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Learning and School Safety**
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The Toolkit
Before the Toolkit

Centering Adaptive and Relational
Elements of Restorative Practices for
Implementation Success

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CONTENTS

OVERVIEW

Restorative practices — a continuum of informal and formal tools, practices, and processes that build, maintain, and repair relationships — hold significant promise for school transformation.[1] However, because of the widespread popularity of their restorative justice component, many educators mistakenly assume that restorative practices are merely responsive, focused on repairing harm to relationships as an alternative to traditional disciplinary approaches that focus on punitive responses to rule infractions. On the contrary, restorative practices are characterized by proactive relationships, connection, and community transformation. As the International Institute for Restorative Practices says, these practices focus on "how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision making."[2]

As such, effective implementation of restorative practices rests not merely on getting their technical aspects right,[3] but far more on the often overlooked adaptive and relational elements that are necessary to achieve authentic, meaningful, and sustainable implementation. By highlighting the mindsets, values, social capital, and structural supports that bind and hold together restorative practices, this guide provides educators, school leaders, and district administrators with the strategies, tools, and structural supports they need to successfully implement restorative practices and transform their schools into strong communities with meaningful relationships, a sense of authentic belonging, and equitable whole-person outcomes.

When implemented correctly, restorative practices are not more to do but a different way to *be*.[4]

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1   Katic, B., Alba, L. A., & Johnson, A. H. (2020). A systematic evaluation of restorative justice practices: School violence prevention and response. *Journal of School Violence, 19*(4), 579–593. https://doi.org/10.1080/15388220.2020.1783670

2   International Institute for Restorative Practices. (2018). "What is restorative practices?" https://www.iirp.edu/restorative-practices/what-is-restorative-practices

3   See Part 4 of this guide for a short list of existing toolkits and guides that center the technical elements of restorative practices.

4   Adapted from the International Institute for Restorative Practices.

INTRODUCTION

Although educators may collectively agree on the necessity of strong school climates as a condition of healthy schools, they may not be aligned in what it takes to achieve them. Imagine two high schools in the same town that have been implementing restorative practices for the same amount of time. In School A, restorative practices are used mostly for discipline, students are skeptical of participating in community-building circles, educators are resentful of having one more thing to do, and administrators are unconvinced that restorative practices even work. In School B, restorative practices are embedded in the school culture; students and their families are well informed about restorative practices and feel a deep sense of belonging and connection within the school community; educators have ample time to teach creatively and thoughtfully; and administrators use data to effectively close disproportionality gaps in discipline, graduation rates, and academic success.[5]

Why does School B's implementation of restorative practices look so different from School A's? Most likely, School A's leaders have focused only on attending to the technical elements of restorative practices. In the education system, **technical** elements are the practices, programs, and interventions implemented to solve problems or apply new initiatives. In restorative practices, these might range from informal practices — such as affective statements, which communicate people's feelings or questions about how behavior has affected others — to formal practices such as groups, circles, and community conferences convened to prevent or repair harm.[6] Although many school and district leaders come to restorative practices through the buzzword of "restorative justice," which they see as a quick fix for exclusionary discipline, they may lack a true understanding of what restorative justice is (and isn't), how it's implemented, how it's measured, and even why schools might use it.

Restorative practices belong to and have existed as values, processes, and ways of being among various global indigenous communities for centuries. Rather than applying a perfunctory version of restorative practices, School B's leaders have likely learned more deeply about this history and made sure to attend to the adaptive and relational elements of restorative practices to inform and reinforce the technical elements, as well as the structural supports needed for restorative practices to take root.

5   Darling-Hammond, S., Trout, L., Fronius, T., & Cerna, R. (2021). *Can restorative practices bridge racial disparities in schools? Evidence from the California Healthy Kids Survey*. WestEd. https://www.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Restorative-Practices-Bridging-Racial-Disparity-Research-Brief-3.pdf

6   Wachtel, T. (2012). "Defining restorative." International Institute for Restorative Practices. https://www.iirp.edu/restorative-practices/defining-restorative/

Adaptive elements refer to mindsets, paradigms, values, and belief systems, which lay the groundwork for any technical elements. Harvard University professor Ronald Heifetz explains it as follows:

> While technical problems may be very complex and critically important (like replacing a faulty heart valve during cardiac surgery), they have known solutions that can be implemented by current know-how. They can be resolved through the application of authoritative expertise and through the organization's current structures, procedures, and ways of doing things. Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people's priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties.[7]

When district and school leaders use packaged programs to change schools, and roll them out rapidly, they risk overlooking the hard work involved in reimagining what safe and equitable schools and systems of education can be. When these leaders and educators skip over the slow and difficult shifts in mindset and value in order to dive more quickly into technical elements such as trainings and toolkits, their efforts often fall short of the outcomes they seek. For example, some schools may use community conferencing, a formal restorative process that responds to misbehavior through repairing harm and restoring relationships, with the same beliefs of punitive discipline and values of punishment that result in push-out and student exclusion. Others may practice "community-building circles," which are intended to proactively build community and relationships, and exhibit the technical skill of circle-keeping but devalue the tenets behind the process. As a real-world example, a student once shared the following with the author:

> The circles are fine, but I hate being in them because they're fake! In circles, my teacher tells me I have a voice and treats me with respect, but the second the circle is over she yells at me and treats me like I don't matter, like I am a problem for her. How can I sit in a circle about community building with her when I know she doesn't actually mean it?

Many districts and schools lose out on the full impact of their technical work with restorative practices because the adaptive components — values, mindsets, and beliefs — that imbue those practices have not shifted. What's more, without the adaptive shifts in place, implementing the technical pieces becomes exhausting, ultimately leading educators to resent and dismiss restorative practices as "one more thing that doesn't work."

Meanwhile, the **relational** elements of restorative practices are intentional actions that build relationships and foster agency, community, and social capital. Social capital is a resource that allows a school, community, or society to function together as a whole, and relational work is what we do to build that social capital. By focusing on relational elements such as building trust, listening

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7   Heifetz, R., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). The theory behind the practice: A brief introduction to the adaptive leadership framework. In *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Harvard Business Press.

deeply, being vulnerable, and unlearning bias, educators and leaders may help their teachers, students, and others in the school community accumulate the social capital needed to create space for transformation. In fact, relational work is the very paradigm on which restorative practices rest. Restorative practices and restorative justice stem from values and belief systems of various indigenous communities around the world that believe relationships are the crux of healthy societies and seek to rebuild and restore those relationships when necessary.[8]

Finally, **structural** supports include critical infrastructure and resources such as funding, people, time, discipline and other policies, and equity. Too often, schools attempt to implement restorative practices without reallocating time, redefining discipline policies, redesigning tools of measurement, and, perhaps most important, reimagining education altogether. Putting the right structural supports and infrastructure in place can ease implementation of the technical elements of restorative practices and ensure that individual adaptive work and interpersonal relational work will add up to create meaningful, sustained systemic change.

