



SUPPORTING EVERY LEARNER:

A Guide to Inclusive and Restorative Practices in Upper Elementary Classrooms

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How to use this guide

This guide will define and demonstrate the most commonly used restorative practices through practical examples in a typical fourth-grade classroom case study. Tools, checklists, and tip sheets are available to implement the content discussed. Some resources are linked to printable copies in the appendix.

Each section of the guide contains referenced documents for more information. Additional valuable resources not included in the document’s text are organized in the appendix to help readers understand and implement the practices.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW

It is no surprise to educators that all the students in their classrooms have their unique ways of learning. What engages one student may not motivate the child sitting next to them. It is also no surprise that there are forces in play that make learning more difficult for some students than others, such as sensory challenges, attention issues, and personal challenges from outside the classroom that impact day-to-day performance. More students with learning differences are being taught within the regular education classroom than ever before, despite the fact that children with these diverse abilities often require additional educational support. According to the *Illinois Report Card* (the state’s official source for information about public schools across Illinois), 16 percent of classroom students have an Individual Education Plan (IEP).¹ This percentage only includes students officially identified as having a learning issue documented in an IEP in the school system. However, diverse learners may also include:

- Students who are struggling in the classroom and have not been diagnosed.
- Students who do not meet the criteria for a diagnosis of learning difference or disability.
- Neurodiverse students, or those who identify as neurodivergent, or individuals who may not recognize that they learn differently.
- Students who are withdrawn in the classroom.

- Students experiencing academic or social-emotional deficits because of COVID-19.
- Students who learn at different paces.
- Students learning English as a second language.
- Students who have recently had a traumatic experience.
- Students who are experiencing complex trauma.

These students may struggle to meet the demands of the school day without a specific plan to assist them. A study by Forman and Markson found that “Students with emotional and behavioral disorders had the highest rates for suspensions.”² Lack of understanding and support within the classroom may lead to more outbursts or disengagement, leading to punishment and a decrease in the student’s learning. This reality, in addition to the fact that over half of students with disabilities spend 80 percent of their time in a general education classroom,³ makes it even more necessary for educators to have skills and information to meet the requirements of students with a wide variety of learning needs. This diversity in learning abilities makes employing critical strategies to ensure that all students’ needs are addressed even more important.

This resource is designed to provide teachers with the practical tools and knowledge they need to meet the learning demands of every student by offering helpful information to identify non-punitive, inclusive, and restorative practices to use in classrooms to support students whose behaviors do not always conform to school expectations. Hill Learning Center reminds us that “no matter the term, it’s important to remember that students with learning differences are capable of academic excellence and can learn with strategic, diversified teaching techniques.”⁴ The content of this guide will equip teachers, school staff, and administrators with resources to integrate students with diverse learning needs into the classroom environment, utilizing interventions from Social Emotional Learning and Restorative Practices.

Restorative Practices

Restorative practices foster social connections and build meaningful relationships between individuals. In schools, restorative practices help improve social connections, fostering a sense of belonging and greater safety, which leads to better student behavior, decreased bullying, and reduced violence. These changes have a positive impact on the school’s climate. Restorative practices can identify solutions to problems, help find the root causes of conflict, allow school personnel to facilitate conversations that minimize harm, and attempt to repair relationships.⁵ Building up restorative practices in the classroom benefits all students.

In a comprehensive toolkit for educators, the Schott Foundation for Public Education outlines the types of restorative practices that schools can implement, including:

- **Restorative justice** – focuses on communication and repairing the harm caused by conflict, including the offender taking accountability for their actions.
- **Community conferencing** - involves each person affected by the behavior contributing to the conflict resolution process.
- **Community service** – individuals who have caused harm to the school community provide a meaningful service to make amends.
- **Peer juries** - students are trained to discuss the issue with the person who broke a school rule and how to repair the harm done.
- **Circle process** – circles can be used both proactively and reactively. This process can help to develop relationships, build community, celebrate students’ successes, discuss complex issues, and teach social skills.
- **Preventative and post-conflict resolution programs** – teach children how to manage possible conflicts, diffuse situations, and reduce retaliation.
- **Peer mediation** – a youth leadership model that recognizes that youth can use conflict resolution practices and social skills to reduce violence and increase peace in the school.
- **Informal restorative practices** - affective statements and questions, proactive engagement, and mentor relationships help build a positive and supportive environment. These small actions foster connection, empathy, and accountability among students and staff.
- **Social-emotional learning (SEL)** - a process through which people develop the skills to manage emotions, build healthy relationships, and make responsible decisions.⁶

The application of restorative practices in school settings is up to the individual school. Determining the plan for implementing restorative practices begins by evaluating existing school policies and systems, gathering input from stakeholders, and providing training to teachers, staff, and students. By assessing their readiness, engaging stakeholders, and selecting strategies that align



with their needs and resources, schools can determine which restorative practices to use.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

It is important to note that although the Schott Foundation for Public Education includes social-emotional learning (SEL) as part of restorative practices, extensive research supports SEL as a comprehensive framework and educational approach in its own right. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) helps students develop essential life skills, such as recognizing and managing their emotions, getting along with others, making good choices, and resolving conflicts positively. For late elementary students, this means learning to work well in groups, recovering from mistakes, and showing empathy to others. These skills support academic growth and promote positive behavior and can be built into everyday classroom routines, lessons, and interactions. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) has developed Illinois Social Emotional (SEL) Standards, which it recommends for integration into school systems and practices. ISBE urges schools to embed SEL instruction within existing school curricula rather than treating it as a separate subject by:

- Incorporating SEL objectives into lesson plans and classroom activities.
- Using teachable moments throughout the school day to reinforce SEL concepts.
- Promoting a school climate that supports students’ autonomy, relatedness, and competence.⁷

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) developed a framework that describes five core competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, which are essential to students’ development.⁸

CASEL gives the following descriptions of the **five core competencies**.

Self-awareness is the ability to understand one’s emotions, thoughts, and values and how they affect one’s behavior. It involves recognizing strengths and weaknesses and having confidence and a clear sense of purpose.

Self-management is the ability to control one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in various situations to reach goals. It includes managing stress, staying motivated, delaying gratification, and taking the initiative to achieve personal or group goals.

Social Awareness is the ability to empathize with others and understand their perspectives, including people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts. It includes feeling compassion, understanding social norms for behavior in various settings, and recognizing resources and supports in family, school, and community.

Relationship Skills include establishing and maintaining healthy, supportive relationships and effectively navigating settings with diverse individuals and groups. This includes communicating clearly, listening actively, cooperating, solving problems, and managing conflict constructively. It also includes adapting to different social and cultural contexts, providing leadership, and seeking or offering help when needed.

Responsible Decision-Making is making caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions in diverse situations. It includes considering ethical standards and safety as well as evaluating the benefits and consequences of actions for personal, social, and collective well-being.

Discussing how restorative practices align with these five core SEL competencies is essential for understanding each concept’s role in the classroom. SEL and restorative practices are intentionally used to build connections and positive relationships in the school environment. They can work in tandem to support each other in their efforts. It is not uncommon for schools to establish restorative practices to promote SEL.

In a guide for implementing school-wide SEL, CASEL discusses three primary restorative practices, including informal restorative practices, such as affective statements, the circle process, and responses to harm through conversations and conferences that significantly affect students’ SEL development. CASEL states that “these techniques are most effective when aligned with schools’ evidence-based SEL programs and practices, implemented together, and used frequently and consistently by all members of the school community.”⁹ The CASEL guide gives specific examples of how these techniques relate to the five SEL core competencies. In the next section, this resource guide discusses the connection between restorative practices and SEL using case scenarios to illustrate what this looks like in practice.

SECTION 2: EVERY CHILD - RESTORATIVE SCENARIOS FOR CLASSROOMS

This resource guide provides information about the frameworks for restorative practices and social-emotional learning (SEL). However, this section contains classroom-based snapshots that go beyond theory. The frameworks explain the “what” and “why,” but it is essential to see the “how” in action. The following scenarios illustrate student needs, common classroom challenges, and teachers’ daily decisions to foster inclusion and connection for students with learning differences, as well as for all students.

