

Trauma-Informed Restorative Discipline

A Guide for Creating Restorative Learning in Your School

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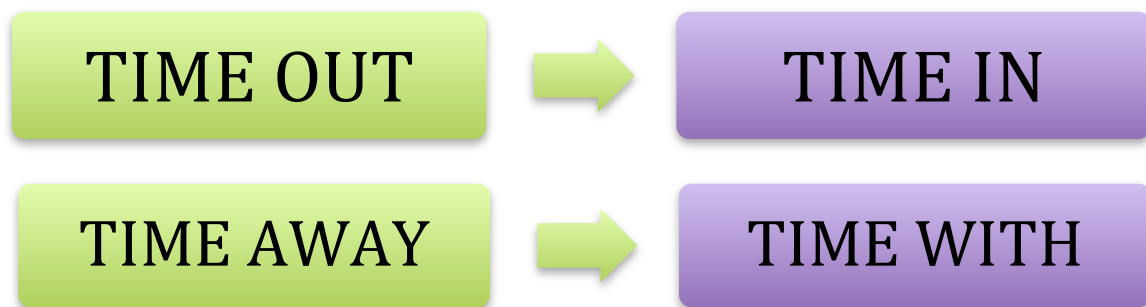
Trauma-Informed Restorative Discipline Guide

From an unplanned conversation in the hallway to a scheduled session in a fully designed restorative room, this guide is intended to guide your school in creating a restorative spaces. These are places and time for students - and adults - to calm their nervous systems, recover, and grow from struggles, deepen relationships, and re-engage in learning as soon as possible.

I. The Restorative Approach to “Misbehavior” As A Learning Opportunity

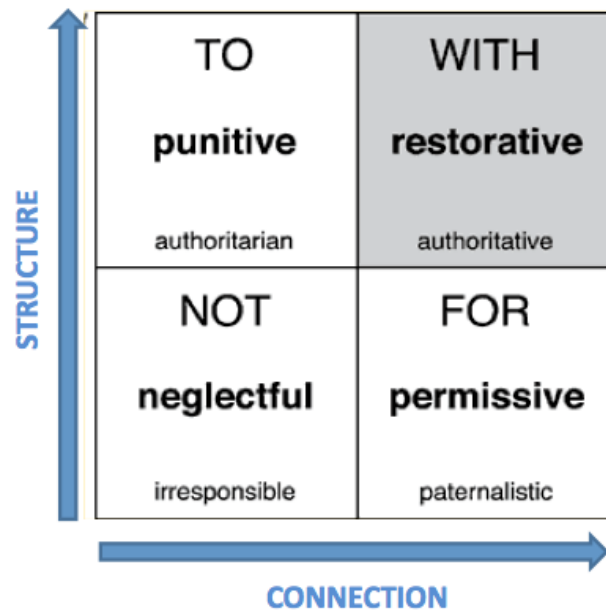
Shifting Mindset and Language to Create Restorative Growth

- **Time In (vs. Time Out):** Take a breather, a pause, a chance to recover, reflect, and grow.
- **Time With (vs. Time Away/Alone):** Perform an act of caring, as a member of a connected community; take a chance to get support, repair harm, and reaffirm belonging.



- **Restorative Priorities:** Focus on safety for all first. Then de-escalation, and then begin recovery of self-expression and curiosity. Afterward re-establishing relationships, repairing harm, and reintegration into classroom; **be self-aware of and suspend punitive impulses through out the process.**
- **Brain-, Trauma-, and Childhood Development-Informed:** Understand the natural biological basis of dysregulation and strong emotions; shift away from asking “what’s wrong with you?” to “what happened to you?”
- **Voluntary Participation:** Create a culture of trust, autonomy, and intrinsic accountability. Invite students genuinely to make choices around how they recover, reflect, and repair - within boundaries of what continues to meet the safety of all.

- **Connected and Structured:** Balance care and kindness with expectations and firmness.