Restorative Practices Implementation

Adaptive Elements
Mindsets, paradigms, values, and belief systems

Relational Elements
Actions that build relationships and foster agency, community, and social capital

Structural Supports
Critical infrastructure and resources such as funding, people, time, discipline and other policies, and equity

Technical Elements
Practices, programs, and interventions
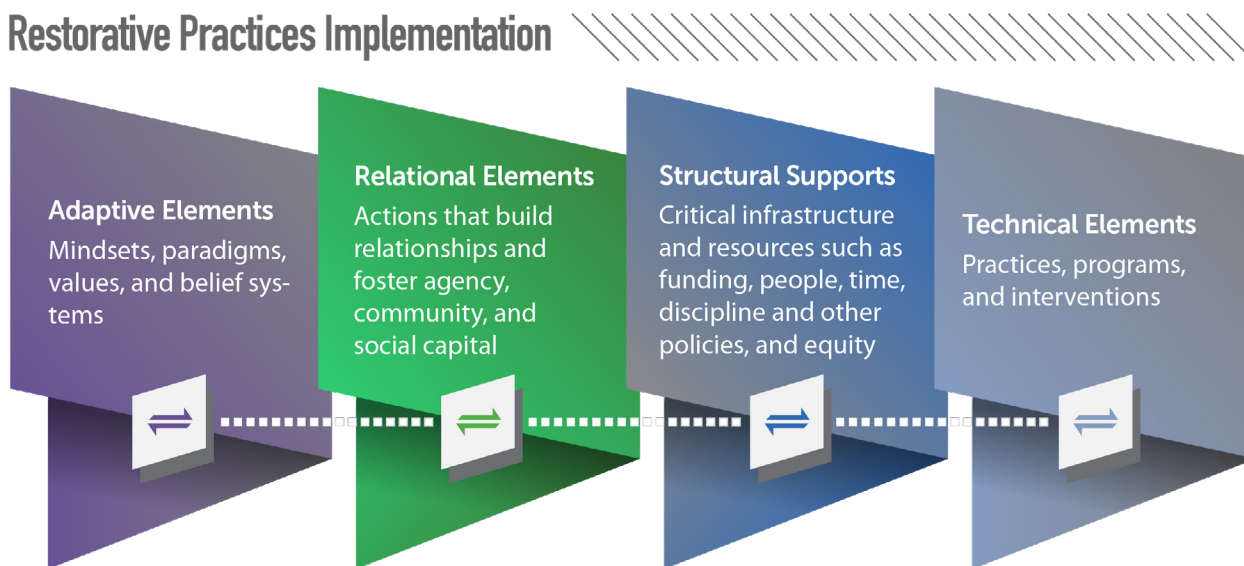
In this guide:

- **Part 1** introduces **adaptive** elements of restorative practices, including the concept of paradigms and why we as individuals are products of our systems. This information includes tools, questions, and activities to help you shift your mindset and values in support of restorative practices.

- **Part 2** explains the **relational** components of restorative practices through an exploration of one of its most well-known and foundational aspects, restorative justice. Here, you will learn about the necessity of relationships for engagement, collaboration, and sustainable implementation, and you will practice skills and strategies for strengthening relationships and social capital.

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8   Zehr, H. (2005). *Changing lenses: A new focus for crime and justice*. Herald Press.

- **Part 3** explores the **structural** and **systemic** elements that enable and support successful implementation of restorative practices, including funding, people, time, discipline and other policies, and equity.

- **Part 4** identifies **technical** elements of restorative practices in the form of existing guides and toolkits. Using this toolkit as a touchstone to deepen your understanding of adaptive and relational elements of restorative practices will ground you in your implementation of the technical elements seen in the listed guides.

By considering these elements of restorative practices deeply and holistically, educators and leaders stand a greater chance of implementing restorative practices in a way that is consistent, coherent, with quality and fidelity to the model, and aligned with other efforts to serve the whole person.

PART 1: ADAPTIVE ELEMENTS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: HOW RESTORATIVE MINDSETS, VALUES, AND PARADIGMS INFORM SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION

Restorative Practices Implementation

Adaptive Elements
Mindsets, paradigms, values, and belief systems

Relational Elements
Actions that build relationships and foster agency, community, and social capital

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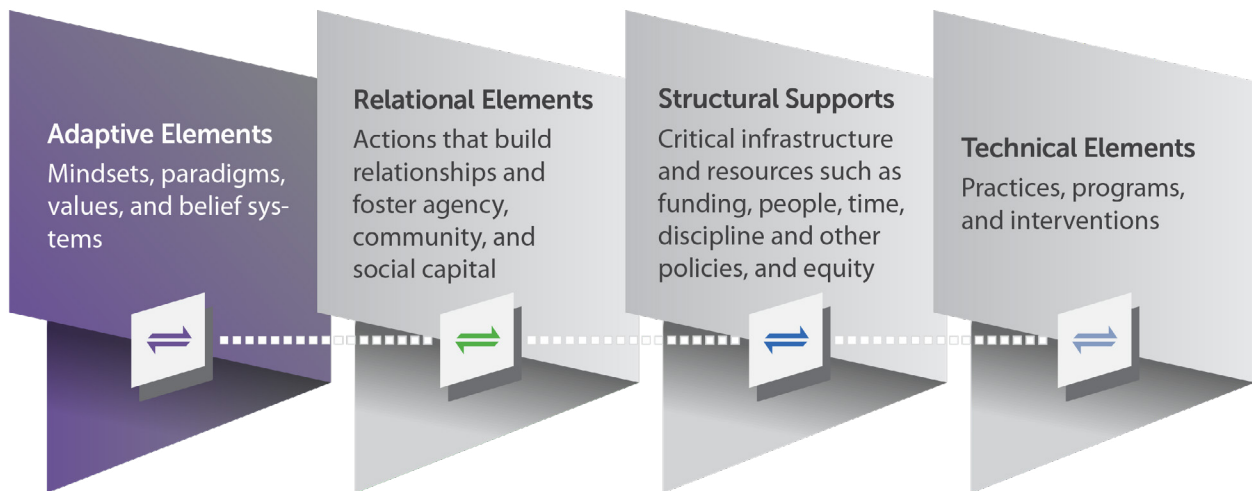
This part of the guide identifies the adaptive elements of restorative practices, ultimately showing that restorative practices are not a *program* to place within existing structures but rather a *paradigm* within which educators and leaders can (and should) shift the structures themselves.

Paradigms, the Education System, and Restorative Practices

Most educators have likely witnessed or experienced the unveiling of a new "best practice" that theoretically will fix problems, address needs, and transform schools. At best, it ends up having little

to no impact; at worst, it creates more problems and needs. This phenomenon is due in large part to those initiatives being out of alignment with values and beliefs of the larger education system.[9]

Brazilian educator and critical pedagogist Paulo Freire argued that societal systems are no more neutral or objective than the humans who created them; such structures and systems are governed by paradigms or frameworks that ultimately determine the systems' outcomes. Freire's philosophy asserts that inequitable outcomes arise not because our systems are "broken"; rather, our systems, created by humans, function as designed according to particular belief systems, values, and assumptions that determine those systems' practices — and their outcomes.[10]

What is the paradigm of the education system? As educators, students, staff, and families, we can understand and describe the paradigm of our education system by simply observing the daily outcomes or results of our schools. In the following activity, think about your day-to-day experiences inside a school building and jot down your thoughts. There are no wrong answers.

Activity: Zoom Out

Zooming out to understand the paradigm of the education system is like getting a bird's-eye view of a maze: it helps us understand where we are, how to navigate, and how to take steps to create different outcomes.

Think about the sights, sounds, and experiences in a typical day at a typical school.