The scenarios introduce a typical fourth-grade classroom detailing what happens during the school day. Six case studies focus on learning differences and describe student behaviors in the classroom. These case studies identify key restorative practices that can mitigate issues and the associated SEL competencies. Each topic area will include the following information:

- A **scenario introduction** details the student’s challenge and how it manifests in the classroom. Readers will be given practical, real-world examples of behaviors, attitudes, or issues encountered in school.
- **Scenario discussion questions** enable teachers to apply the scenario to their own experiences.
- **Teacher Tools** include web page links, linked resources, or job aids that help support or instruct teachers. The document will list teachers’ options for addressing student behavior using non-punitive, inclusive, and restorative practices. Available tools will be referenced and included in the appendix or linked to relevant websites, allowing teachers to access them. These items will be described so teachers can choose options that best suit the needs of their students.
- **Deeper Learning Resources**, such as articles, videos, and other materials that can help you better understand the topic.

Scenario Who’s Who

The chart below introduces some fourth-grade students with learning differences in veteran teacher Ms. Mathews’ classroom. It provides an overview of the content to help readers understand the types of restorative practices that could be used to address their needs and how they are connected to several of the CASEL core SEL competencies. The strategies and restorative practices discussed in the **SCENES FROM THE CLASSROOM** case scenarios below are designed to provide specific support for the diverse learner profiles in each scenario. They also benefit all children in Ms. Mathews’ classroom. Let’s begin by looking at Ms. Mathew’s preparation before school begins.

SCENES FROM THE CLASSROOM (7:50 AM)

The school day is about to begin, and Ms. Mathews’ fourth-grade classroom is already in motion as she walks around the room making her morning preparations.

Daylight filters through the windows. Several strategically spaced lamps around the room are lit, providing enough light to ease students into the day. The overhead lights will remain off since daylight from outside and the lamps is sufficient for reading and writing tasks. Quiet music plays from a small speaker at the back of the room. The soft music without lyrics helps keep students focused and calm.

Ms. Mathews has just finished writing the daily schedule on the whiteboard and ensuring the visual timer is set correctly for the day’s activities.

The Peace Corner has been refreshed to ensure it is ready to accept any child who needs it. The glitter jars are lined up, breathing cards are neatly stacked, two noise-reducing headphones are on their designated hooks, and the beanbag chairs have been fluffed.

Ms. Mathews has placed a morning prompt on each desk: “What helps you feel ready to learn this morning? You can write or draw.”

A mood check chart near the door has a clothespin labeled with each child’s name, all set in the “happy” position to start the day. Ms.

Mathews sees it and smiles as she prepares to meet each child at the door with a special good morning greeting.

Click on the student’s name to view the scenario with the challenge you want to learn more about. Resources that support the scenario concept are linked to the appendix from the column “Restorative Practice” in this chart, and others are available in the “Teacher Tools” section following the scenario.

Student	Challenge	Restorative Practice	SEL Core Competency
Jillian is a creative and observant student who experiences sensory sensitivity, particularly loud noises and bright lights. Busy hallways and chaotic mornings often overwhelm her.	Sensory sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peace Corner• Sensory Tools• Breathing Tools	Self-awareness and Self-management
Eli is thoughtful and creative but struggles to transition between activities, often becoming anxious or freezing when asked to shift.	Difficulty with transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Timer• Daily schedule• Grounding Techniques	Self-management
Alina is a shy new student who struggles to form social connections and engage with verbal participation in class.	Social Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peer buddy• Conversation starters	Relationship Skills
Jordan and Michael are two neurotypical fourth-grade boys who are engaged in an argument because of a misunderstanding.	Difficulty resolving conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check-in zone• Affective statements• Proactive Circle	Relationship Skills, Self-management
Jayden is a creative visual thinker who sometimes hyper-focuses on his interests, struggling to complete assigned tasks.	Hyper-focus, inattention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Save folder• Visual checklists• Movement Breaks	Self-management
Marcus is expressive but struggles with anxiety and emotional regulation, especially when he finds something frustrating or difficult. He sometimes acts out when overwhelmed.	Emotional regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Peace Corner• Breathing Tools• Non-punitive reset	Self-awareness, Self-management, and Responsible Decision-making

Scenario 1:
Sensory sensitivity – Jillian

Jillian is a creative and observant student who experiences sensory sensitivity, particularly to loud noises and bright lights. Busy hallways and chaotic mornings often overwhelm her. Sensitivity to sensory stimuli is common in people with autism. It is difficult to know what stimuli may be problematic, given that all people with autism are different, and their challenges and gifts are also unique. Students may experience either hypersensitivity (over-responsiveness) or hyposensitivity (under-responsiveness) to various stimuli, such as sights, sounds, touch, smells, or tastes, at different times. Creating an inclusive space for people with autism includes making sure the environment is as free of distractions as possible, which could lead to sensory overload. In the scenario below, Ms. Mathews has worked to create an environment and circumstances best suited to Jillian’s needs.

SCENES FROM THE CLASSROOM (7:55 AM)

As the school day approaches, Jillian steps into the room with her head down. Ms. Mathews is at the door with a gentle smile and quietly asks Jillian what type of morning greeting she would like today. Jillian knows she can choose a silent wave, a soft elbow bump, or a whispered “Good morning.” Jillian raises her hand, and they wave, “Good morning.”

Knowing that noisy transitions and crowded hallways can be difficult, Ms. Mathews has devised a plan for Jillian to arrive just a few minutes early when possible. This allows Jillian to avoid the rush of other students as they enter the room. Jillian has a designated seat near the windows where the light is natural and soft, and a small privacy screen helps her create a calming space.

On Jillian’s desk is the morning prompt and a basket of sensory tools she can choose from, including putty, a textured strip to rub, a pair of sunglasses, and a small visual timer to help her mentally ease into the day. If Jillian needs more help, she knows she can start her morning at



the Peace Corner. The noise-reducing headphones and a glitter jar are her go-tos. She also sometimes uses the available breathing tools, allowing her to calm her senses before the day begins.

Scenario Discussion

In this scenario, Ms. Mathews has set Jillian up for a successful start to her day by allowing her choices, which reduces her stress. Allowing Jillian to arrive early gives her extra time to choose where to settle in before most students arrive. Giving Jillian the option to start her day at her desk using the privacy screen or in the Peace Corner allows the environment to match her energy in the morning, making for a more productive start and helping her practice self-management. The room is soothing, which is essential for students like Jillian, and all students can benefit from starting their day in a calm environment. Consider the following questions as you think about sensory triggers in your classroom.

- ◆ What sensory triggers are present in the current classroom environment, and how might they affect students like Jillian and other students?
- ◆ How can we design classroom routines and environments that offer sensory flexibility (such as lighting, noise levels, workspace options)?
- ◆ What proactive support can be implemented to ensure that students don’t always need to ask for help?

- ◆ How do we strike a balance between individual accommodations and whole-class equity?

Teacher Tools

- **Peace Corners** can be set up in a small section of the classroom and serve various purposes. They can be used by students who need time to ease into the day, take a sensory break from distractions, or calm down and reflect on something that has occurred. The resource listed below provides a more detailed explanation of Peace Corners.
 - Edutopia - Peace Corner: Creating Safe Space for Reflection
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxBv1w4SQyw>.
 - Teach Starter - How to Create a Classroom Calm Down Corner — 9 Ideas for Teachers
<https://www.teachstarter.com/us/blog/calm-down-corner-ideas-for-classroom/>.
- **Sensory tools** often help children reduce anxiety by creating a sense of calm and security. Children on the autism spectrum can also benefit from using these tools for their developmental growth.
 - Essential Calming Toys for Children with Autism
<https://www.levelaheadaba.com/calming-toys-for-children-with-autism>
 - The Magic of Sensory Toys for Autistic Children — Level Ahead ABA
<https://www.levelaheadaba.com/sensory-toys-for-autistic-children>
 - DIY Sensory Tools Videos — Autism Speaks
 - ✓ <https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/video-diy-stress-creatures>.
 - ✓ <https://www.autismspeaks.org/blog/video-diy-sensory-bottles>.
 - ✓ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KjZTkylsX8>.

