

The *fundamental unifying hypothesis* of restorative practices is that “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.” This hypothesis maintains that the punitive and authoritarian *to* mode and the permissive and paternalistic *for* mode are not as effective as the restorative, participatory, engaging *with* mode (Wachtel, 2005).

Restorative Practices are a systemic, proactive approach to fostering good behavior among students and adults. We can think of Restorative Practices on the following continuum:

- For our purposes, we have decided to collaborate with The Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, as they have a process and curriculum that touch on all four parts of the continuum. <http://www.morningsidecenter.org/teachable-moment/lessons/introduction-circles>

### **Community Building:**

Circle-Up. Our Circle-Up Program engages students, grades 6-12, in weekly sessions (“Circles”) that strengthen relationships, foster social and emotional learning (SEL), and promote good behavior. Students sit in a circle with a Circle Keeper (usually a teacher). On the floor is a Centerpiece with objects symbolizing the group’s values. As a Talking Piece goes around, each student is invited to speak on the topic of the day. The impact of well-facilitated Circles over time is powerful. Students share their deepest feelings, dreams, and challenges. They form close relationships with each other and the adult. Circles are effective because they address two key developmental needs of adolescents: belonging and having voice.

### **Social and Emotional Learning:**

Circle Up (grades 6-12). Unlike many Circles-based programs, Circle-Up is built on a structured social and emotional learning curriculum. The aim is to foster classroom and school community while progressively strengthening students’ skills and understanding in these areas:

- understanding and managing feelings
- active listening
- assertiveness
- problem-solving
- diversity

### **Proactive Problem Solving:**

Class Meetings. These meetings, which can take place on a regular or as-needed basis, give the students a chance to apply the skills they are learning in their Circle-Up lessons to real-life problems and conflicts that arise in the class or group. The problem may be a conflict between two students or a problem for the class or group as whole. The teacher facilitates a problem-solving session with the students that involves identifying the problem, brainstorming solutions, choosing one, and trying it.

### **Restorative Conferences:**

Restorative conferences. Both the person responsible for the harm and the person targeted have to agree to take part. If a restorative conference seems appropriate, the facilitator (a trained adult) sets it up. In the session the facilitator asks the responsible party such questions as: What happened? What do you think has been the impact of your action on others? The facilitator asks the harmed party such questions as: What happened? What was your reaction at the time of the incident? What would you like to be the outcome of this session? With this information out on the table, the facilitator guides the participants in a discussion aimed at producing an agreement. In this way, the restorative conference turns a negative incident into a learning opportunity that has brought people closer together instead of further alienating them from each other.