- What are the top priorities? What is most valued? How is success defined?
- What are common sights you see and sounds you hear?
- In an eight-hour school day, where does time get spent? How does time feel; does it feel scarce, as if there is never enough of it? Or does time feel abundant?
- When misbehavior occurs, how do staff typically respond?
- What is the role of an educator, and what is the role of a student?
- When your school or district runs out of time or resources, what aspects of schooling are the first to be shortened or eliminated?
- If it has been hard to implement restorative practices in your school or district, what were the parts that felt hardest? What were the biggest barriers?

In your responses, you may have made some connections among academic success, a lack of time, and pressure to perform. By looking at some of these commonplace outcomes, we can begin to piece together the design of the education system and the paradigm that informs it. If "every system

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9   Betts, F. (1992). How systems thinking applies to education. *Educational Leadership*, *50*(3), 38–41.

10 Giroux, H. A. (2010). Rethinking education as the practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy. *Policy Futures in Education, 8*(6), 715–721. http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2010.8.6.715

is perfectly designed to get the outcomes it gets,"[11] our society's education system was built on, and often still is driven by, the paradigm that academic learning and success are the priority.[12]

Moreover, in the traditional paradigm, anything that gets in the way of academic learning and success can be seen as disposable or a distraction — whether that is student misbehavior, activities deemed "not academic," such as art and music, or even relationship and community building.

If a school is operating from the paradigm that relationship- and community-building practices *detract* from learning, then the very way restorative practices *center* relationships and community will likely pose an inherent struggle. Restorative practices — and other whole-person initiatives, such as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) — in their values, practices, and mindsets, operate out of alignment and often antithetically with the traditional paradigm of our education system. This is the crux of the tension we feel when trying to implement something new — why it feels hard, as if there is not enough time for it and it will soon be replaced by the next initiative.

However, if we understand restorative practices not just as technical *programs* to implement within the existing paradigm but rather as an adaptive *paradigm*, then we can make greater progress. Think of restorative practices being added into the education system as in a glass of water. If restorative practices are just a *program,* they will be like oil, never fully absorbed, just dispersed throughout, because of their opposing scientific properties. But if restorative practices are a *paradigm,* they will be like food coloring, diffusing through the whole glass and changing its very composition.

Moving Toward a Restorative Paradigm

When we implement restorative practices as a program, they never fully actualize because we have not placed value on the outcomes restorative practices work to produce. When we shift toward the paradigm of restorative practices and reimagine schooling with relationships and community at the center, then the technical elements of restorative practices do not become one more thing to *do* but a different way to *be*. Restorative practices are a continuum of tools and practices that focus on proactive relationship building[13] and indeed center relationships and community as the *conditions* for learning without which meaningful learning cannot exist. This means:

- Community-building circles do not take away from instructional time; they inform instruction and set the foundations for academic success.
- Affective statements about a student or adult's feelings are tools that promote safety and connection, not tools that challenge authority.
- Community conferences do not become one more tool to add to the discipline toolbox; they become the toolbox.

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11 Attribution disputed. W. Edwards Deming Institute. https://deming.org/quotes/10141/

12 Llewellyn, K. R., & Parker, C. (2018). Asking the "who": A restorative purpose for education based on relational pedagogy and conflict dialogue. *International Journal of Restorative Justice, 1*(*3*), 399–412.

13 Hulvershorn, K., & Mulholland, S. (2018). Restorative practices and the integration of social emotional learning as a path to positive school climates. *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning, 11*(*1*), 110–123. https://doi.org/10.1108/JRIT-08-2017-0015

Activity: What Could Be Different?

If schools operated from the paradigm that authentic relationships and strong communities are preconditions for learning, and all of our values, beliefs, practices, and outcomes come from that paradigm:

- What would be different?
- What sounds might you hear? What things might you see? How might it feel?
- How would we respond to behaviors and make decisions? How would we spend time?
- What would teaching look and feel like? How might students feel and act?

In the activity on the previous page, reflect on the following question: If schools operated from a restorative paradigm, what would be different?

The following table highlights a few elements of the education system and day-to-day schooling. Notice how those elements look, feel, operate, and achieve the outcomes they do as you compare them in traditional and restorative environments.

Elements of education: Traditional versus restorative mindsets, values, and beliefs

	Traditional Education	Restorative Practices
Paradigm	Academic learning and success are the priority; relationship-building practices detract from academic learning	Learning cannot exist without meaningful relationships and strong communities; strong relationships are the conditions for learning and academic success
Safety	Fear-based, reactive: safety comes when those who cause harm are pushed out	Proactive: everyone has a voice and a connection to someone, and all identities are honored; communities are safe when those who cause harm are held accountable and reintegrated, and the community is made whole again

	Traditional Education	Restorative Practices
Time	Instructional time is the top priority; anything that takes time away from academic learning (conflict, misbehavior) is a problem	Relationship building proactively manages misbehavior and conflict and creates strongly favorable conditions for academics; responding to behavior and engaging in conflict are not distractions from learning but opportunities for learning
Power	Power over: power is held over students	Power among: power is shared among teacher and students
Teaching	Sage on the stage: the teacher takes up the most space in the room	Guide on the side: the teacher facilitates spaces for collaborative learning; students are "mutual experts" in their education
Discipline	Punishment	Repair, restoration, accountability, and reconnection with the larger community
Misbehavior	Infractions of school rules	Harm to relationships

Schools that operate within a restorative paradigm put people, relationships, voice, and agency at the center. Without the mindsets, values, and belief systems that prioritize strong relationships as a necessary condition of learning, the technical elements will never take root.

Shifting the Paradigms: The Essential Role We as Individuals Play in Shifting Our Systems

Because individuals have created the paradigms and systems that enable but also limit us, individuals also play a critical role in paradigm and system change.[14] We are taught to exist, think, and function within the same framework and values that our societal systems operate in. This means (pointing back to the traditional education system) that we may, often subconsciously and implicitly and with the best of intentions, not be operating from and educating in a way that centers people, authentic connection, and best practice. When individuals internalize restorative principles and paradigms, the system shifts. By centering our personal adaptive work as necessary and foundational to any change, we set the stage for our practices, habits, and interpersonal interactions to inevitably shift. With time and enough

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14 Osta, K., & Vasquez, H. (n.d.). *Implicit bias and structural inequity.* National Equity Project. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e32157bff63c7446f3f1529/t/5f173bc8da7d1115210824c0/1595358153358/National-Equity-Project-Implicit-Bias.pdf

individuals with mindset and value shifts operating collectively, we gradually and inevitably shift the system. This is the idea behind Margaret Mead's famous quote "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Activity: What Is Your Paradigm?

One way to move toward individual change is through reflective questions that allow leaders and educators to bring to the surface the paradigms and mindsets in which they currently work:

- "For me, the purpose of education is . . ."
- In what ways does your personal philosophy of education align with the paradigm and practices of our education system, and where does it differ?
- What are the ways that you, often without even knowing it, operate from a traditional education paradigm? How does this show up?
- How is a traditional paradigm of education working for you, your students, and your community? What are the outcomes?

Learn More, Do More: Restorative Theory Resources and Tools to Ground Adaptive Work

Shifting mindsets and values is often a lifelong, nonlinear and nonformulaic journey of deep self-reflection, unlearning, and exploration. Leaders and educators should build intentional understanding not only of restorative practices but also of the interconnected web of indigenous communities, peacemakers, and ancestors who preceded us in this work and who continue it today.[15] The following resources and tools can help educators and leaders start their journey toward values, principles, and beliefs informed by restorative theory.

