

Responding to Objections and Resistance Against Restorative Practices



THEME 1: TAKES AWAY FROM CONTENT LEARNING, WILL RESULT IN LOWER SCORES

1. Takes too much time away from content.
2. Will result in less time for learning important things that students will be evaluated on.
3. It means lowering our expectations, degrading our standards.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a. How much time is lost to the effects of student non-engagement, not having support with challenges in their life, feeling like they matter, that others are going through similar experiences, that they belong?
- b. How much time and learning is lost to distracting behaviors, discipline issues, not effectively dealing with stressful events in the classroom?
- c. How much learning is lost because of skipping classes, truancy, and dropouts?
- d. Students come to class with their distress whether it is supported or not. Students can't learn when they are upset and don't know what to do with their upset.
- e. Circles multiply the support they get from others. One teacher cannot do it all; peer support and connection is vital to remaining in school.
- f. This stuff really works!!! [provide data from a local school or recognized authority]

THEME 2: THIS STUFF IS UNCOMFORTABLE FOR ME, OUTSIDE OF MY SKILL SET

4. Will I have to learn new skills for this?
5. I don't have the training for this – I'm not a social worker, I'm a scientist, artist, math person, etc.
6. I don't like touchy-feely stuff; it makes me uncomfortable, I want to just teach my subject matter.
7. It means getting too personal, asking private questions, that's not our job or business.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a. Doing Circles is not Rocket Science. It is teachable and learnable. Many teachers are effectively starting this after as little as a half-day of training. Students learn how to be Circle Keepers, too.
- b. It is not about being a social worker; it is just about listening and sharing. We all have interpersonal skills or we could never be teachers or working with children or parents.
- c. Learning new stuff is often uncomfortable; it's what our students have to do every day.
- d. Building an effective learning community in the classroom is absolutely part of our job.

THEME 3: THIS IS AN IRRELEVANCY

8. It's a distraction; It's not preparing them for the real world, how things are out there.
9. It's not part of our mission.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a. People virtually never get fired because they don't have the technical skills or information for doing the job they were hired for. They get fired because they could not get along with their co-workers, their boss, their customers, and/or their direct reports. Circles teach these skills.
- b. Nationwide businesses are overwhelmingly saying they are looking for workers to have "good people skills", be team players, solve problems, and listen and communicate effectively. Colleges and universities, too. Our students absolutely need these skills.
- c. Our mission is to creating successful students in all aspects of their lives

THEME 4: WHAT WE ARE DOING NOW IS WHAT WE SHOULD CONTINUE

10. What we are doing now is fine enough.
11. We can't be all things to all people.
12. It's not what education is supposed to be about. It's not what I had when I was in school.
13. It's just another passing fad.
14. I am already doing this stuff.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a. Our graduation rate and truancy/absenteeism rates are *not* what they need to be and research indicates many social, emotional and cultural reasons contribute to this. The time used in the classroom to build community, support, belonging etc. is **already documented in research** as making a huge difference. Youth need to know that they matter, that they have something to contribute, that people "have their back."
- b. Our mission is to the whole student; attending to the whole student will make all the parts go more easily.
- c. This is more than a set of techniques; it is a new mindset that will be at the core of all we do, a way of being as individuals and a community.
- d. We are working to integrate restorative practices throughout the school in a way that is meaningful and sustainable, and complements other models/tools we have adopted in the past.
- e. Like other social skills, Restorative Practices incorporates many things you already know and do, but that we can always strengthened and reinforced; and there will likely be completely new things to learn as well.

THEME 5: THIS APPROACH WON'T WORK WITH OUR STUDENTS

15. This is too soft. Students just get off easy. It won't work with our students.
16. This is too culturally foreign. It's not appropriate for our students.

POSSIBLE RESPONSES:

- a. This offers an alternative form of accountability to punishment. It is not easy to acknowledge and repair human harm directly with those you have impacted.
- b. Restorative justice is rooted indigenous traditions from around the world. We have since seen this developed out of and adapted to a variety of contexts. Some of the most successful cases are inner city schools with students of color similar to DC such as in Oakland Unified and Baltimore.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR DEALING WITH RESISTANCE

- Change is an *emotional* process. Under particular circumstances, change can threaten one's sense of order, certainty, ease, or competence, thereby triggering strong emotional reactions. This is inherent to change. Respond with patience and compassion (i.e. restoratively) modeling how you would respond to anyone with challenging emotions. Remember resistance is an opportunity to build relationships!
- A leading cause of resistance is lack of clarity. Be pro-active in clearly addressing the following questions:
 - What is the change? ○ Why is it needed? ○ What is wrong with the way things are now
 - How do we know this works? ○ What's in it for me? ○ What is the scope and pace of change?
 - What will be asked of me? ○ What is the vision? ○ How will I find the time to implement it?
- There may be other concerns. Make the time and space for them to be surfaced and addressed.
- Another cause of resistance is lack of control. As you anticipate the change, offer anyone affected by it the opportunity to be involved in planning.
- Resistance over the long-term can arise from leaders underestimating the time and effort required of everyone for real change, or declaring victory too soon. Whole-school restorative culture change often takes 3 or more years. Be realistic and transparent about what is ahead, and plan for and celebrate short-term wins along the way.