Deeper Learning

The following resources are available to provide a deeper understanding of the topic.

- Autism Speaks - Sensory Issues
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/sensory-issues>.
- Addressing sensory sensitivities in children with autism
<https://www.mastermindbehavior.com/post/addressing-sensory-sensitivities-in-children-with-autism#:~:text=Creating%20sensory%2Dfriendly%20home%20and%20school%20environments%20Quiet,blankets%20or%20textured%20toys%20to%20encourage%20calming>.
- Autism Speaks - Supporting sensory needs at school
<https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit-excerpt/supporting-sensory-needs-school>.
- Classroom Calming Corners: Peaceful Spaces for Times of Transition
<https://libjournals.mtsu.edu/index.php/ijwc/article/view/2563>.

Scenario 2:
Difficulty with Transitions - Eli

Classroom transitions, no matter how well planned, do not always go smoothly. Students often get off task, taking time away from planned instructional activities. This can be especially true for diverse learners. Smooth transitions not only save time for instruction but also reduce behavior issues, keep children focused, and maintain the learning flow between activities. Managing frequent disruptions and regaining student attention repeatedly can be mentally exhausting. Teachers may spend more time on behavior management than instruction, leading to frustration and fatigue. Below, you will find information and resources to help manage classroom transitions, as well as additional strategies to improve transitions for all learners. But first, here is an example of what a smooth transition might look like for one student. Eli is thoughtful and creative but struggles to transition between activities, often becoming anxious or freezing when asked to make a shift.

SCENES FROM THE CLASSROOM (10:15 AM)

The classroom is quiet as the timer beeps, signaling the end of independent reading.

Ms. Mathews (points to the daily schedule on the board): “It’s Time to close your books and put them on the shelf. Then, get your science notebooks and return to your desk. Let’s see how quick and quiet we can be.”

Most students begin moving calmly. Maya and Tyler quietly return their books to the library shelf and grab their science notebooks. Jayden is seated, flipping through his notebook and looking for the correct science lesson.

But after a minute, Eli is still deep into his book, with his eyes glued to the page, and he doesn’t move.

Ms. Mathews walks over and kneels beside him, keeping her voice low and respectful. She says, “Eli, I can tell you’re really into that book. I love that you love to read. But right now, it’s time to join us for science. You can pick up where you left off later.”

Eli sighs but closes the book. He doesn’t move. Ms. Mathews gently says, “Thank you. It looks like switching to science is tough right now. I wonder if you are feeling a little anxious.”

Eli nods his head.

Ms. Mathews says, “I understand. You were looking pretty comfy sitting there reading. How about you do some big stretches to get yourself ready to move on?” Eli stands and bends, letting his arms hang low, then reaches up toward the ceiling. He repeats these movements several times and then stops to look at Ms. Mathews.

She says calmly, “Are you ready now? Would you like to do the first step together? Can I help you bring your book back to the shelf?” As they

walk to the bookshelf, Ms. Mathews says, “I’m excited to see what you think of the plant samples we will examine during science.”

Scenario Discussion

The above scenario reflects how Ms. Mathews directs her classroom to transition from reading to the next science lesson, particularly Eli, who doesn’t want to transition. Students who feel discomfort or anxiety due to an unknown situation may be more likely to act out or freeze against the change rather than go with it. Distraction caused by these feelings would result in a loss of focus on the tasks at hand, at least for a few minutes. Ms. Mathews utilizes many best practices in transitions, including:

- ◆ *Utilize timers.* The timer visually indicates how much time is left and beeps to signal the end of independent reading.
- ◆ *Use clear, predictable routines.* Ms. Mathews points to the daily schedule on the board.
- ◆ *Provide gentle, private redirection.* Ms. Mathews talks to Eli individually and gently to avoid embarrassing him by calling out that he is not following directions. Ms. Mathews also introduces a new topic and interest to think about, instead of focusing on what task is being left behind.
- ◆ *Assisting/supporting transition.* Ms. Mathews walks Eli through the



transition by helping him put his book away. She also addresses his anxiety by allowing him to take a stretch break that helps ground him and enables him to release some of the tension he is feeling.

Consider the following questions as you think about transition times in your classroom.

- 1. Which students struggle most during transitions, and what do you notice about their behavior?
- 2. How do you support students with ADHD, autism, or anxiety during transitions?
- 3. Have you taught or practiced transitions as a specific skill in your classroom? What worked, and what didn't work?
- 4. How do your students know what's expected of them during transitions?

Use the resources below to help you better understand your students' needs and learn additional strategies for making transitions easier and more effective.

Teacher Tools

- Strategies to Improve Transitions—This resource in the appendix offers strategies for improving transitions. It can be used to enhance your current transition plan or confirm that it is on target. Specific examples of actions to take during the transition are provided.
- Classroom timers help students stay on task and track the remaining time in an activity. Digital timers can be displayed in the classroom. Below are several free resources for timers.
 - <https://classroomscreen.com/>.
 - <https://www.roomrecess.com/Tools/ClassroomTimer/timer.html>.
 - <https://www.thefountaininstitute.com/blog/free-online-workshop-timers>.

Deeper Learning

The following articles, videos, and other resources are available to provide a deeper understanding of the topic.

- How can we help kids with transitions? Child Mind Institute. <https://childmind.org/article/how-can-we-help-kids-with-transitions/>
- Why do kids have trouble with transitions? Child Mind Institute. (2025, February 4). <https://childmind.org/article/why-do-kids-have-trouble-with-transitions/>.
- Classroom Transitions. POPFASD. <https://www.fasdoutreach.ca/resources/all/c/classroom-transitions>

Scenario 3: Social Connections - Alina

School connectedness, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), refers to a student's belief that adults and peers in their school care about them and their success in learning. It has been linked to positive outcomes in adolescence and into adulthood.¹⁰ Implementing approaches that support school connectedness yields many positive outcomes for students, including better test scores, improved attendance, and higher graduation rates. These students often make healthier decisions. Building a connection to the school can frequently reduce social isolation by creating opportunities



for individuals to build positive relationships with their peers. The Office of the U.S. Surgeon General cites research that states the number of youth who experience isolation and loneliness has increased every year since 1976 and that today's young people have one of the highest rates of loneliness.¹¹

Below, you will find information that helps build connections between students, allowing them to fit in and find new friends, two things essential for school success. The more attached a student is to the school, the less likely they are to experience feelings of social isolation. The scenario below illustrates how implementing restorative and SEL practices can help create these connections. In the scene below, you will meet Alina, a new student who is very shy and struggles with social connections and verbal participation in class.

SCENES FROM THE CLASSROOM (11:15 AM)

It's lunchtime, and the cafeteria is bustling. There is a lot of noise and excitement as children from all grades stand in the lunch line and then join their friends at their tables for lunch. Alina looks around hesitantly, clutching her tray tightly in her hands and looking for a place to sit. Ms. Mathews, aware that this is one of the most challenging times of day for Alina, approaches her with a calm, reassuring smile.

She says softly, "It's very busy in here today. Would you like to sit alone or with a lunch buddy at the quiet table?" Alina nods toward the back of the cafeteria and chooses to sit at the quiet table. This area is designed for students who need a gentler social environment and some encouragement to interact. It includes a card game on the table that students can use to help break the ice.

A "Lunch Buddy," a peer trained as a classroom mentor, is already sitting at the table as Ms. Mathews guides Alina over. The lunch buddy doesn't push conversation with Alina but reaches for the deck of "Getting to Know You" picture cards with prompts like "What is your favorite food?" and "Where is a place you like to go?" She asks Alina if she would like to play

while they have lunch. Alina agrees and begins to open up, even laughing during the game.

Later, when it is time for the students to return to class, Alina helps clean up the game and walks beside her new buddy. Ms. Mathews notices Alina's small steps toward connection. She decides to talk to her one-on-one after lunch, before class starts again.