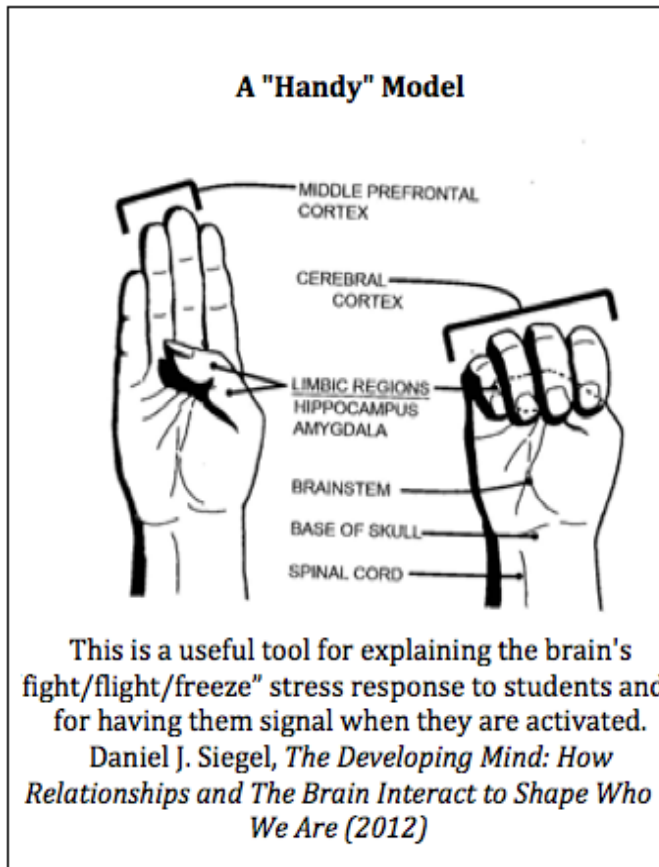


- **Humanize the Individual:** Consider “misbehavior” as (often unconscious or habitual) strategies to meet fundamental human needs, however ineffective those behaviors may be.
 - **Resiliency Building and Mistakes as Opportunities to Teach/Learn:** Offer new attempts to “try again” after learning through the F.A.I.Ls (First Attempt in Learning) the underlying needs at play and the resources/learning yet missing that need to be added. Create a culture of effort over results, of resilience over achievements.
 - **Collaborative Problem Solving:** Invite involvement such that everyone is valued, their needs and experiences matter. Focus on observations, multiple perspectives, shared understanding, collaboration, and making requests; avoid judgments, shaming/blaming, lecturing, unilateral decision making, and making demands.
 - **Agreements over Rules:** Actively review and (re)gain agreement around school norms. Explore what challenges or missing resources get in the way of genuine agreement and follow-through, rather than enforcing passive obedience of rules.
 - **Creativity and Curiosity:** Offer the model of your own curiosity and creative mind and heart to find new solutions, new ways, new trials. Give faith in the journey of trial and errors and support the growth of “yes I am loveable, and I can try again!” minds and spirits
- *Self-Reflection: How do we invite students to reflect, learn and grow from mistakes? How much space, time, encouragement, and resources are we putting towards learning through mistakes?*

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Brain-Informed Restorative Approach: “Connect Before Correct”

Brain science now helps us understand how our nervous systems dys-regulate into stress reactions and disengagement and how to support us and others from the fight/flight/freeze stress modes back to calm, thoughtful, and safe social engagement.



See

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gm9CIJ74Oxw>

Dan Siegel, author of “Brainstorm” offers these four pillars of nervous and social recovery:

- (Self-)Regulation: Shifting ourselves or others to a calmer emotional state, re-establishing executive functioning, listening, and reasoning.
- Reflection: Using our own mind – with support from others if need be - to understand the deeper roots and underlying needs of our own reactions and those of others.
- Relationship Focus: Identifying the social dynamics and needs (such as belonging, mattering,, etc..) and find solutions to re-establish trust and cooperation.
- Repair and Reintegration: (Co)Create relevant new solutions to problems, add new resources and do-able steps, new skill to learn and practice and new agreements to try with review.

○ *Self-Reflection: What is our school's capacity to promote each pillar of healthy recovery?*

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Whole-School Systematic Integration of Restorative Discipline

Restorative time and space can fit into a school’s current disciplinary policies and practices, whether formal or informal, individual or organizational. Important questions to consider are:

- Discipline/Referral System: *Are restorative priorities and options incorporated into the discipline policy? Are they understood, and practiced by the school community?*
- Communication: *What are the channels and quality of communication between school staff and families once a student is in the disciplinary process?*

