

Being Restorative at Home



“We care about you AND we cannot have that behavior.”

Both parts of that sentence are equally important in Restorative philosophy. Restorative Practices rest on the premise that to successfully teach children to be truly accountable for their behavior’s effect on others, they must feel part of that community of others.

AACPS schools have been infusing this philosophy into our schools, slowly but surely, over four years, and all AACPS schools will be using it by fall of 2021.

So, what does Restorative philosophy look like in a time of online learning, and how can parents and families embrace Restorative philosophy during quarantine? Try thinking of it in two parts: building community and addressing harm restoratively.

1. Build Community

This might sound silly at home, but it isn’t. We are often so caught up in our daily lives we forget to build community in our own home. We figure it will just happen, but sometimes it takes intentional effort.

To build community at home, prioritize time each day – 10 minutes or so – to ask your child questions that are fun for both of you. Be sure to give it your undivided attention. You can include the whole family in the form of a Community-Building Circle. There’s a good chance your child’s AACPS school is using them! If so, invite your children to lead the Circle -- they will love teaching you how a Community-



Building Circle works! Continuing to use rituals, like Circles and Talking Pieces, is comforting to children during unsettling times. The Talking Piece is a tangible reminder of what it feels like when they Circle with peers, reminding them of that connection. Some teachers are using Virtual Community-Building Circles to continue to build the classroom community as well.

When you Circle up with your children, keep the questions light (no hidden lessons!), and accept their answers without comment or criticism (watch your facial expression!). Adults are always participants in Circle, so be sure you answer the same questions as the children. Here are a few sample community-building questions you can use with your children at home – feel free to adjust them to suit your child’s age:

What song makes you smile?

If you could be any animal, what animal would you choose?

What makes you know someone cares about you?

What food or meal would you like to help make for a special occasion?

What do you like to do with your arms?

What would your friends say you are good at?

If you could create a new holiday, what would it be? Tell us about it.

Would you rather have bowling ball legs, or spaghetti arms?

What is something you worked hard to learn to do?

What comes to mind when you think of the word “art”?

Are you a shoes person, or a barefoot person?

What daily routine do you really look forward to?

What is your favorite breakfast food?

What do you like most to do in P.E.?

2. Respond to Harm Restoratively

The second part of being restorative at home involves your response when a child misbehaves. Restorative practitioners call unexpected behaviors “harms” because they harm whatever community they affect. During quarantine, the affected “community” is whoever is in your home that is affected by the child’s actions. The goal is to use the child’s mistake to help them make the connection between behaving appropriately and being accountable to others.

When faced with undesirable behavior, using a restorative lens means we begin by asking the child what happened, and really listening to the child's perspective of what happened, without correction or interruption. (You will be surprised what you learn!) Next, instead of asking *why* she did it, ask your child to think about what she was feeling or thinking at the time she did the harm. *Always accept her answer as her truth.*



Next, ask the child to think about who, in their immediate “community,” their actions affected, and how. This is where the deepest learning about accountability begins. In school, the affected “community” could be the classroom, the hall, the cafeteria; at home, the “community” might be the apartment, the dining room, the bedroom, the people in the

car. Finally, ask the child what he or she, specifically, can do to make things better. This is how they learn to repair the harm they caused and “earn” their way back to the community they affected.

Once we begin to view misbehavior as a “harm” to a “community,” it is much easier to teach children why their behavior matters, and to develop buy-in from them to repair it. Responsibly acting to repair the harm they caused can replace traditional punishment for causing the harm. This Restorative approach to addressing misbehavior is more logical, more educational, develops important life skills, and is more effective than traditional punishment.



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