Ms. Mathews approaches Alina as she gets settled at her desk and quietly says, "I saw that you and your lunch buddy were laughing during lunch. How did it feel to have someone to talk to?" Alina responds shyly, "It was fun. She was very nice to me." Ms. Mathews says, "It is great to see how easily you were able to make a friend," and then asks, "Would you be interested in helping me work on a project to create more question games for the lunch tables? I would appreciate your help." Alina smiles and nods her head, "Yes."

Ms. Mathews smiles and walks away, hoping that participating in the planning for new games will give Alina a chance to use her voice and find a place to grow in ways that will help her become less isolated.

Scenario Discussion

In this scenario, Ms. Mathew utilized a "lunch buddy" as part of restorative practices to show Alina that she has a supportive school community. "Buddy" programs help students build positive relationships and enhance their social skills while fostering a positive school culture. Building relationship skills is an important SEL competency addressed in this scenario. The lunch buddy program is not only good for Alina; it also has benefits for other students and the school as a whole in the following ways:

- ◆ Students who serve as buddies can enhance their social skills.
- ◆ Buddy programs can help build a positive school climate.
- ◆ Programs increase engagement and allow students to feel more connected.
- ◆ Learning to be a buddy provides students with opportunities for leadership development.
- ◆ Create a supportive environment for all students.

Additionally, Ms. Mathews used affective language in an impromptu conversation to help encourage Alina to continue building relationships by becoming involved with a project. CASEL states that this type of interaction allows students to share their perspectives and experiences and can help students "become engaged as leaders, problem-solvers, and decision-makers."¹²

Consider the following questions about student isolation and connectedness in your classroom.

1. What systems are in place (or could be added) to support socially isolated students in building relationships?
2. How do we ensure shy students feel seen and included without pressuring them to speak?
3. How can you leverage peer leaders to build safe, productive peer connections?

Teacher Tools

■ **Getting to Know You.** This resource provides step-by-step instructions on how to use getting-to-know-you questions as an activity. The questions could also be used to build a game as described in the scenario.

36 Questions to Help Kids Make Friends
https://ggie.berkeley.edu/practice/36-questions-to-help-kids-make-friends/#tab__2

■ Parents can use this customizable template to provide information about their child’s needs in the classroom.

“About Me’: A Customizable Resource for Your Child’s New Teacher.” Reframing Autism, January 27, 2025.
<https://reframingautism.org.au/about-me-a-customisable-resource-for-your-childs-new-teacher/>.

■ **Buddy System.** The tipsheet linked here suggests utilizing a buddy system to help in a specific situation, such as assisting a child with transitions, remembering rules or procedures, or simply helping them fit in.

Buddy System Tip Sheet
<https://www.ecmhc.org/TTYC/documents/Folder2BuddySystemTips/FileA%2BuddySystem/BuddySystemTipSheet.pdf>

Deeper Learning

- How a Buddy Program Can Foster SEL – Edutopia
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-buddy-program-can-foster-sel/>.
- Five Ways to Help Students Feel Connected at School Again

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/five_ways_to_help_students_feel_connected_at_school_again.

- Promoting School Connectedness Through Restorative Practices
<https://www.cdc.gov/youth-behavior/school-connectedness/restorative-practices.html>.
- What is the importance of social connection in schools?
<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/sg-social-connection-schools.pdf>.
- Four Ways to Increase Student Connectedness
<https://www.iirp.edu/news/4-ways-to-increase-student-connectedness>
- Using Restorative Practices to Prepare Teachers to Meet the Needs of Young Adolescents
[Preparing Teachers to Meet the Needs of Young Adolescents.pdf](#).

Scenario 4:
Conflict – Jordan & Michael

Classroom and playground conflicts are not uncommon. These situations can get out of hand and often result in students facing disciplinary action. Instead of viewing these moments as problems, teachers can use restorative practices to see them as opportunities to develop social-emotional competencies, promote accountability, and strengthen relationships. In the following scenario, Jordan and Michael, two fourth-grade boys, are arguing because of a misunderstanding about turn-taking on the playground.



SCENES FROM THE CLASSROOM (11:45 AM)

The playground is filled with children running everywhere and making lots of noise. Jordan and Michael begin arguing about whose turn it is on the swings. The disagreement escalates quickly. Jordan shouts, “You always cut in line!” while Michael yells, “You never let anyone else go first!”

Mr. Evans, a fifth-grade teacher, hears the boys arguing and calmly walks over. Instead of reprimanding or separating them, he says, “Looks like something went wrong here. Let’s pause so everyone feels heard and safe.”

Mr. Evans invites both boys to walk to the Check-In Zone, a quiet, shaded spot at the playground’s edge. Here, conflicts can be discussed using the language and questions that the students have practiced in class. Once everyone is calm, Mr. Evans guides them in a pre-structured dialogue using key sentence-starting questions and encouraging the use of “I” statements:

“What happened?”

- *Jordan:* “I was waiting for the swing, and he ran in front of me.”
- *Michael:* “I didn’t see him. I didn’t know he wanted to swing. I thought he was just standing there talking.”

“What were you feeling at the time?”

- *Jordan:* “I was feeling mad and like it’s always unfair.”
- *Michael:* “I was feeling embarrassed because he yelled in front of everyone.”

“What do you need to feel okay again?”

- *Jordan:* “I need kids to take turns and not be skipped.”
- *Michael:* “I need to be able to explain myself next time instead of getting yelled at.”

“What can we do to make it right and move forward?”

Together, they agree to check in with each other to be sure someone is not waiting to take

their turn before getting on the swing. They shake hands and walk back to join the group.

Follow-Up in Class (Afternoon Circle)

Back in class, Ms. Mathews leads a brief **proactive circle** (without naming the students involved). Ms. Mathews invites all the children to the circle. Once they are all seated facing each other, she asks the group a question:

Ms. Mathews says, “It is important that we all get along well and respect each other during class time and especially at recess when things can quickly get misunderstood and seem unfair. What can we do when we feel like something is unfair on the playground?”

Students share ideas, and the class brainstorms a list of “Fair Playground Agreements” that she captures on the whiteboard. Ms. Mathews helps the students craft these ideas into statements and checks to ensure she is using the correct wording. Ms. Mathews says to the class, “We want everyone to feel like they had a part in writing these agreements. Does anyone have anything they think we should add?”

Once the agreements have been finalized, she asks all students to raise their hands if they agree with what is written. She then states that these agreements will be posted where we exit to the playground so we can all see them and help us remember how we have decided to treat each other.

Scenario Discussion

In this scenario, Mr. Evans, a teacher trained in restorative practices and SEL, stepped in to help two boys resolve a conflict. Rather than immediately separating or punishing the boys, he invites them into a conversation to help them resolve the issue. Using structured questions to address the conflict and build SEL competencies, he helps the boys de-escalate the issue and use their voices to rebuild trust. The competencies of self-awareness and responsible decision-making are addressed as the students discuss what they could do the next time this situation occurs. Following up, Ms. Mathews held a quick, proactive circle to capture the teachable moment and address a student-led class policy that was lacking, “Fair Playground Agreements.” Think about your current process for handling this type of disagreement and consider the following questions.

1. How do you respond to student conflict in ways that teach SEL competencies and problem-solving, not just enforce rules?
2. What shared routines or tools (like a “Check-in Zone” or sentence starters, using “I” statements) can you utilize to help students process conflict calmly and consistently?
3. How do you ensure that consequences are about making things right, not punishment?

- 4. What proactive SEL lessons or role-plays could help reduce future playground conflicts?
- 5. Do you have student-generated classroom agreements for how to treat others? What are some areas where you could create these?

Teacher Tools

- This PDF can be printed and used as a visual aid to guide you through a restorative conversation during conflicts.
Using “I” Statements - Conflict Resolution [PDF] - Teachers Pay Teachers
<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Using-I-Statements-Conflict-Resolution-PDF-7430846>.
- This printable tool provides scenarios to help students practice feeling statements. The scenarios can be used to teach communication skills.
I Feel Statement Practice Scenarios - SEL Conflict Resolution
<https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/I-Feel-Statement-Practice-Scenarios-SEL-Conflict-Resolution-9424442>.