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- Voluntary Participation: *Are restorative options a choice or demand? If a demand, is there transparency about it and an awareness of the impact on student and their relationships?*
 - Disability, Trauma, & Brain Development:
 - *How is the larger context of a student understood and assessed?*
 - *How are the challenges assessed through disability and/or trauma awareness lens? How is the discipline approach in collaboration between discipline staff and special education, counselors, social workers, etc?*
 - *How are adaptations and adequate resources evaluated for each case and not just based on behaviors evaluation?*
 - Stakeholders Inclusion: *Who is involved throughout the disciplinary process?*
 - Accountability: *How is accountability shared by the students and staff involved?*
 - Follow up: *Who tracks and handles agreements and the needed support that emerge from a restorative process, and how? What is the review process and strengthening and/or fine-tuning of agreements?*
- *Self-Reflection: How well are discipline policies and practices aligned with a restorative mindset and culture?*

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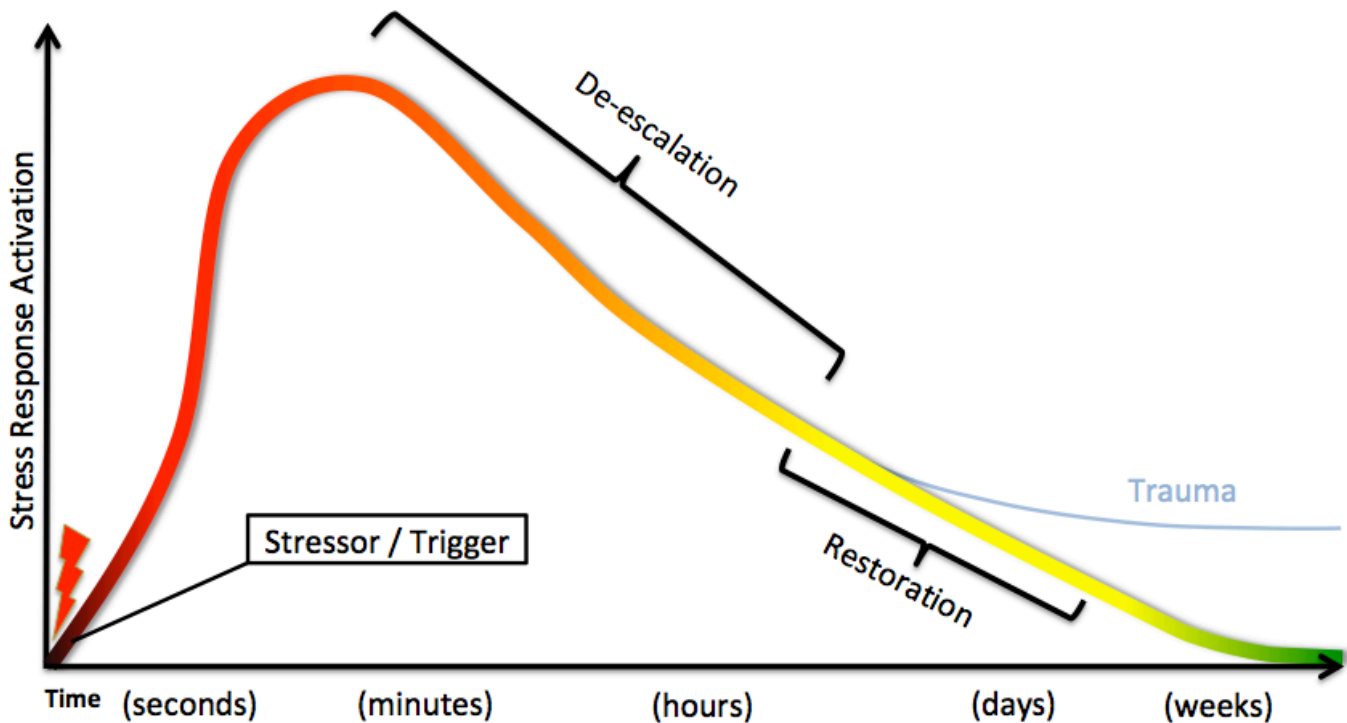
II. Restorative Practices from Stress Escalation to a Restored Capacity Back to Learning

When our brain and nervous system get into high alert or “fight/flight/freeze” mode, we have several restorative practices at our disposal to help along restoring the person the relationship and the community. It is important to understand and assess “where” someone might be in their nervous capacity so that we can give that person the best chance to recover and restore themselves and the situation and relationships at hand. A variety of formal and informal responsive practices support someone in regulating, reflecting, repairing, and reintegrating. Safety and de-escalation are the most urgent, followed by connection and reflection.

