Restorative Practice

The 7 Questions That Improve Behavior Without Punishments

Some schools have managed to completely transform their culture through Restorative Practice. ‘Restorative Justice’ is an alternative to ‘Punitive Justice’ and focuses on addressing the root cause of the behavior, what damage the behavior has done and how to repair the damage. When done successfully it’s used to develop mutual respect, empathy, consideration, emotional intelligence, intrinsic motivation, taking responsibility and pretty much everything else we are trying to achieve when addressing behavior!.

Restorative Practice principles can be incorporated into all aspects of school life but in this tip we are focusing on responding to unwanted behavior or conflict in a way that avoids criticism, blame and punishments. It involves asking a pupil or a group of pupils questions that promote reflective thinking and giving the others the opportunity to listen and empathise. The goal is for the pupils to come to realisations themselves about why they behaved in the way they did and the consequences of it. It uses the power of communication to build understanding and empathy between the different people involved, so respect and consideration drives positive behavior, rather than just following school rules because they have to.

Rewards such as class points, praise, star of the day and merit certificates provide valuable recognition, fun and a strong sense of achievement which children thrive on, but there is a fine line between giving pupils much needed recognition and relying on rewards to coerce work or good behavior out of children against their will. We want children to primarily acknowledge that making positive choices is rewarding in and of itself and then use external rewards and praise to further reinforce that message. Similarly with punishments, they can discourage destructive behavior, but if a child is only being respectful to avoid a punishment, children are motivated by self preservation rather than consideration, respect and care for others. So how do we develop self-motivated pupils, who want to make positive decisions out of their own autonomy? Restorative Practice is a great place to start.

As adults we generally make decisions based on past experiences and the consequences of our actions.  For example we have learnt that the consequence of being disrespectful is that it damages relationships. We don’t like the consequences of damaging relationships, so treating people with respect becomes one of our core values. Contrary to what many disciplinarians might think, we haven’t learnt this through discipline, we have learnt it through making mistakes, damaging relationships, not liking the results, and doing something different the next time. This is the process that Restorative Practice nurtures.

Restorative Conference

A Restorative Conference takes place after the incident, once everyone involved has calmed down. The teacher’s role is similar to a counsellor. Their job is empathetic listening. Empathy isn’t the same as sympathy. Empathy is understanding someone else’s experience regardless of whether you agree or not. Often empathy is enough for a conflict to de-escalate because in many conflicts, people’s most significant unmet need is to be heard and understood. If two or more people are reflecting, each person will have a different experience of events and it is likely that they won’t agree. The listener’s initial job is to listen to everyone’s experience and check understanding

**The 7 Questions to behavior reflection**

1) What happened?

This is an opportunity to model the empathy and respect we want the pupil to develop. At this stage the objective is for the pupil to feel understood and heard.

* Listen (use facial gestures and body language, and small words eg. ‘yes’, ‘okay’, ‘I see’,‘um’… to demonstrate active listening)
* Ask questions if necessary
* Check if you understand properly (do you mean…?)
* If they use this as an opportunity to justify themselves, let them. The objective at this stage is for the pupil to feel heard and understood, not corrected.
* If what the pupil is saying isn’t an accurate reflection of the truth ask inquisitive questions and check understanding: ‘are you saying that this happened?’

2) How were you feeling? What did you need?

Simply identifying and understanding the underlying feelings and needs that cause behavior can often be enough to resolve it. A Feelings and needs card can be really helpful for this. –

* Suggest feelings and needs if necessary
* Respond with empathetic body language and facial expressions.

3) What happened after your behavior?

The objective at this stage is to identify the natural consequence of the behavior. This stage is fundamental for children to start to assess whether this behavior is working for them but it is often lost once punishments and getting told off take place because they are distracted by a fight or flight response or resentment.

* Listen
* Ask questions
* Check understanding

4) Who else was involved? What do you think were their feelings and needs?

The objective at this stage is to help the pupil develop empathy and emotional intelligence towards others. How you modelled empathy when listening to the pupil in stage one will directly impact how well the pupil will be able to empathise with others now.

* Listen
* Use the needs and feelings card
* Ask questions
* Make suggestions if necessary

5) Who else was effected by this behavior who was not directly involved in the incident?

What do you think their feelings and needs are? This question is about understanding how the behavior affects people not directly involved with the incident, for example the rest of the class, the teaching staff, the rest of the school, the head teacher and parents. Often the pupil won’t have considered how their behavior has impacted people outside of the incident.

6) What have you learnt and what will you do differently next time?

This is an opportunity to work with the pupil to find strategies moving forwards for them to meet their needs in a way that will also be respectful of other people needs. If there doesn’t seem to be an easy solution, for example they are bored in maths and they have rejected all ideas about how they could make it more fun for themselves, revert back to empathy and sympathise with the challenge. The goal with Restorative Practice is to get everyone one step closer to meeting their needs whilst improving communication, understanding and empathy for one another

* Listen
* Ask questions
* Check understanding
* Summarise

7) How can you repair the damage?

This step is often missed with ‘Punitive Justice’ where a pupil might have to do a detention but won’t necessarily repair the damage. Giving the responsibility to the pupil to correct their behavior is arguable far more effective than a punishment for many reasons. The process of apologising to the class, replacing broken equipment, sanding down a defaced desk etc. deters them from doing it again without the need for a punishment, it gives everyone involved a sense of resolution and anyone who was negatively impacted is left feeling touched rather than resentment.

Make Restorative Practice simpler and click here to download our ‘Restorative Practice Pack  Featuring worksheets, a learning wheel, and needs and feelings cards, the pack is the ideal resource to support your classroom behavior management.Some schools have managed to completely transform their culture through Restorative Practice.