- Learn about the indigenous history of restorative justice and its current emergence as a social movement for change.
- Review the guiding principles and tenets of restorative practices.
- Educate yourself about the school-to-prison pipeline, systemic inequity, and tools for developing racial equity mindsets.[16]
- Flex your "mindset muscles" using the National Equity Project's "Liberatory Design Mindsets".
- Watch Restorative Justice: Why Do We Need It?
- Learn the history of the U.S. education system and different pedagogies and philosophies of education.
- WestEd has developed several adaptive tools that are included at the end of this guide:
  - Appendix 1: Reflecting and Acting Upon Adaptive Elements of Restorative Practices

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15 Baliga, S. (2019). *A diversion toolkit for communities.* Impact Justice.
https://rjdtoolkit.impactjustice.org/establish-a-foundation/restorative-justice/

16 Buckner, L. (2021). *Cultivating and applying race equity mindsets among K–12 education leaders: Key questions for reflection.* WestEd.

Part 1 introduced the paradigms of the education system and restorative practices, as well as the adaptive elements required as precursors to enable and sustain the technical elements of restorative practices. Part 2 highlights the role of relational work in forming a successful foundation for the implementation of restorative practices. Using the guiding principles of restorative justice and strategies for building authentic buy-in, Part 2 shows how relational work helps set the stage for meaningful and sustained success with restorative practices.

PART 2: RELATIONAL ELEMENTS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: "MOVING AT THE SPEED OF TRUST" AS A FOUNDATION FOR RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IMPLEMENTATION

Restorative Practices Implementation

Adaptive Elements
Mindsets, paradigms, values, and belief systems

Relational Elements
Actions that build relationships and foster agency, community, and social capital

Structural Supports
Critical infrastructure and resources such as funding, people, time, discipline and other policies, and equity

Technical Elements
Practices, programs, and interventions
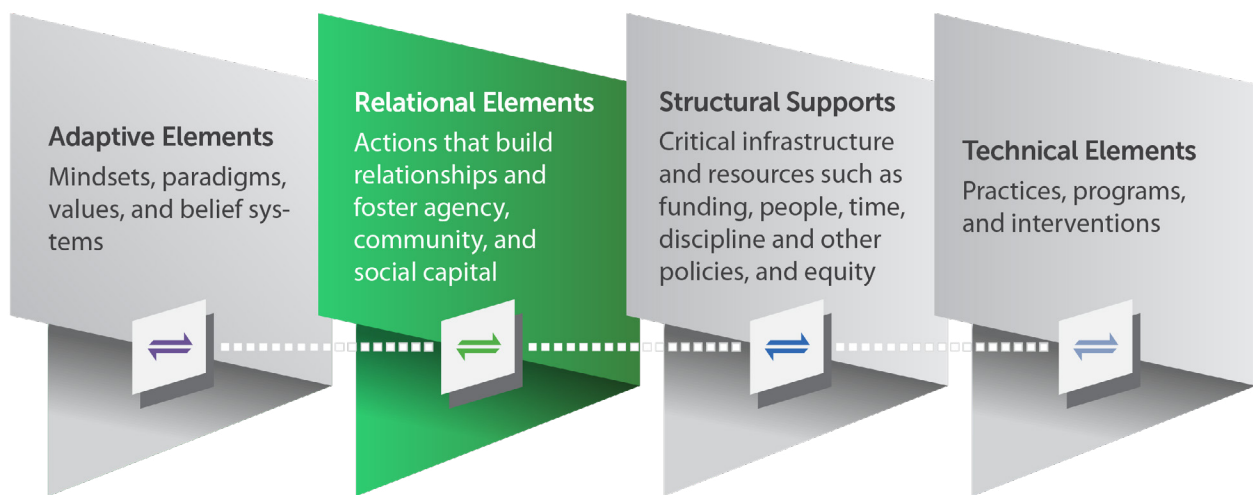
A district leader and an elementary school principal were meeting to discuss restorative practices when a call for help came through from a teacher. It seemed a 2nd grader was flipping desks and throwing chairs in his classroom. "Let's see how this restorative stuff works," said the district leader to the principal.

The district leader entered the room and saw a young boy screaming and throwing things while the teacher shielded the rest of the students on the other side of the room. The district leader attempted to approach the student and use restorative questions, nonjudgmentally inquiring what happened, discussing impact, and creating a plan to repair the harm and prevent future harm. The questions only seemed to escalate the student's distress.

Just before the principal called in the school's disciplinarian to remove the student from the classroom, the student's teacher from the previous year heard the commotion and walked in. This teacher and the student had formed a strong, trusting relationship. Calmly, the teacher approached the student and led him through controlled breathing exercises until he was regulated and able to answer the same restorative questions that the district leader had attempted to ask earlier. Walking through the questions and feeling regulated, heard, and understood, in less than five minutes the

student was able to apologize, rearrange chairs and desks, and reconnect with his current teacher and classmates.

Part 1 showed how implementing technical elements of restorative practices without embracing the adaptive mindsets and values that inform them can lead outcomes to fall short. Similarly, engaging in technical elements of restorative practices without relational elements in place can lead to lackluster results.[17] The foregoing story highlights the importance of relational work in successful implementation of restorative practices. Although the district leader was an expert in the technical elements of restorative practices, she was unable to use her tools to effectively work with the dysregulated student because she lacked a relationship with the student. However, the student's former teacher had a strong relationship and so was able to regulate the student and then use exactly the same tools to repair harm and ensure accountability. Using social capital to bolster the restorative questions, the educators were able to not only restore peace in the classroom but also keep the student out of suspension so he could continue learning and growing.

Relational Elements of Restorative Practices

One component of restorative practices, restorative justice holds many of the relational elements of restorative practices in its theory and tenets. Restorative justice as a theory of justice views crime, conflict, misbehavior, broken rules, and the like as harm to relationships, as opposed to infractions of societal laws. Restorative justice aims to center those harmed and create spaces for accountability from those who caused harm in a way that brings healing and prevents future harm from occurring.[18] Although restorative justice as a philosophy emerged in Western criminal justice systems in the late 1970s, its true origins belong to the practices, belief systems, and values of indigenous communities around the world. The following is a list of tenets and guiding principles of restorative justice:

- **Centering People and Relationships:** Restorative theory scholars argue that meaningful relationships are the most important element of our social fabric. Putting people and their inherent interconnectedness at the center of our work can inform the way our systems, values, and practices work. As educator and writer Margaret Wheatley said, "Whatever the problem, community is the answer. How we are together in our relationships is the solution."[19]

- **Trust:** A key relational element that informs restorative practices is trust. Restorative justice is anchored by an inherent trust in people, communities, and their capacity to resolve their own conflicts.[20] Practicing trust, as it relates to restorative justice, means being grounded in a deep belief that humans belong to one another, need one another in order to grow, and are not expendable (no matter how great the harm); that conflict and harm are natural and often inevitable parts of being interconnected; and that personal and collective transformation are always possible.

17 Vaandering, D. (2010). The significance of critical theory for restorative justice in education. *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, 32*(*2*), 145–176. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714411003799165

18 Zehr, H. (2002). *The little book of restorative justice.* Good Books.

19 Wheatley, M. (2012). *Whatever the problem, community is the answer* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fPvEKP1cUZA

20 Zehr, H. (2002). *The little book of restorative justice.* Good Books.

- **Voice and Agency:** Voice, in relationship to restorative justice, underpins fairness, empowerment, and ultimately healing. For humans, a truth of all ages is that voice is a condition that will make or break a community. Simply put, if people feel that they have voice, they are engaged — and if they don't feel they have voice, they are disengaged. Agency, like voice, is a condition of being able to self-determine. In restorative justice, agency allows people to make decisions that can bring healing or repair harm through accountability. Authentic voice and agency are essential relational elements of restorative practices that drive the what, why, and how of all restorative processes.
- **Equity:** Focusing on equity means unlearning bias and working to honor and uplift identities, experiences, and histories that are most impacted by systemic oppression.