Riding Out the Stress Response Curve: A Brain-Informed Model of Priorities

This curve demonstrates the activation of the nervous system over time by a stressor, which may be a major incident or minor incident that triggers cumulative stress. Major incidents maybe a threat to an individual’s perceived safety, mattering, or belonging. A relatively minor incident can be one that triggers cumulative stress and chronic trauma from someone’s lived environment. Trauma further accumulates when the stress response is not completely discharged, leading to more readily-triggered stress responses in the future. Restoration is thus synonymous with trauma prevention and healing. The color-coded techniques below provide guidance on how to ride out the stress response at each point on the

curve. Often the curve may have several peaks as an individual may be further triggered by the way they perceive others' response to their behaviors.



- **Safety First:** Before anything else, take any necessary actions to protect yourself and others away from any immediate physical danger. This could include moving to another location, removing a dangerous object, or restraining an individual.
Note: Utilitarian use of force impacts relational trust – a restoration once calm is recovered can be done by acknowledging transparently such use of force and any values/needs lost by its use and impact on everyone and what is the quality of relationship and interaction we envision and want to co-create instead.
- **(Self-)Regulation:** Self-Regulation is humanly learned only through having been supported and taught by others FIRST. Through watching models first and by being given actual learning steps on how to recognize/acknowledge, allow (for it to exist) and transform that emotion. If caught in your own stress response, self-regulation (i.e. internal de-escalation) is necessary to have the capacity to engage thoughtfully with others' stress response. Follow the below two steps with yourself first or use with others to help them regulate.
- **De-Escalation:** What is most effective depends on where you are on the curve, which typically corresponds to specific observable behaviors:
 - High verbal/high physical (RED): Characterized by screaming, hitting, pushing, making large, quick, and unpredictable movements. The individual seems to have lost self control, awareness of surroundings, and responsiveness to verbal instruction.
 - Create a buffer of space and time between the individual and the stressor/trigger.
 - Begin simple verbals - "slow and low" - in terms of pace and tone and non-verbals that clearly communicate "you are safe; you matter, you belong".
 - Sometimes matching firm and kind authoritative acknowledgment of intentions may also be supportive "I want to hear you. I want to understand what is going on for you. AND I need us to calm our voices so we can speak"

- High verbal/medium physical (ORANGE): Characterized by yelling, pacing, and generally restless. The individual responds to verbal instruction, but not (yet) rationally.
 - Continue the above simple verbals and non-verbals.
 - Request (or model) for the individual to engage in calming somatic, sensory, or cognitive stimulation.

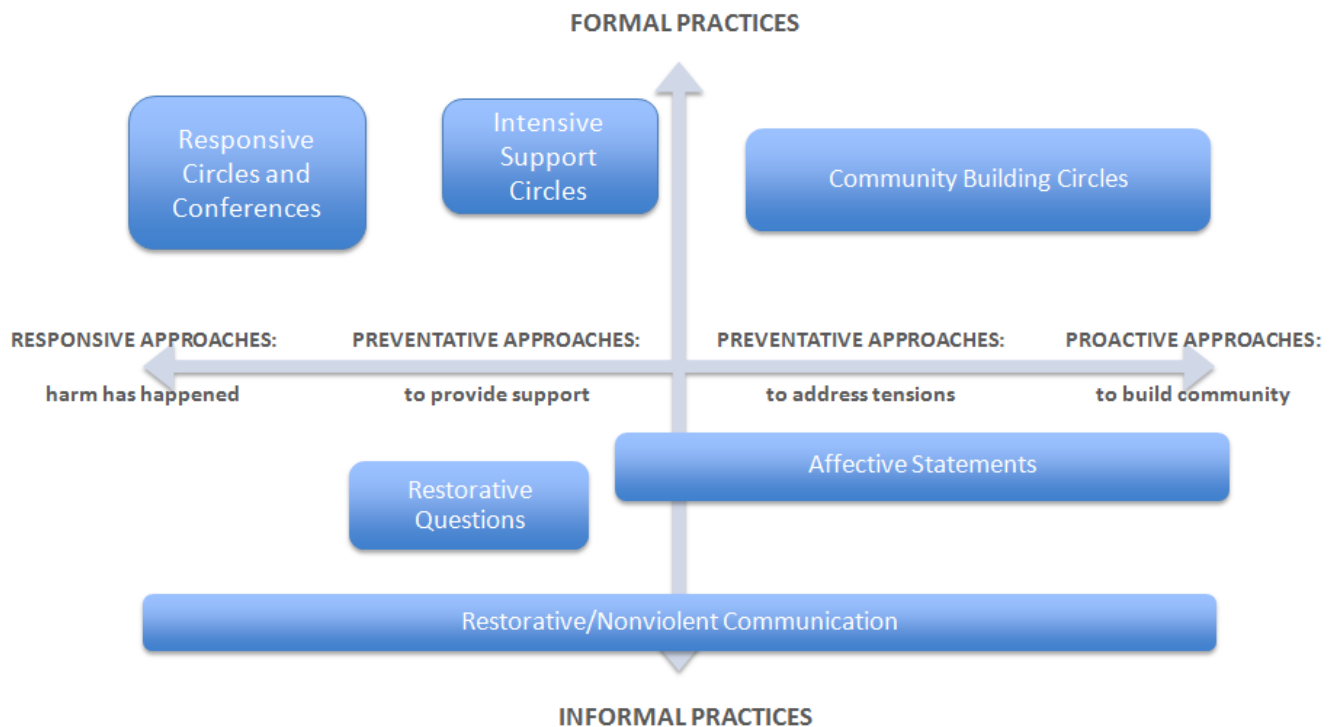
Categories (and examples) of De-escalation Techniques