Deeper Learning

- Creating Class Agreements and Goals – CASEL
https://schoolguide.casel.org/content/uploads/sites/2/2019/05/Creating-Class-Agreements_Class-Goals-10.2024.pdf.
- Start off the year with restorative practices. - International Institute of Restorative Practices
https://www.iirp.edu/images/2024/K12_Resources/Start-off-the-year-with-restorative-practices-IIRP.pdf
- Building Community With Restorative Circles – Edutopia
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/building-community-restorative-circles/>
- Guides for Implementation – International Institute of Restorative Practices
<https://www.iirp.edu/school-resources/guides-for-implementation>.

- Circle Packet with Planning Guide – Restorative Resources
https://www.restorativeresources.org/uploads/5/6/1/4/56143033/circle_packet_with_planning_guide.docx

Scenario 5:
Hyperfocus and Inattention - Jayden

Jayden is a creative visual thinker who sometimes hyper-focuses on his interests, struggling to complete assigned tasks. Hyperfocus “is the ability hyper fixate on an interesting project or activity for hours at a time. It is the opposite of distractibility, and it is common among both children and adults with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.”¹³ Hyperfocus isn’t a bad thing. It has its advantages, especially in completing tasks. However, when it interferes with a child’s ability to engage in other activities, it needs to be addressed. In this scenario, Ms. Mathews uses restorative tools to help redirect Jayden so that he is able to focus on the task at hand.

SCENES FROM THE CLASSROOM (12:15 PM)

Jayden runs into the classroom, talking quickly about a project he’s been thinking about on the playground. He has decided to draw a detailed blueprint of a space colony during art class. Ms. Mathews greets him warmly, “That sounds amazing, Jayden. I can’t wait to hear more about that during tomorrow’s drawing time. Let’s make a note so we don’t forget,” she says, handing him a sticky note and a pencil. Jayden quickly writes “space colony” and his name on the sticky note and hands it back to Ms. Mathews, who places the note into the class “Save Folder.” Writing his idea down allows Jayden to move on with getting ready for the afternoon lessons, and he bounces toward his desk.

Ms. Mathews has placed the afternoon prompt on his desk and a small visual checklist with pictures that read:

- 1) Read the prompt.
- 2) Get out your notebook and a pencil.
- 3) Draw or write your response.
- 4) Be in your seat and ready to start 12:20.

Placing the checklist on Jayden’s desk is part of her usual lunch routine although this sequence is always the same each day, she knows he might otherwise get lost in his thoughts and forget to start. To help him manage his attention, Jayden has access to fidgets in a basket near his seat, which is strategically located at the front table next to Ms. Mathews’ desk. He can also use a movement band on his chair and a sand timer to help him break down tasks into smaller steps.

Later, during the lesson, Jayden’s hyperfocus takes over, and he can’t stop thinking about his space colony idea. Ms. Mathews gently

taps the desk as she walks by to redirect him gently and positively, but he just can’t pay attention. They’ve also co-created a “When I’m Stuck” Plan that allows Jayden to move to the Peace Corner for three minutes to reset if he needs to, and today, he does just that. While in the Peace Corner, Jayden sets the three-minute timer, does twenty-five wall pushups, and then writes his ideas in his notebook to save for the next day’s drawing time. Feeling like he can focus again, he returns to his desk and continues working on his assignment.

Scenario Discussion

In this scenario, rather than reprimanding Jayden for being distracted, Ms. Mathews has built strategies that allow him to be successful, like the sticky note system to preserve ideas, a visual checklist to support executive functioning, flexible tools like fidgets and sand timers, and a “reset” plan to help him regulate his behavior independently. These strategies help Jayden develop the social-emotional learning (SEL) competencies of self-management using restorative practices that assist him in managing his challenges. Take a few minutes to consider the following questions and how the scenario’s information applies to your classroom.

- 1. What tools or routines are already in place to support focus and engagement in your classroom? What additional tools might you try?
- 2. How can you help students develop self-awareness about when they’re focused vs. distracted?
- 3. What’s the balance between honoring student passion and helping them meet learning goals?

Teacher Tools

- Visual schedules serve as reminders for students, can help increase understanding, let them know what is expected, and help them feel more independent. This resource offers free printable schedules for teachers to use.



5 Free Visual Schedule Templates (Plus How To Use Them) – We are Teachers
<https://www.weareteachers.com/visual-schedule-templates/#morning>

- This site provides an overview of utilizing movement breaks to help students refocus. All students can benefit from adding movement to classroom activities. The site hosts videos and descriptions on how to incorporate brain breaks.

Brain Breaks - The OT Toolbox
<https://www.theottoolbox.com/brain-breaks/>.

Deeper Learning

- A Guide for Teachers – Promoting Executive Function Skills in the Classroom
<https://proactiveapproaches.co.uk/promoting-executive-function-skills-in-the-classroom-a-guide-for-teachers/#:~:text=Teach%20emotional%20regulation%20strategies:%20Introduce%20techniques%20such,stress%2C%20and%20stay%20focused%20during%20challenging%20tasks.>
- Attention Strategies Fact Sheet – CHADD
<https://d393uh8gb46l22.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Attention-Strategies-infographic-FINAL.pdf>.



Scenario 6:
Emotional Regulation - Marcus

Marcus is a kind, sensitive child who struggles with anxiety and emotional regulation, especially when he finds something frustrating or difficult. He sometimes acts out when overwhelmed. These types of feelings are typical of many students. The American Psychological Association notes that children develop the skills at different times, and caregivers like parents and teachers “play a critical role in helping children learn to manage their feelings.”¹⁴ In this scenario, Ms. Mathews helps Marcus manage his emotions using SEL and restorative practices.

SCENES FROM THE CLASSROOM (1:15 PM)

It’s mid-afternoon, and Ms. Mathews has just completed teaching a math lesson. She has distributed a worksheet to practice these new skills. The students are beginning to settle in for some independent work to complete the worksheet. While most students get busy working on the problems, Marcus stares at the worksheet and gets increasingly frustrated and angry. His jaw is clenched, and his eyes dart from the paper to the whiteboard. He slams his hands on the table, causing his tablemates to be startled. Ms. Mathews notices

the tension. She approaches gently, crouching to his level. “Hey, Marcus, I feel like you might need to step away for a minute. Would you like to spend a few minutes in the Peace Corner, or would you prefer to talk to me? Whatever helps right now is what I would like you to do.”

Marcus pushes his chair over as he stands up and stomps straight to the Peace Corner, slams down into a beanbag, and picks up a breathing card. He slides on the noise-canceling headphones and puts his chin to his chest. After a few minutes, he grabs the mini-whiteboard and begins writing furiously. This is his go-to strategy when he needs to get something out and is not ready to talk.

Once he finishes writing and leans back into the beanbag, Ms. Mathews quietly walks over and kneels beside him. She gently asks, “Do you want to write more, or do you want me to read what you wrote?” Marcus pushes the whiteboard toward her. She silently reads the words he wrote, “I hate math, I hate not understanding, I hate school, I want to go home.” She leans in and tells him, “That seems like you are very frustrated, and I can tell you are having a rough day. Thank you for trusting me with your words and feelings.”

She pauses, giving him space to think before continuing, “You don’t have to carry those feelings all by yourself. Would it help to talk about what makes math feel so hard today, or would you like more time to breathe and take a break first?”

Marcus doesn’t speak; he just shrugs his shoulders, but he is still looking at her. Ms. Mathews continues gently, “Everyone, including grown-ups, feels stuck sometimes. You are not in trouble. You are having some big feelings. We can figure this out together.”

Ms. Mathews offers Marcus two options. He can spend a few more minutes in the Peace Corner doing a calming activity, or join her at the back table to work on some math problems together to help him understand. He decides to join her at the back table to work on his math problems.

Scenario Discussion

Rather than reacting with discipline or removing him from the classroom, Ms. Mathews applies restorative and SEL-based strategies to support Marcus and help him work through his frustration. She validates his emotions, offers him a choice, and allows him to self-regulate using the Peace Corner and familiar calming tools.

By communicating with Marcus using reflective dialogue and providing compassionate, structured support, Ms. Mathews models emotional regulation. She helps him reconnect to the lesson he was confused by without feeling shame or punishing him. This approach creates trust and reinforces the core SEL competencies of self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making. Everyone can benefit from learning how to regulate emotions, especially in frustrating situations. Take a moment to think through some questions related to this scenario.

