

Rupture – Repair

Resolving Student – Teacher Conflicts

There are times when students get upset and teachers get frustrated and there is a rupture in the relationship. It is important to ensure that both the student and teacher have the support they need to first calm down after the conflict. Once everyone is calm, the teacher should initiate a conversation that allows the student to share their perspective, explain what they need, and to understand the impact the incident/behavior had on others. Together, the student and teacher can then make an agreement for how they can repair their relationship and avoid the conflict in the future.

What Causes Conflicts to Arise and Relationships to Rupture?

Needs Are Not Being Met: Conflict can arise when needs such as safety, belonging, food, autonomy, and respect are not met.

Past or Current Trauma:

- Someone who has or is currently experiencing trauma often perceives ambiguous situations as threatening. This is because trauma literally changes the brain.
- Students who have experienced trauma are often operating out of their “survival brain” which has a flight, fight and freeze response, even to situations that others might not perceive as threatening (ex, a change in routine, getting bumped in the hallway, a “look” from a teacher).
- It is our job as educators to make students feel safe so that they can operate out of their “thinking brain” and learn. We do this by building safe and trusting relationships, and by making our schools predictable and consistent.

How Can We Calm Ourselves and our Students?

- Breathing exercises
- Use large muscles
- Listen to calming music
- Sensory experiences (clay, playdough, art)
- Try to engage your “thinking brain” (cortex) by counting, spelling, listing things, etc
- Create a classroom designed for regulation: Calming Corner or Regulation Station, Buddy System with another teacher
- Use mirror neurons
- Mindfulness practices

Preparing for a Restorative Dialogue:

- Make sure all participants are calm
- Be curious about the other person's culture and perspective – open mind
- Suspend judgment – open heart
- Use active listening and supportive language
- Offer time and personal space

Restorative Questions:

- What Happened? *What were you feeling? What were you thinking? Who was hurt by what happened?*
- What do you need? *How do you want things to change? How do we fix the problem together?*
- What's the plan? *What needs to be done to make things right? What is our agreement for the future?*

Elements of a Good Agreement:

- Fair
- Realistic
- Specific

The Agreement can be oral or written. If another conflict arises in the future, the student and teacher should use their Agreement as the foundation for their next restorative conversation.

Preparing for a Restorative Talk

1. Be calm
2. Be curious about the student's culture and perspective - Open Mind
3. Suspend judgement - Open Heart
4. Use active listening and supportive language
5. Offer time and personal space

Restorative Questions

- 1. What happened?**
How were you feeling? What were you thinking?
Who was hurt by what happened?
- 2. What do you need?**
How do you want things to change?
How do we fix the problem together?
- 3. What's the plan?**
What needs to be done to make things right?
What is our agreement for the future?