Again, within a restorative practices paradigm, these relational elements are not add-ons to learning but rather are essential conditions for learning. When these relational elements exist, they form the basis for norms and values that create social capital, which in turn creates a community in which learning can happen and learners can thrive.

Learn More, Do More: Resources and Tools for Developing Authentic Buy-in from School Stakeholders

The previous section highlighted some relational elements of restorative practices. This section provides tips, tools, and strategies for engaging in and practicing relational elements in order to build relationships and develop social capital.

Show, Don't Tell: One of the best ways to get authentic buy-in from skeptical school stakeholders about restorative practices is to do rather than just say. In other words, let people learn about restorative practices by experiencing them firsthand.

Try These:

- Practice building relationships with the help of Zaretta Hammond's Trust Generators.
- Try out the Social Discipline Window, a guiding principle of restorative practices that matches high expectations with high levels of support.
- Use circle-keeping and facilitative strategies in staff meetings to develop collective voice, agency, connection, and collaboration. Design meetings that are facilitated by one or several to include the majority in the conversation, rather than meetings that are managed to include just one or a few voices.

Slow Down to Speed Up: Make time intentionally to practice relational elements and build relationships, even if it means restructuring the flow of the day. After all, building relationships and social capital does not happen organically; otherwise, we'd already have exceptional communities. We make time for what we value; when we value relationships as an essential component of learning, we build structures for those relationships to begin and flourish.

Try These:

- "Move at the speed of trust":[21] This is a phrase that originated in transformative justice communities. Transformative justice is a movement, a philosophy of justice, and a political framework that seeks to eradicate all forms of violence and responds to harm with strategies that do not cause more harm.[22] This phrase suggests that the best time lines and strategic plans for goals are formed by centering the needs of people and relationships in the room.

- Think about the instructional time lost in classrooms because of misbehavior or conflict. Reallocate that time in favor of intentional, proactive relationship building. Notice how classroom dynamics shift in favor of learning and how instructional time is gained rather than lost.

- Reflect: In your commitment to implementing sustainable and high-quality restorative practices, what space are you creating or holding for collective rest and self-care, joy, and visioning? Even the hard work of restorative practice requires reflection and restoration.

Find Your Allies and Engage with Your "Resistors": For initiatives to succeed, there must be top-down *and* bottom-up supporters in place. Start by identifying allies and "resistors," and consider where to put your energy between the two.

Try These:

- With allies: Intentionally ask for their support, and find ways to honor and utilize their experience and leadership. Trust their expertise, and connect them with other allies.

- With "resistors": Find more relational ways to get them to join the team. Engage with them about their hesitance or resistance with curiosity and empathy.

  - Develop spaces for consent and dissent: Having safe and nonpunitive spaces to openly share dissent helps foster critical thinking and trust and makes consent more authentic.

  - Personally reflect: Who are my resistors, and why might they be resistant to working with me or engaging in this initiative? How are my biases inadvertently keeping potential allies as resistors?

  - Reflect on a moment when you resisted change, personally or professionally. What were the feelings and context that led to you resisting? What things were helpful to your getting on board with the change (e.g., a clarifying conversation, having your concerns and needs listened to and taken into consideration)?

- Tools such as the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) can help with assessing concerns and providing individual support.

- Who is not at the table or in the room? What will it take to get their participation, input, and buy-in?

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21 Racial Justice Advocate's Mervyn Marcano's contribution to Stephen Covey's "speed of trust" concept.

22 Dixon, E., & Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. (Eds.) (2020). *Beyond survival: Strategies and stories from the transformative justice movement*. AK Press.

Do Your Mindset and Heart Work: Practicing relational work is ultimately about bias, vulnerability, control, and connection — all of which lie inside of us. Find spaces, alone or with others, to better understand your natural strengths in building relationships, your areas of opportunity, and the larger barriers that keep you from being in authentic relationship with people of all identities. Take the time to reflect and practice self-awareness in these areas.

Try This:

- Reflect: What are my strengths in building interpersonal relationships? What parts of my journey of unlearning and healing are preventing me from being in authentic relationship (e.g., need for control, fear of vulnerability, avoidance of a group of people for fear of "doing it wrong")?

Consider Assets Rather than Deficits: In the restorative practices paradigm, people and communities are the single greatest asset to learning. It is important to consider staff, students, families, and community members as allies, assets, and resources for your school — rather than as problems and barriers.

Try These:

- Learn more about asset framing as a tool for strength-based equity work.
- Reflect on what mindset you carry when you look at and work with school stakeholders.
  - When you reference your students and their families, how do you talk about them? Do you view them as vital team members working toward the same goal as you are, or as flawed barriers to your goal?
  - If people are the most important resource and asset to learning and strong communities, what can you do to elevate school stakeholders' voice, capacity, and agency?

By identifying and prioritizing relational elements of restorative practices, we can build a strong foundation for successful and sustainable restorative practices that don't just reduce discipline disparities but also create a culture of care, respect, joy, and connection. In the third part of this guide, we explore the structural supports that create and sustain the conditions for the adaptive, relational, and technical elements of restorative practices, including rethinking and reallocating resources and establishing infrastructure.

PART 3: STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IMPLEMENTATION: BUILDING THE DREAM

Restorative Practices Implementation

Adaptive Elements
Mindsets, paradigms, values, and belief systems

Relational Elements
Actions that build relationships and foster agency, community, and social capital

Structural Supports
Critical infrastructure and resources such as funding, people, time, discipline and other policies, and equity

Technical Elements
Practices, programs, and interventions
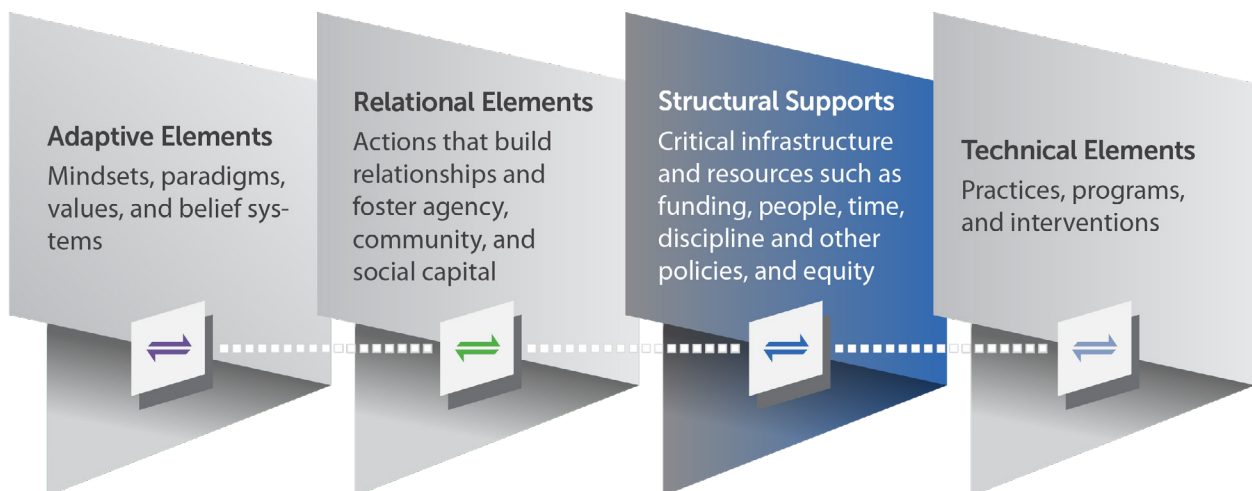
The first two parts of this guide highlighted the adaptive and relational elements of restorative practices, including the mindsets, values, relationships, and social capital needed for technical elements to function and to achieve desired results. Structural supports also play a critical role in creating the conditions for restorative practices to exist, sustain, and thrive. Just as governments, roads, waterways, electric grids, and banking underpin a functioning society, so too must education systems have infrastructure to thrive. These include physical facilities such as offices and school buildings, time, policies, and, of course, people.

