are...”

Step 4: Where to from here

“What do you think we need to do together WITH _____ (student's name) between now and the next reporting period?”

Step 5: Record the conversation results.

Make notes of what you agreed to, date them and check with a parent to be sure that it is clear to all.

Step 6: End the interview in a respectful way.

“Thank you very much for coming in. I am looking forward to working with you and your child.”

Preparing for when an interview may be challenging is important. As a reminder, do not forget to practice self care and ensure you are in the best head space possible before entering into a situation that may be more taxing and challenging.

While currently it is not common practice for students to attend these family-teacher meetings, a way forward in a relational way could be to invite the students in to be a part of the conference. Ask them how they feel about their progress/report card, giving all parties the chance to share openly. Having students more involved in the conferences could be great for goal setting.



Pictured here: Set a calming atmosphere for family/teacher conferences with a fireplace on the Smartboard and/or play relaxing music.

How to deal with problematic student behaviors in a restorative manner

What can you do when a student in your class does not follow through with or meet the class created norms? Restorative circle conversations are a valuable tool when revisiting what happened, either in a one-on-one, small group or a whole class way. Here is where students take the skills they've learned through daily talking circles and can apply them to a situation where harm may have been committed or where norms were broken/not respected.

NOTE: It is extremely important to note that this is a beginning for daily, small situations. Harm that is serious or more intense needs careful planning, instruction and training in order to address and facilitate healing. Please reference the *Relationships First Implementation Guide* by Dorothy Vaandering and Deenaree Voelker for more information. I would also encourage you to read "Part III: Using circles when things go wrong" in *Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community* by Carolyn Boyes and Kay Pranis.

In small daily situations of harm, asking the student what harm has been caused and how they can potentially repair the harm is transformative. Use the RF-RJE questions to guide the conversation. Begin by asking the person(s) hurt the following questions to ensure you focus on the needs of those harmed before reacting to those who you perceive have caused the harm. After these students have shared, give the person(s) responsible for causing the harm a chance to answer the same questions. Keep in mind that in *most* cases the person causing the harm and the person experiencing the harm are not clear. Using the questions and creating space for dialogue will help them to resolve the situation, often without you requiring the need to know the exact details.

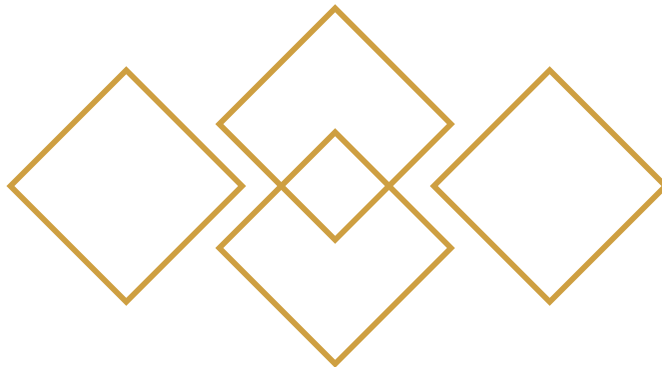


- What happened? [not WHY?]
- What were you thinking/feeling at the time?
- What are you thinking/feeling now?
- Who has been affected? In what way?
- What has been the hardest thing for you?
- What do you need [to do] to go forward?

These questions ask the students involved to think about events in the past, present and future. First, they help students who are experiencing the harm. They also aid students in discovering how to potentially repair harm so that it may not be repeated. It is valuable for students to acknowledge and understand that harm was caused, rather than simply serving a consequence or undergoing a punishment that is not directly connected to the action or circumstance. The restorative aspect in small situations of harm is allowing students to be a part of deciding what happens rather than having a decision made for them. When referencing the RF-RJE questions, students are held accountable, are able to reflect on and acknowledge their actions, and can see how their actions have affected others. You are building empathy within your class, and teaching them the skills they need to independently improve their behavior.

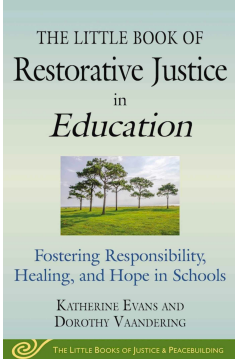
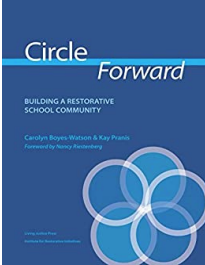

Conclusion

In an ever changing profession, my goal for this project was to create a resource that teachers like you, would find helpful for beginning well. There are many stresses that come with entering into a new teaching position at a new school. New teachers like you have responsibilities in your new roles and RJE can help. We have a responsibility as educators to care for and value each one of our students. This guide can help you start thinking how to do this using RJE. I have included some ideas and resources on how to begin building relationships with those around you and what restorative justice practices can look and feel like within a new classroom and school. As you use this resource, I hope you find it helpful and are excited to use it to begin to implement RJE practices in your own classroom. This guide intends to highlight the value and importance of looking through a relational lens, and aims to support teachers like you in doing so as you begin your work in a new school. Through creating such a guide, I hope that you will see that thinking restoratively begins before you enter the school, and is highlighted through relationships along the way. Consider this: RJE is not something extra that is added to your plate. At the end of the day, RJE is the plate on which everything else exists.



Further resources

As you conclude this informational guide on how to start your new teaching position in a restorative manner, please consider reading the following resources to further your RJE journey. Without these specific resources listed, this guide would not be possible.

<p>Evans, K., & Vaandering, D. (2016). <i>The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education: Fostering responsibility, Healing, and Hope in Schools</i>. Skyhorse Publishing, Inc.</p>	
<p>Boyes-Watson, C. & Kay Pranis (2015). <i>Circle Forward: Building a Restorative School Community</i>. Living Justice Press.</p>	
<p>Relationships First NL</p> <p>Relationships First. (2012). https://www.relationshipsfirstnl.com</p> <p>Relationships First. (2022). https://www.rfnl.org</p>	

Vaandering, D. & Voelker, D. (2018).
Relationships First Implementation Guide: A
Holistic, Whole-School, Responsive Approach.
https://www.relationshipsfirstnl.com/_files/ugd/556f9d_1d363a4b1d3846e096e2517f683261b2.pdf

