

## **Restitution in Schools**

### **A Tool for Repairing Harm and Providing Meaningful Accountability**

#### **Purpose of Restitution**

- To provide compensation, amends, healing to the victim
- To enable the student who caused harm to understand the impact of their actions and to reclaim self-esteem through personal effort
- To discourage repeat behavior

#### **Elements of a Strong Restitution Agreement**

- **Created by the Student:** The student is responsible for coming up with the restitution. The staff member who is point-person can provide guidance by asking questions and providing examples, but the student should be given time to reflect, brainstorm, and propose ideas. When a student proposes a restitution plan, the staff-person can require the student to alter the proposal.
- **Addresses Victim's Needs:** The restitution should be seen by the victim as adequate compensation. If that is not possible or the victim does not want to participate, there can be a surrogate victim. Ex) A student throws a snowball at a passing car. The student may not be able to make amends to that particular driver, but the student could help shovel sidewalks the next morning.
- **Requires Effort:** The restitution must require time and effort; it can't be too easy.
- **Discourages Repeat Behavior:** Through the process, the student should understand the negative impact that their actions caused.
- **Relevant to the Situation, if Possible:** Ideally there should be a nexus between the harm caused and the restitution.
- **Tied to a Higher Value:** Connecting the restitution to a larger value helps the student see the restitution not as an isolated event, but part of a larger picture of how people treat each other. Restitution that enables the student to help build community and relationships is ideal.
- **Strengthens the Student:** The restitution should grow the student's character, self-esteem, sense of belonging, empathy, etc.

#### **Important Nuts and Bolts of Restitution Agreements**

- **Realistic and Specific:** The plan must be 1) achievable (for the student AND the person monitoring), 2) specific in terms of the restitution to be performed, 3) contain a deadline for completion, and 4) lay out a plan in case the agreement isn't followed.
- **Written:** The plan should be captured in writing and signed by all participants.
- **Monitored:** There must be person who is monitoring the agreement to ensure compliance (staff-person, trusted family member, volunteer).

## Examples of Restitution in Elementary School

Behavior	Possible Restitution
<p>Student rips student-made projects off the wall in the hallway</p>	<p>Put the posters back up</p> <p>Apologize to the students who made the posters and (if they are willing) learn at least 10 things about the projects</p> <p>Create a piece of art for that classroom</p>
<p>Student intentionally dumps over the garbage can in the lunchroom</p>	<p>Clean up the mess</p> <p>Help the custodian during/after lunch, or after school the next day or for multiple days</p> <p>Apologize to the lunchroom staff, learn at least 5 new things about the staff and their jobs, and do something kind for them based on what you learn</p>
<p>Student steals class supplies from the teacher</p>	<p>Return the supplies and apologize to the teacher and/or entire class</p> <p>Help with class chores/clean up</p> <p>Help office staff clean/organize supply rooms</p>
<p>Student throws snowballs at passing cars</p>	<p>Help salt/shovel sidewalks</p> <p>Teach the class about snow safety</p>
<p>Student calls another student or the teacher an offensive name</p>	<p>Apologize and (if the victim is willing) learn at least 5 new things about that person and then do something kind for them based on what you learn</p> <p>Create or lead a lesson on empathy or building class community</p>

Some content was drawn from “Restitution: Restructuring School Discipline,” by Diane Chelsom Gossen.