- 1. How can you differentiate between disruptive behavior and behavior that communicates an unmet need, such as not understanding a lesson?
- 2. How can restorative conversations help students identify and manage their emotions over time?
- 3. What co-regulation strategies can be embedded into the class routine?
- 4. How do you respond to students in a way that preserves dignity and connection while holding them to the expectation that the work must be completed?

Teacher Tools

- 5 finger breathing - The Calming Corner <https://www.thecalmcorner.com/2018/11/material-share-monday-5-finger-breathing.html>

- Teaching Young Learners Self-Calming Skills – Edutopia <https://www.edutopia.org/article/teaching-young-learners-self-calming-skills>

Deeper Learning

- The Role of Emotion Co-Regulation in Discipline – Edutopia <https://www.edutopia.org/article/role-emotion-co-regulation-discipline>
- Co-regulation Strategies in Schools: How Educators Can Support Students’ Learning - NYU - The Institute of Human Development and Social Change <https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/ihdsc/path-program/path-perspectives/co-regulation-strategies-schools-how-educators-can-support>
- Five Discipline Strategies That Preserve Dignity – Responsive Classroom <https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/five-discipline-strategies-that-preserve-dignity>

Closing Circle

At the end of the day, Ms. Mathews helps students reflect on the events of the day without rehashing them or placing blame for things that went wrong. This practice is shared by the students each day and teaches them lessons to look out for as they work together to build community.

SCENES FROM THE CLASSROOM –
CLOSING COMMUNITY CIRCLE (2:20 PM)

During the day’s closing community-building circle, Ms. Mathews chooses a story to read aloud to her class. It is a short picture book about a character who learns how to name and manage their feelings. She shares a personal story about how hard it can be to focus and be kind when emotions are big. She doesn’t mention the issue between Michael and Jordan or Marcus’s outburst, but offers the class a shared space where they can feel seen and build their classroom community.



SECTION 3: REFLECTION AND PLANNING

Reflection

Thinking through your own experience with SEL and restorative practices, and after reading the above scenarios, use this section to reflect on your personal experiences. What is working for you? What feels challenging for you? The following prompts are designed to help you reflect honestly about your current and future use of these practices and their potential impact on your classroom.

Questions to consider:

- How can I modify my daily interactions with students to include more empathy or emotional awareness?
- When responding to conflict or misbehavior, what values or history guide those responses?
- What actions do other teachers take that foster a sense of belonging and trust that I want to replicate in my own classroom?
- What kind of learning environment do I want to create for my students and the school community?
- How might adopting a restorative practice strategy change how I engage with students?
- What is one thing you can commit to changing in your interactions that will help you adopt one new restorative or SEL practice for students with learning differences?

Administrative Support

Administrative support is essential to ensuring the successful implementation and continued use of restorative practices by teachers and staff. Administrators play a crucial role in implementing restorative practices by providing teachers and staff with professional development and training, and by fostering a culture that values relationships between teachers and students, which helps build the school community. When teachers receive support from administrators, it lays a foundation for safe, supportive environments where students can thrive. Although individual teachers can create a sense of safety and trust in their classrooms, all

students benefit most when restorative practices are applied consistently throughout the school. Applying the same practices across all classrooms ensures that all students learn in a nurturing environment, no matter which classroom they enter. School-wide implementation of these practices is crucial for building trust and promoting positive behavior. Administrators who support a school-wide approach help provide the needed tools and support to all teachers and students.

Although most administrators want to ensure that they are providing resources to their teachers, they may not know the best way to support them in implementing a restorative approach. Teachers may not know exactly what to ask for regarding that support.

To that end, a checklist was created to help administrators and teachers determine what planning and discussion are needed, ensuring alignment, accountability, and consistency in implementation. The [Restorative Practices Implementation Checklist](#) can be used as a planning tool to set implementation goals or to check the mid-year or end-of-year progress of a plan already in place.

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3. Illinois Report Card 2023–2024.
4. Hill Learning Center, "What Are Learning Differences? (blog), December 14, 2022, <https://www.hillcenter.org/what-are-learning-differences/>.
5. IIRP Graduate School, "Restorative practices: explained," March 11, 2025, <https://www.iirp.edu/restorative-practices/explained>.
6. Schott Foundation, "Restorative Practices: Fostering Healthy Relationships & Promoting Positive Discipline in Schools," <https://schottfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/restorative-practices-guide.pdf>.
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14. Kirsten Weir, "How to Help Kids Understand and Manage Their Emotions," *American Psychological Association*, April 21, 2023, <https://www.apa.org/topics/parenting/emotion-regulation>.

Additional Resources

Additional resources are provided here on topics that may not be covered in the case scenarios but are good practices. Educators could benefit from learning more about the impact these topics have on students. Many of these resources offer guidance on implementing restorative practices in schools, including step-by-step instructions, timelines, lesson plans, and rubrics.

- **Teaching Restorative Practices in the Classroom** https://www.restorativeresources.org/uploads/5/6/1/4/56143033/teaching_restorative_practices_in_the_classrooml.pdf.
- **Denver School-Based Restorative Practices Partnership** <https://rjpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/Restorative-Justice-Implementation-Guide.pdf>.
- **Chicago Public Schools** https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B18g5ywbF84_bk1nWU96OFdadE0/view?resourcekey=0-AttNLkuirAG7Rw2wvxz6Og.
- **Oakland Public Schools** <https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1692101675/ousdorg/mxzgprfq2ic2oq4ethyv/BTC-OUSD1-IG-08b-web.pdf>.
- **Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium** <https://maec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/MAEC-RestorativePractices-2021.pdf>.
- **SEL Tips Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility** <https://www.morningsidecenter.org/sel-tips>.
- **Psychological and Behavioral Impact of Trauma: Elementary School Students** https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/psychological_and_behavioral_impact_of_trauma_elementary_school.pdf.
- **Trauma Facts for Educators** https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/trauma_facts_for_educators.pdf.
- **Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) in Kids** <https://childmind.org/article/pathological-demand-avoidance-in-kids/>.

APPENDIX

Strategies to Improve Transitions

1. Establish Clear Routines
 - ✔ Teach and practice transitions just like any other classroom skill.
 - ✔ Model exactly what students should do: where to go, what to bring, what it looks/sounds like.
 - ✔ Use consistent language (“Books away, science notebooks ready”).
2. Use Visual and Auditory Cues
 - ✔ Timers, music, or a clapping pattern help signal when it’s time to transition.
 - ✔ Visual countdowns or posted step-by-step transition instructions on the board help students stay on track.
3. Give a Heads-Up
 - ✔ Provide a verbal warning 1–2 minutes before the transition, such as “In two minutes, we’ll be moving on to science. Please find a good stopping point in your reading.”
4. Set Time Limits
 - ✔ Keep transitions short but reasonable (1–2 minutes max).
 - ✔ Occasionally, time transitions to build efficiency and make it a game. Say, “Let’s see if we can transition to our seats and be science-ready in under ninety seconds. The first table to quietly complete this task gets to line up first for lunch!”
5. Use Positive Reinforcement
 - ✔ Acknowledge individuals or groups transitioning well: “I love how Table 2 is already seated with their notebooks open—great job being prepared.”
6. Have a “Reset” Plan
 - ✔ If a transition gets too loud or off-task, calmly pause and reset: “Let’s go back and try that again, this time remembering to be quiet and courteous.”
 - ✔ Make it part of your classroom culture that everyone is committed to improvement.
7. Assign Roles During Transitions
 - ✔ Rotate student jobs like “Timekeeper,” “Materials Manager,” or “Noise Monitor” to give students ownership and accountability.
8. Reflect and Review
 - ✔ After a rough transition, briefly debrief: “What went well? What can we improve next time?” This builds awareness and community responsibility.