The way these structures are designed has an impact on whether they help or hinder restorative practices.[23] Often, it is important to rethink, rebuild, and reimagine these education structures in order to enable restorative practices to take root and flourish. As transformative justice practitioner Mariame Kaba notes, "Changing everything might sound daunting, but it also means there are many places to start, infinite opportunities to collaborate, and endless imaginative interventions and experiments to create."[24]

Activity: Reimagine Schools and Structural Supports

In thinking about changing our systems, it is critical to consider what the education system could look, feel, and sound like. As humans, we are not inclined to lay down bricks for what we cannot clearly see we are building. Reimagining systems requires unlearning what we already know and developing a clear vision of what we want.

In a small group, brainstorm answers to the following questions. Think about what structural supports or infrastructure might be needed to achieve your vision.

- If schools were to be equitable, what would they look like? What would they feel and sound like?

- If schools were to be spaces of whole-person learning, what would be taught? How would learning take place? How would success and failure be defined, and how would we respond to failure?

- If schools were strong and safe communities, what would they look, feel, and sound like? How would students and families feel, and what roles would they play? How would educators feel and operate?

Learn More, Do More: Elements of Infrastructure and Strategies to Support Restorative Practices Implementation

How many times have we experienced or witnessed an incredible training and left determined and inspired, only to immediately let the lessons, ideas, and inspirations go because of lack of the time, support, resources, or accountability needed to maintain them? Putting the right structural supports and infrastructure in place can ease implementation of the technical elements of restorative practices and ensure that individual adaptive work and interpersonal relational work add up to create meaningful, sustained systemic change.

The following are a few of the most critical structural supports that must be attended to in order to imagine, implement, and sustain restorative practices.

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23 Anne Gregory, Allison Rae Ward-Seidel & Kayla V. Carter (2021) Twelve Indicators of Restorative Practices Implementation: A Framework for Educational Leaders, Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation, 31:2, 147-179, DOI: 10.1080/10474412.2020.1824788

24 Kaba, M. (2021). *We do this 'til we free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.

Rethinking Success: Success with restorative practices includes more than having fewer disciplinary referrals and reduced disciplinary incidents — and even these results will take several years or more to achieve.

Try These:

- Reflect: How can you ensure that restorative practices are not reduced to a checklist, something you "do" that produces superficial "success," but rather something you are that produces profound change?
- Create environments in which it is "safe to fail" and where learning and implementing are journeys, not destinations.
- Collect baseline qualitative, quantitative, and experiential data from all school stakeholders, and collect data along the journey to better understand small victories, areas that need attention, and what next steps to take.
- Build sustainability for the work over time by managing expectations for ongoing work and celebrating the small victories each year along the way.
- Identify existing structures that will support restorative practices. Identify potential barriers and think through how you might respond to them as they arise.

Funding: Allocate or reallocate funding to show people that there is a legitimate commitment to restorative practices.

Try These:

- Financially compensate people for their personal and collective commitment to learning, internalizing, and practicing new ideas and skills. This shows respect for their time, leadership, and ability to be an agent of change.
- Allocate a portion of school funding to educators', students', and families' personal growth and development in the form of professional development opportunities, listening circles and fishbowls, training boosters, community-building spaces, and resources such as books and professional facilitators.
- If financial compensation is not possible, find other ways to acknowledge and compensate people.

People: As is the case elsewhere in education, people are a major element of restorative practices infrastructure.

Try These:

- Gather knowledge: As you get ready to implement or train, find out if everyone is on board with the initiative and has a clear understanding of the what, why, and how. Determine who may need clarity and support about what is coming regarding trainings and implementation.
- Build a team: Having a critical mass of people in support of any initiative is a key determinant of its success or failure. Find folks who are already "singing in the choir" of restorative practices, and provide them with resources, support, and platforms to share their work with others. Build a team of early adopters at all levels. Reflect on who is not at the table or in the room as a result of internal, interpersonal, or systemic oppression, and find ways to bring them in.

- Create spaces to continue growth: Infrastructure such as professional development sessions, booster sessions, and other spaces for unlearning, visioning, and public learning is vital for people to internalize new information. As the 70:20:10 model for learning has found, only 10 percent of learning comes from formal trainings, 20 percent comes from interactions with others, and 70 percent comes from consistent daily practice.[25]

- Avoid silos: Find alignment with what's already in place. Initiatives such as restorative practices, social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, equity and racial justice work, and culturally responsive learning overlap in values, mindsets, and some practices. Don't make the mistake of telling your staff that this school year, they have the choice of implementing restorative practices or social-emotional learning; show how the initiatives dovetail and support one another, to avoid having educators feel they are being given one more thing to do.

Time: Educators often note that the greatest challenge to implementing restorative practices is time. Restorative practices can be implemented successfully only if leaders and administrators rethink and reallocate their use of time in schools.

Try These:

- Imagine: What would it look, feel, and sound like if we prioritized relationships instead of time?

- Plan: If your technical program or curriculum for restorative practices consists of significant relationship-building work, plan accordingly. Create advisory periods devoted to relationship building, inclusion, and connection. Use traditional staff meetings as spaces for groups to engage in building community, developing their collective voice, and practicing unlearning together in order to envision a different way of being and operating. Intentionally build circles into class time and staff meetings. Remember that relationship building aids learning and does not detract from it.

- Slow down to speed up: When we take the time to build foundations, we set up a stronger future. Taking the first weeks at the beginning of a semester to exclusively build relationships, agreements, voice, and agency increases the likelihood that students will be engaged and that misbehavior will be limited.

- Expect community conferences to be slow: By their very nature, community conferences repair harm, and they are designed to do so in a way that is complex and slow. Embrace this pace to ensure that the right preparation happens, the right people are in the room, and the right process has time to unfold fully and authentically.

Discipline and Other Policies: Traditional education concepts of exclusionary discipline (through detentions, suspensions, and expulsions) and related student policies are antithetical to restorative values, practices, and principles. It is vital to restructure policies in support of restorative concepts of discipline and justice, focusing on relationships and social capital in place of restrictive rules, zero-tolerance policies, and punitive discipline methods.