Somatic	Sensory	Cognitive
Breathing (yawn or deep breaths in for 5 counts and out for 8)	Touch (self hugs, sand tray, weighted blankets)	Mathematics (count to 10 or solve math problems)
Shaking (allow body to tremor, shake if off, jump on the spot)	Sight (focus on colorful imagery or captivating patterns)	Verbal cognition (read or recite a passage)
Acupressure/tapping (grip thumb or tap temples)	Hearing (calming music or sounds)	Self-awareness/expression (use the hand model or identify feelings)
Body scan (track body sensations)	Smell (essential oils or incense)	Imagination (pretend to be somewhere or someone else)
Meditation (focus on breath or a mantra)	Taste (eat fruit or drink juice)	Humor (tell a joke)
Fine motor movement (tracing a labyrinth or tie a knot)		
Gross motor movement (push ups or punching bag)		

- Medium verbal/low physical (YELLOW): Characterized by crying, complaining, and interrupting.
 - Transition to more sophisticated verbal engagement by paraphrasing what they say or offering empathy guesses (such as “are you feeling upset because you want respect and space?”). Keep in mind that their nervous system will still not be ready to learn and restore without further de-escalation and a strong sense of connection.
- **Reflection and Restoration:** Only at this point on the curve is the pre-frontal cortex sufficiently engaged for a student to be neurobiologically ready to reflect on what happened, take on other multiple perspectives, to identify and repair what has been ruptured. They can no learn from the experience and return to the classroom.
Here are some available restorative practices depending on stress/capacity continuum:
 - Restorative Reflections: Prompt reflection about what happened by asking the restorative questions verbally and/or using a form, picture cards, objects, drawing, or a role play.
 - Restorative Conversations: Use restorative questions and affective statements to hold an informal conversation about the harm and how to move forward.
 - Responsive Circles (or Conferences): Have trained facilitator lead structured restorative process, creating shared understanding of what happened, impact, and how to address it.

- **ReIntegration and Learning for Growth and Prevention:** Outside of any hot moment, this phase is for acknowledgment of impact on larger community, for proactive creation of new skills and resources to sustain them, for added support and prevention/change of past pattern issues.
 - Reintegration and Support Circles: Conduct preventative circle to bring struggling individual (such as when returning from long term suspension) together with family, staff, friends, community members, and others into a web of support characterized by affirmation, strong relationships, and shared responsibility over a support plan.
 - Proactive Circles: Run regular peer circles to build long-term relationships, resilience, and social-emotional capacity. (see *Circle Forward* book for dozens of sample outlines)

The Map of Restorative Practices



Notes on Academic Maintenance in Restorative Rooms

If you have the resources to have a Restorative space in your school (ISS room or otherwise), maintain the goal to use any time in service to going back “as soon as possible” to learning engagement. For this goal, we recommend to:

- Minimize or eliminate distraction (for both the student and the attending adult) to move through the curve and towards getting back to learning in the classroom.
- Make time agreements for moving along the curve with flexibility, adapting to re-activation.
- For any instructional time lost outside the classroom between de-escalation and restoration, provide the materials and space needed for the student to continue learning in coordination with their teacher(s).