Restorative Practices (RP) Implementation Checklist

Category	Action Items	Purpose	Status
Leadership Commitment & Vision	<input type="checkbox"/> Define and communicate a clear vision for restorative practices	Sets a clear direction and aligns staff with a shared purpose	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Embed RP in school mission and discipline policies	Sets a clear direction and aligns staff with a shared purpose	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Allocate time in staff meetings for RP goals and reflections	Keeps RP a priority and allows for regular feedback and improvement	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:

Category	Action Items	Purpose	Status
Professional Development & Staff Support	<input type="checkbox"/> Provide ongoing training for all staff	Builds staff competence and confidence in using restorative strategies	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Assign and support RP coaches/ champions	Offers peer support and promotes schoolwide consistency	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Include RP in new staff onboarding	Ensures continuity of practice and expectations with staff transitions	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:

Category	Action Items	Purpose	Status
Structured Implementation	<input type="checkbox"/> Schedule regular time for restorative circles and conferences	Embeds RP into daily practice rather than treating it as reactive	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Provide necessary materials (circle guides, reflection sheets, etc.)	Gives staff the tools needed to implement RP effectively and consistently	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Ensure staff have time and support to lead restorative processes	Addresses logistical barriers and supports follow-through	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:

Category	Action Items	Purpose	Status
Family & Community Involvement	<input type="checkbox"/> Communicate RP purpose and practices with families	Builds transparency and understanding, and aligns school-home expectations	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Offer workshops or resources for families	Helps families reinforce restorative values at home	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Partner with community organizations to reinforce RP values	Expands the circle of support and promotes a more restorative community culture	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:

Category	Action Items	Purpose	Status
Data Monitoring & Equity Review	<input type="checkbox"/> Track RP interventions and behavior data	Measures effectiveness and identifies trends	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Review discipline data for equity and adjust practices	Ensures fair and unbiased implementation for all student groups	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:
	<input type="checkbox"/> Share outcomes and improvement areas with staff and families	Promotes transparency, accountability, and collective ownership of progress	<input type="checkbox"/> Completed <input type="checkbox"/> In Progress <input type="checkbox"/> Not Started Notes:

Content adapted from:

- American Institutes for Research, *Integrating Restorative Practices in Schools: Considerations for Implementation*. Washington, DC: AIR, 2020.
- Bob Costello, Joshua Wachtel, and Ted Wachtel, *The Restorative Practices Handbook for Teachers, Disciplinarians and Administrators* (Bethlehem, PA: International Institute for Restorative Practices, 2009).
- Katherine Evans and Dorothy Vaandering, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice in Education: Fostering Responsibility, Healing, and Hope in Schools* (New York: Good Books, 2016).

HOW TO CREATE A PEACE CORNER

1. Create a Safe Space
- ✓ Set up your Peace Corner in an area with less foot traffic and away from other students.

✓ If there is space, set up a physical barrier to separate the area from the rest of the classroom. Low bookshelves work well for this and offer storage space.

✓ Make it cozy with soft floor mats or carpets and a comfy place to sit. Even using throw pillows or beanbag chairs would allow students to relax comfortably.

✓ If there is no space for a separate area, students can focus on their feelings by turning away from the rest of the class, sitting under a desk, or using other means of sensory blocking.
2. Have Visual Guides
- ✓ Hang up posters of grounding, breathing, or other calming techniques that are easy to follow.

✓ Techniques can also be kept in a binder with exercises students can use anywhere.
3. Provide Ways to Self-regulate
- ✓ Books

□ Many books are available to help develop emotional learning. They can be used in read-alouds, and kids can pick up their favorite when trying to calm down.

✓ Fidget Toys and Other Tools

□ Offer noise-cancelling headphones or earplugs to block out the sounds of the classroom.

□ Fidget toys can help use up nervous energy so students can focus on centering themselves.

□ Providing creative outlets, such as coloring books, can help take their mind off what upset them until they calm down enough to process.

□ Calm-down jars provide a calming tactile and visual tool that helps maintain focus. Calming jars are made with water, oil, water-based food coloring, and oil-based food coloring.

4. Teach Kids How to Use the Space

✓ Make the distinction that the Peace Corner is not for punishment or playtime.

✓ Teaching some Social-Emotional Learning lessons at the beginning of the school year lets them know how to make the most of the Peace Corner.

✓ Set rules

□ Will students need permission to use the Peace Corner?

□ Unless there is plenty of space, limit its use to one student at a time.

□ Set a time limit and provide a timer. If the time given is not enough for students to calm down enough to return to class, they can ask for more time.

Content adapted from:

Jill Staake, B.S., “How to Create and Use a Calm Down Corner in Any Learning Environment,” We Are Teachers, November 14, 2022, <https://www.weareteachers.com/calm-down-corner/>.

Stacy Tornio, “These DIY Calm-down Jars Will Have Your Students Mesmerized,” We Are Teachers, May 31, 2023, <https://www.weareteachers.com/calm-down-jars/>.

Supporting Every Learner: A Guide to Inclusive and Restorative Practices in Upper Elementary Classrooms

Breathing Tools

A poster titled "BUTTERFLY BREATHING" in large, bold, black capital letters. Below the title is a pink butterfly illustration with its wings spread. Below the butterfly, the text reads: "Take a deep breath in as you spread out your arms (wings). Let out your breath as you close your arms (wings)." The entire poster is enclosed in a dashed red rectangular border.

26

27

FLOWER BREATHING



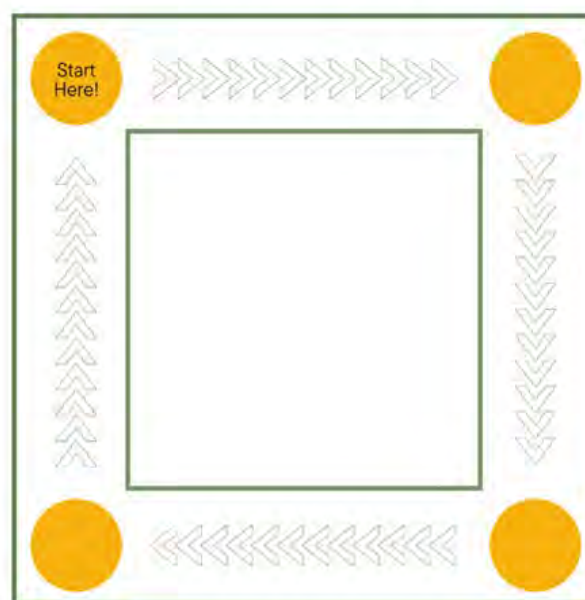
Imagine smelling a flower. Take a deep
breath in and hold it.
Let out your breath and repeat it as
many times as you need.

CUPCAKE BREATHING



Take a deep breath in and
smell the frosting, then blow
out the candle!

BOX BREATHING



Place your finger on the dot that says "Start Here!" Take a deep breath in and count to 4.
Move your finger to the next dot as you release your breath.
Breathe in at each corner and count to 4 until you complete the box.

MINDFUL DOTS BREATHING



Place your finger on the 10, take a deep breath and slowly release it.
Move your finger to the 9 and continue to slowly count down to 1.
Don't forget to take a slow deep breath with each dot.

3

BREATHING
TECHNIQUES
FOR KIDS

BUMBLEBEE BREATH

Lightly place a finger in each ear. Take a deep breath in through your nose, and hum softly like a bee as you breathe out.



RAINBOW BREATHING

Take a deep breath in as you follow the arc to the top, pause, then exhale as you follow the arc to the bottom. Repeat with each color.



5 - FINGER BREATHING

Trace each finger with your pointer finger. Take a deep breath in as you go up each finger and exhale as you go down each finger.



