

Restorative Practices in Schools

TRIANGLE

Restorative Conversations and dialogue, Circles, Conferences and Peer Conferencing are the most common restorative practices in US schools.

Continuum

Circles

Circles are a process grounded in the shared values of those in the circle that creates understanding, builds and repairs relationships and assists with solving conflicts and disputes. They create a safe place for problem solving and conflict resolution in communities and schools as well as in workplaces. Rather than being led by a facilitator, a Circle has one or more “keepers” whose role is primarily to hold the container of the circle in a safe way so that all can be heard and can listen. Circles may include those who have been harmed, those who have harmed others, their support people and community representatives (such as teachers or police officers). By using a talking piece, participants are able to be fully heard as they speak, and can be freed to fully listen as the talking piece travels around the circle. The person holding the talking piece has the undivided attention of everyone else in the circle and can speak without interruption. The use of the talking piece allows for full expression of emotions, deeper listening, thoughtful reflection, and an unrushed pace and is important in creating a safe space and an invitation for people who find it difficult to speak in a group. In schools, Peacemaking Circles can be used for creating culture change and reducing violence and bullying in schools, as well as following inappropriate student behavior. ([less](#))

Restorative Group Conferences in Schools

Also called Family Group Conferences, Accountability Conferences

Restorative Conferences involve the community of people most affected by the offense—the harmed, the harmer, and the family, friends, and key supporters of both—in deciding the resolution of a criminal incident. These affected parties are brought together by a trained facilitator to discuss how they and others have been harmed and how that harm might be repaired. Participation by all involved is voluntary. To participate, the offender must first admit to the offense. The facilitator contacts the offender first. If the conference is possible, then the facilitator contacts the harmed person to explain the process and invites them to the conference.

The facilitator also asks them to identify key members of their support systems, who will be invited to participate as well.

Conferencing was developed from the Maori tradition in New Zealand, where it is currently used for almost all juvenile offenses. In the United States, it is practiced by police departments, communities, and schools. In communities it can be used as a diversion from the court system or after adjudication. In schools, it can be used as an alternative to suspension and expulsion. While it is appropriate for both adults and youth, it is primarily used with youth as a diversion in Illinois. ([less](#))

Peer Conferencing:

Peer Conferences (also known as Peer Juries in the community) typically incorporate a combination of both Conferencing and Circle practices. **Peer Conferencing in schools** are similar to those in communities, in that referred youth attend the Peer Conference after committing an offense (typically referred by an administrator) to avoid suspension or other disciplinary sanctions by completing a contract to repair the harm caused.