25 Arets, J., Jennings, C., & Heijnen, V. (2016). *70:20:10 into action.* 702010 Institute. https://702010institute.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Primer-702010-into-action.pdf

Try These:

- Learn about restorative concepts of discipline, justice, and healing.
- Separate the concepts of discipline and punishment, which have been conflated through zero-tolerance policies but mean different things and have vastly different outcomes.
- Look to other schools and districts that have successfully changed discipline policies to include restorative discipline practices.
- Create a discipline flowchart or matrix to bring transparency to when, why, and how different discipline processes will be used.
- Coherence and alignment: Without adhering to high-quality implementation that has high levels of fidelity to models of restorative practices, it will be extremely difficult to define, measure, and analyze success.
- Reflect: What are the ways your personal views on justice, discipline, and punishment may be causing harm inadvertently? What are ways in which you might dismantle these biases?

Equity: Putting frameworks and structures in place that center racial equity is the only way to ensure that a school or district's implementation of restorative practices closes disproportionate discipline gaps, limits the school-to-prison pipeline for Black and Brown youths, and achieves true racial justice in education.
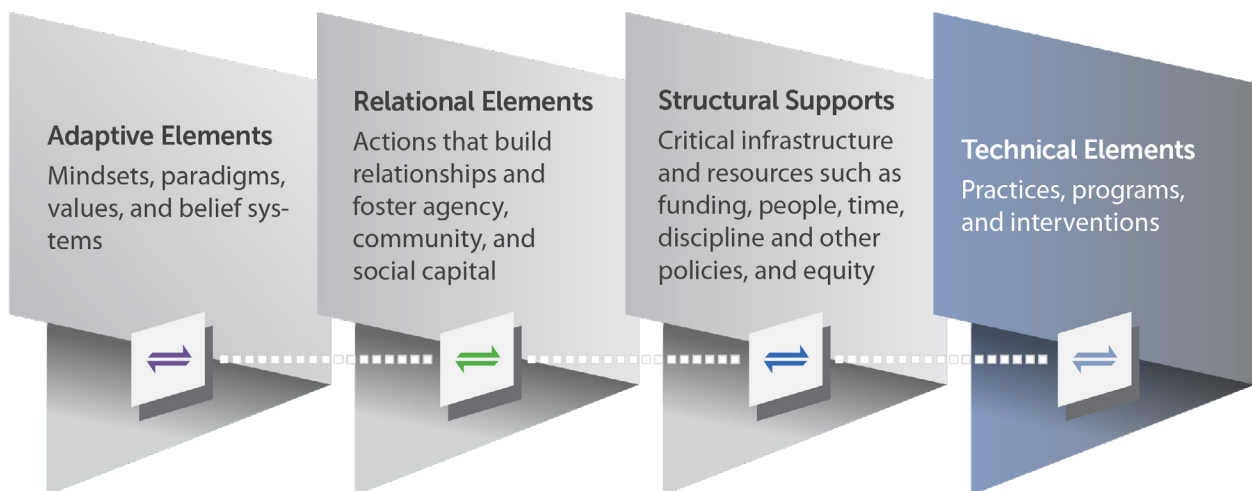
Try These:

- Jamila Dugan's "Beware of Equity Traps and Tropes": article highlighting default equity practices that can inadvertently prevent sustainable equity work within systems.
- WestEd's "Anti-Racist Evaluation Strategies": guide for evaluation teams to build awareness and capacity in anti-racist evaluation strategies.
- Equity in the Center's "Race Equity Cycle Pulse Check": free interactive online tool for teams, organizations, and schools to assess their equity definitions, strategies, and systems.
- New York University's "Identifying the Root Causes of Disproportionality": research highlighting "the three core tensions" of equity work and how to address them.
- BELE Network's framework for equitable learning environments: evidence-based framework and guide for educators and education leaders to build equitable systems within districts and schools.

Structural supports that center people and relationships — and that value authentic belonging, agency, and connection — will create conditions that enable safety and growth and pave the road to success for restorative practices over time.

PART 4: TECHNICAL ELEMENTS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: MOVING TOWARD CHANGE

Restorative Practices Implementation

Adaptive Elements
Mindsets, paradigms, values, and belief systems

Relational Elements
Actions that build relationships and foster agency, community, and social capital

Structural Supports
Critical infrastructure and resources such as funding, people, time, discipline and other policies, and equity

Technical Elements
Practices, programs, and interventions

Continuing the Nonlinear Journey of Implementation

Although this guide centers adaptive and relational elements of restorative practices, understanding the technical elements is essential to turning mindsets, values, and beliefs into actions and daily habits. The journey of deepening technical skills relies on reflection, unlearning, and practice. This is where trainings, toolkits, and guides that spotlight the technical elements of restorative practices can serve and take root. What follows is a short list of guides and toolkits that focus on the technical and infrastructural elements of restorative practices that, when informed by adaptive and relational elements, will clarify and strengthen implementation.

A wide variety of other guides, toolkits, and trainings help explain the technical elements of restorative practices. See, for example:

- Restorative Practice "Resource Project: Tools and Successful Practices for Restorative Schools Supporting Student Achievement and Well Being"
- MAEC's "Getting Started with Restorative Practices in Schools"
- Panorama Education's "Restorative Practices Toolkit"
- "Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools", from the Schott Foundation, Advancement Project, American Federation of Teachers, and National Education Association

In addition, several districts have created resources that may prove useful to other districts and schools:

- Chicago Public Schools' "Restorative Practices Guide and Toolkit"
- Denver Public Schools' "School-wide Restorative Practices: Step by Step"
- Oakland Unified School District's "Restorative Justice Implementation Guide"
- San Francisco Unified School District's "Restorative Practices Whole-School Implementation Guide"

CONCLUSION

Aligning the adaptive, relational, technical, and structural elements of restorative practices is a journey, not a destination.

Prior to implementing restorative practices, schools should "ramp up" by taking a year or more to focus on individual adaptive work, to build social capital, and to redesign structural supports in preparation for formal technical training. Following the training, schools may see quick low-level successes, such as stronger interpersonal relationships, higher social and emotional learning skills, and less conflict. However, high-level success, such as improved behavior, academic growth, and cultural shifts, will take three to five years or more and will be achieved only with quality implementation and constant practice.

APPENDIX 1: REFLECTING AND ACTING UPON ADAPTIVE ELEMENTS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Paradigm

Mindset	Belief	Value
Learning cannot exist without meaningful relationships and strong communities; strong relationships are conditions and prerequisites for teaching and learning	People are assets and essential to academic achievement and student growth	Building, centering, and prioritizing meaningful relationships and authentic connection

Reflect: What is the experience of unlearning like for you? Think of a time you've had to unlearn something or break a big habit. What felt hard? What skills or mindsets helped you? How long did it take? How do we begin and prioritize meaningful relationships? What are traits of authentic connection?

Act: Write down a list of the elements of strong relationships and communities. Find ways to practice those elements in your classroom or school.

Discipline

Mindset	Belief	Value
Repair, restoration, accountability, and reconnection with the larger community	Discipline is composed of opportunities to make right, learn, grow, and reconnect; students' humanity is honored	Practicing accountability and harm repair

Reflect: What is the purpose of discipline for you? Does it achieve its desired outcomes? How can we reframe accountability to help students learn? How can we practice accountability in ways that repair harm and keep people's inherent dignity intact?

Act: Read John Braithwaite's "Reintegrative Shaming."

Safety

Mindset	Belief	Value
Everyone has a voice and connection to someone, and all identities are honored; communities are safe when those who cause harm are held accountable and reintegrated, and the community is made whole	There is an inherent trust in people and communities, that they know what they need to be strong	Trusting people and their ability to repair harm and find solutions

Reflect: What are the ways we've been taught to define and achieve safety? Do we achieve the outcomes we want? What does it look, feel, and sound like to trust people and communities and their ability to know their needs and find solutions to harm?