Emotion Cards



Embarassed



Happy



Anxious



Calm



Annoyed



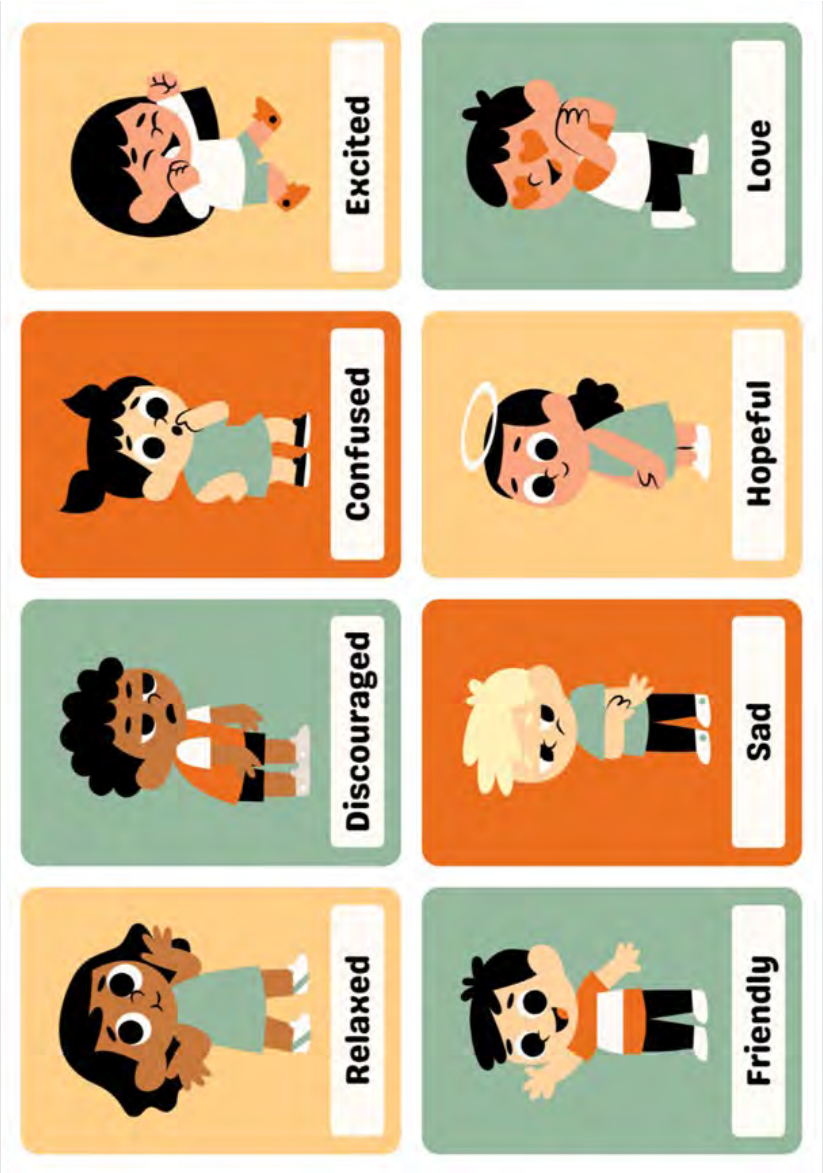
Proud



Angry



Shy



What zone are you feeling today?



Blue Zone

Sad
Tired
Sick
Bored
Feeling slow



Green Zone

Calm
Happy
I'm focused
Feeling okay
In control



Yellow Zone

Excited
Anxious
Nervous
Frustrated
Confused



Red Zone

Angry
Scared
Panic
I want to yell
I'm not in control

Feelings Meter

How are you feeling today?



Angry



Frustrated



Worried



Tired or Sad



Calm



Ready to Learn!

Grounding Techniques – Managing Anxiety

1. 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique

- ✔ Helps children focus on tangible things with their senses.
- ✔ Slowly identify five things they can see, four things they can feel, three things they can hear, two things they can smell, and one thing they can taste.

2. Roots Technique

- ✔ Children focus on a specific image.
- ✔ Ask them to imagine that they have roots extending from themselves into the ground, reaching deeper and deeper until they are stable and anchored.

3. Belly Breathe Technique

- ✔ Have the child take a deep breath through their nose until their belly expands. Have them hold their breath for a few seconds, then let all the air out through their mouth.
- ✔ During the exhale, they can imagine all negative thoughts and feelings exiting the body.
- ✔ Repeat this exercise until they feel calmer.

4. A-B-C Around the Room Technique

- ✔ Helps children focus on tangible things in their environment.
- ✔ Ask them to name something around them that starts with each letter of the alphabet (A, then B, then C)
- ✔ Let them name as many as they can until they check in on how they are feeling.

5. Stretching Technique

- ✔ Simple stretching can help relieve muscle tension.
 - 1. Bending over with arms dangling
 - 2. Reaching up to the sky

6. Hugging Technique

- ✔ Uses firm pressure to help stabilize and ground.
- ✔ Children can give themselves a firm hug and can pair it with an affirmation.
- ✔ A parent or teacher can also give the child a firm hug while saying the affirmation together.
 - ❑ I am grounded.
 - ❑ I am in control

7. Walking Technique

- ✔ Walking while aware of how their feet move on the ground can help to focus and dispel nervous energy

8. Reorientation Technique

- ✔ This technique is used for children who overthink and spiral into negative thoughts and feelings.
- ✔ Have the child recite facts about the current moment. You can also use cards with prompts for them to consider.
 - ❑ My name is...
 - ❑ I am ... years old.
 - ❑ I live in...
 - ❑ Today is...
 - ❑ My favorite color is...
 - ❑ My eyes are...

9. Coloring and Drawing Patterns

- ✔ Allows a child to focus on something more productive.

10. Stomp, Stomp, Blow Technique

- ✔ A more active grounding exercise may be necessary to manage negative feelings.
- ✔ Have the child stomp their left foot, stomp their right foot, and then breathe out quickly.
- ✔ They can focus on the sensation of their feet and imagine blowing out negative feelings or thoughts.

Content adapted from:

- Team, Calm Editorial. “5-4-3-2-1 Grounding: How to Use This Simple Technique for Coping with Anxiety,” Calm Blog, October 28, 2024, <https://www.calm.com/blog/5-4-3-2-1-a-simple-exercise-to-calm-the-mind>.
- Michael Vallejo, LCSW, “10 Grounding Exercises for Kids to Manage Anxiety and Worries,” Mental Health Center Kids, <https://mentalhealthcenterkids.com/blogs/articles/grounding-exercises-for-kids#:~:text=Firm%20pressure%20is%20an%20excellent,as%20many%20times%20as%20needed>.



Get To Know You Letter

 **Let's Get to Know You!**

Personal Information

Name

Birthday

Favorite Things

Movie

Book

Game

Subject

How Do You Learn Best?
Rate your Learning Style from one to five stars.

Seeing ☆☆☆☆☆
Hearing ☆☆☆☆☆
Doing ☆☆☆☆☆

What I Do Well:
What are some of your biggest academic strengths?

Your Teacher
What would you like me to know?
Any conditions or sensitivities that I should be mindful of?

What I Find Hard:
What are some things you struggle with academically? What can help?

Content adapted from:

- Sabrina Rivera, “Get to Know Your Students Letter,” Procreate, June 9, 2025.
- “‘About Me’: A Customizable Resource for Your Child’s New Teacher,” Reframing Autism, January 27, 2025. <https://reframingautism.org.au/about-me-a-customisable-resource-for-your-childs-new-teacher/>.

Affective Statements Worksheet

You can use an affective statement to tell someone how you feel or how someone's actions made you feel. These statements help you express your feelings without getting angry, starting an argument, or hurting someone's feelings. Affective statements usually follow this basic formula.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| First , state how you feel: | I feel ... |
| Next , identify the behavior: | When ... |
| Then , state what you want: | What I'd like/Need is ... |

Here are some Examples:

- **I feel** proud **when** I do well on my spelling test. **What I would like is** for my teacher to tell me I did a good job.
- **I feel** distracted **when** kids talk while we are supposed to be reading. **What I would like is** for everyone to respect the rules and be quiet.
- **I feel** sad **when** I'm not picked to be on a team until last. **What I would like is** for our teacher to choose the teams.

Now it's your turn. Complete this statement.

I feel _____ **when** _____

What I would like is _____.

Content adapted from:

- Affective Statements Practice, https://www.restorativeresources.org/uploads/5/6/1/4/56143033/affective_statements_practice.pdf.
- Lisette Casteneda, "Affective Statements in Restorative Classrooms," *Region 13: Education Service Center* (blog), January 5, 2023, <https://blog.esc13.net/affective-statements-in-restorative-classrooms/>.