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III. Restorative Room Implementation

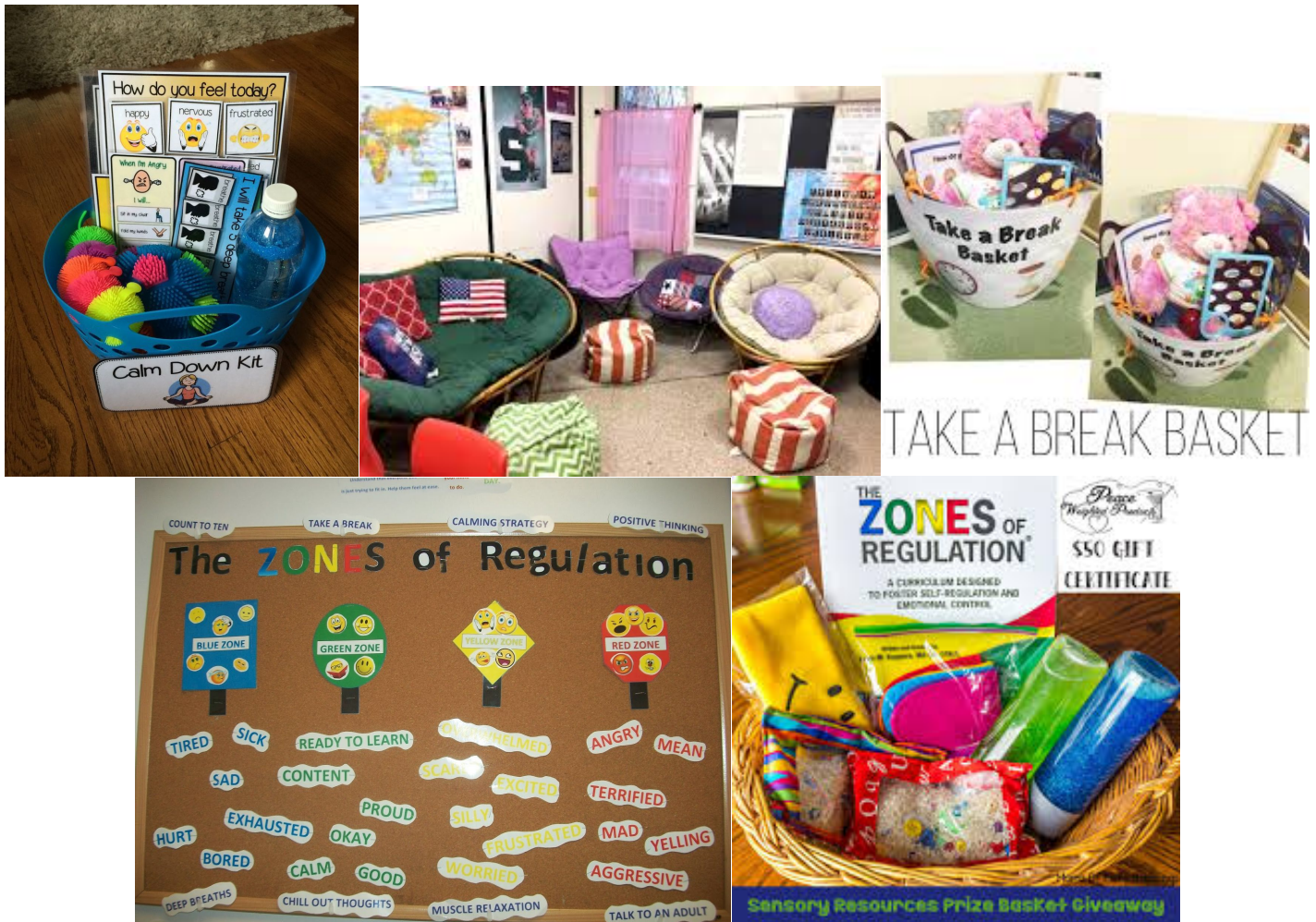
Restorative Room Coordinator

Qualities and capacities of an effective coordinator:

- Sufficient discretion, time, resources, and training to implement restorative options carefully and thoroughly
- Natural ability to connect and build meaningful relationships
- Deep integration of restorative approach and mindset, including trauma-informed de-escalation techniques
- Capacity to maintain curiosity, creativity, and empathy in the face of emotional intensity

Physical Space and Environment

If possible, designate a room as a restorative space. Otherwise merge an admin or support staff office to be utilized as a restorative space.