Act: Imagine a safe school and world. What does it look like? What does it feel like? How do others feel?

Time

Mindset	Belief	Value
Relationship building proactively manages misbehavior and conflict and creates strong conditions for academics; responding to behavior and engaging in conflict are not distractions from learning but opportunities for learning	Relationship-building practices are learning and also create the necessary conditions for academic success	Relationship-building practices are assets (not disruptions or things to do with "extra" time)

Reflect: Where are the spaces where "there isn't enough time"? Why isn't there enough time? How can time work for us and not us for it? What might it look, feel, and sound like if we centered relationships over time, not the other way around? What would happen?

Act: Slow down to speed up! Try proactively taking time to collectively create classroom agreements as a tool for relationship building and student agency. Refer back to them as needed.

Power

Mindset	Belief	Value
Among/with	"Human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them."[26]	Fairness, connection, and collectivity

Reflect: How do I define power? Where does power come from? What does it look like to be "with" people and not "to" them or "for" them?

Act: Review Brené Brown's work on "power over" and "power with/to/within."

Teaching

Mindset	Belief	Value
Guide on the side: the teacher facilitates spaces for collaborative learning; students are "mutual experts" in their education	Teachers and students have a responsibility to share teaching and learning with one another	Voice, agency, and people as experts in their reality and experience

Reflect: What are the differences between being a "sage on the stage" and a "guide on the side"? Where are they similar? How do they make people feel? What does it mean to build authentic voice and agency among your students? What does it look like when we honor students as "mutual experts" in their learning experience?

Act: Read Stacey Goodman's "The Importance of Teaching Through Relationships."

Reflect: When was a time you felt harmed by misbehavior and, although there was a disciplinary response, you didn't feel the harm was repaired? What about a time when you did feel the harm was repaired? What happened? Consider the following quote by Indigenous Australian activist Lilla Watson: "If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."

Act: Watch Common Justice's *Doing sorry*.

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26 Wachtel, T. (2005, November). *The next step: Developing restorative communities.* Paper presented at the Seventh International Conference on Conferencing, Circles and Other Restorative Practices, Manchester, UK.

APPENDIX 2: TECHNICAL ELEMENTS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND THEIR ADAPTIVE COUNTERPARTS*

Technical element	On the surface, without adaptive element	Adaptive elements to dive deeper
Affective questions	Using different questions to address harm but using the same vantage point of defining harm as an infraction of school rules	Use questions to create space for voice, connection, empathy, meaningful accountability, and creative opportunities for making things right. Explore curiosity about the internal, interpersonal, and systemic conditions that may have contributed to the incident. Find ways to keep people's humanity at center, trusting in their individual and collective ability to make things whole again. To operate from these questions means fundamentally believing schools are places for behavior to be learned.
Affective statements	A different way of talking to students about their behavior	Affective statements challenge us to hold power differently by sharing (sometimes vulnerably) the impact a student's behavior has on us. We are often taught as educators and adults to "keep ourselves out of it," and affective statements encourage us to share our feelings with others as a tool for connection. Doing this looks easy but can be very uncomfortable for us as adults!
Talking circles	Following scripts and rearranging the room, or holding circles only to reduce misbehavior	Honor young people as human beings and mutual experts. Unpack our notions of power, redefine learning beyond academics, understand students as experts of their experience, and center student voice and agency. All of these values and mindsets of circles live inside and outside of circles. If we are centering relationship building, we must look past the surface concept of every student feeling connected to an adult in the building; rather, we must explore our personal biases that implicitly or explicitly create barriers to authentic connections.

Technical element	On the surface, without adaptive element	Adaptive elements to dive deeper
Small impromptu circles or conversations	Quickly pulling students aside to "make them say sorry to each other"	Address harm in real time as an opportunity for students to practice accountability and reconnect, as learning cannot happen until reconnection occurs.
Restorative circles or community conferences	Circles are the tool, but punishment remains the goal or synonym for "justice" and "fairness"	Circles are the process used for a different definition of justice and accountability, as well as a tool for strengthening communities.

* Adapted from Wachtel, T. (2012). "Defining restorative." International Institute for Restorative Practices. https://www.iirp.edu/restorative-practices/defining-restorative/

APPENDIX 3: IF THIS, TRY THIS: ADAPTIVE ANSWERS FOR TECHNICAL PROBLEMS

"There isn't enough time for restorative practices."

Try: Write a list of where your time is going. How much time is being taken from instructional time for behavior management? Use that same amount of time to facilitate proactive community-building practices and activities in your classroom, and keep track of how time changes.

"We already do restorative practices."

Try: Develop inquiry about the truth of this statement. If it is true, in what ways can you engage more deeply with the adaptive elements of restorative practices? If this statement is not true, engage in curiosity about why it may feel true.

"Community conferences don't work! They're just a slap on the wrist."

Try: Community conferences operate most effectively and transformationally when meaningful relationships are already in place. There is not much point for Johnny to sit in a circle to hear about how he has impacted the community if there is no community in place. Find ways to build authentic relationships so that when conflict or misbehavior occur (as natural and inevitable aspects of being in community), restorative processes will be effective.

"The students hate being in community-building circles."

Try: Engage with students outside of circles using the same mindsets and tenets of community-building circles. Give them voice, connection, agency, responsibility, and respect. Moving forward, see if they trust the people and the process such that they feel safe enough to engage.

"Why should I do this? We have a disciplinarian for this."

Try: Next time there is misbehavior in your classroom, ask a disciplinarian to step into your classroom for a few minutes while you step outside with the student who is causing harm. It is your relationship with the student being impacted, not the disciplinarian's. Ask the student about what is happening for them and deeply listen; reaffirm the expectations of the space and ask what supports they need to meet them; make a plan together.

APPENDIX 4: SCHOOLWIDE IMPLEMENTATION: WHAT RESTORATIVE PRACTICES IS AND IS NOT

What Restorative Practices Is	What Restorative Practices Is Not
Implementation is 80% driven by proactive relationship-building practices and processes and 20% used for responding to behavior, conflict, or harm	Restorative processes are most often used to respond to incidents of misbehavior and rarely foster proactive relationship building
Educators are given time, resources, and support to foster agency, belonging, and shared power in their classrooms	Educators are given a multiple-day training at the beginning of the year with no follow-up or infrastructure for using the practices in their classrooms
Students have a clear understanding of all different types of restorative practices and processes and their purpose	Students understand restorative practices as "something they have to do when they get in trouble," and they dislike participating in proactive circles or other relationship-building practices
Circle processes to repair harm are voluntary and center the people harmed	Circle processes to repair harm are coerced and center school rules or administrators peripherally impacted
An explicit set of practices, values, and mindsets that require consistent and ongoing reflection, unlearning, and skill building	A vague set of tools that can fall under any category of interpersonal dynamics; a set of tools learned through one training or certification
A framework for building connections, agency, belonging, and strong school culture	An additional punitive disciplinary tool or a nonexclusionary disciplinary tool that is used punitively
A tool for engaging in conversations about equity and racial justice	A program that will promote equity and reduce disproportionate discipline among students of color without any need for direct conversations about equity or racial justice
A slow, deliberate, and intentional change that requires infrastructural changes, personal and collective reflection and unlearning, and consistent reimagining of education	A quick fix to improve individual behavior, disproportionate or exclusionary discipline, and school climate