- Sensory Tips: Consider what creates a calming, focused space in terms of noise, lighting, objects, furniture setup, and privacy.

- (Self) Regulation Corner: Designated space within the room for returning to calm. (see below for resources). An area that allows for brain-body (re)connection exercises can also be helpful.
- Reflection Space: A space to write feelings and needs cards with a desk, paper, handouts, and good lighting.
- Connection Space*: An area for empathic listening, support in understanding underlying feelings, needs, reasonings, etc..
- Circle Space*: Ideally the room has enough space for proactive and responsive circles.

**Critical: Mind privacy and consent if space is shared with others nearby*

Additional Resources

This is a non-exhaustive list of optional resources to be adjusted to your school's particular needs and constraints.

- Basic Supplies: water, healthy (low/no sugar) snacks, tissue box, bathroom pass, etc..
- Social-Emotional Supports: Posters of restorative questions, positive affirmations, guidelines, emotions (emoticons posters, wheel of emotions handouts), thermometer of emotional intensity
- Auditory Supports: station with calming/meditation music, guided meditations
- Visual Supports: calm wall colors, window to outdoors, mural/paintings, positive affirmations posters, eye mask, zen coloring books
- Tactile and Other Sensory Supports: aromatherapy diffuser, stress balls, squishy items, sandtray, moon sand, art therapy exercises
- Time Supports: a timer, set a time agreed with student to frame a boundary for each corner (Important to remain sensitive to and not overpower each individual student's time needed to regulate, reflect, and recover. If an individual needs more time in one corner than previously agreed upon, differ to their needs within reason.)
- Restorative Supports: reflection sheets, restorative agreement plan-making handout, letter of intention and impact templates
- Relationship Building Resources: create engagement and reflection with Restorative Coordinator, use Ungame questions, conversation starters, questions jar, feelings and needs cards
- Reference Materials: restorative books, inspirational/empowering books, or quotes/short readings handouts to borrow, or read on-site

References for Continued Education

Brainstorm, The Whole Brain Child, and more books by Daniel Siegel

Positive Discipline by Jane Nelsen

Conscious Discipline By Becky Bailey

The Compassionate Classroom: Relationship Based Teaching by Sura Hart and Victoria Kindle Hodson

The Trauma-Informed School by Jim Sporleder and Heather T. Forbes

Trauma-Informed Restorative Discipline Toolkit Worksheet

For Use with *School Discipline: A Restorative Approach Video Session Guide*

Please review *Trauma-Informed Restorative Discipline Toolkit* to respond to the questions below.

Question and Reference Pages	Response
<p>* Self-Reflection: <i>How do we invite students to reflect, learn and grow from mistakes? How much space, time, encouragement, and resources are we putting towards learning through mistakes? (pages 1 – 2)</i></p>	
<p>* Self-Reflection: <i>What is our school’s capacity to promote each pillar of healthy recovery? (page 3)</i></p>	
<p>Discipline/Referral System: <i>Are restorative priorities and options incorporated into the discipline policy? Are they understood, and practiced by the school community?</i></p>	
<p>Communication: <i>What are the channels and quality of communication between school staff and families once a student is in the disciplinary process?</i></p>	
<p>Voluntary Participation: <i>Are restorative options a choice or demand? If a demand, is there transparency about it and an awareness of the impact on student and their relationships?</i></p>	
<p>Disability, Trauma, Development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How is the larger context of a student understood and assessed?</i> • <i>Is there an IEP check? Collaboration between discipline and special education staff?</i> • <i>Are there adaptations and adequate resources for those who need it most?</i> 	
<p>Stakeholders Inclusion: <i>Who is involved throughout the disciplinary process?</i></p>	

<p>Accountability: <i>How is accountability shared by the students and staff involved?</i></p>	
<p>Follow Up: <i>Who tracks and handles agreements and the needed supports that emerge from a restorative process, and how?</i></p>	
<p>*Self-Reflection: <i>How well are discipline policies and practices aligned with a restorative mindset and culture?</i></p>	

