

3 QUESTIONS ACTIVITY

RestorativeTeachingTools.com

OBJECTIVE

Participants will understand the restorative paradigm shift and to the three central restorative questions.

MATERIALS

You will need a short, simple scenario of an incident of harm that is relevant to the group you are working with.

INSTRUCTIONS

Start by introducing the purpose of the activity. You may explain, "One of the best ways to understand the crucial philosophical shift of restorative justice is to look at the questions that are asked in the traditional retributive system and in restorative justice."

Next, introduce the three basic retributive and restorative questions to the group.

Retributive Questions

What rule or law has been broken?

Who did it?

How should he/she be punished?

Restorative Questions

What happened?

Who was affected?

What can be done to repair the harm and make things right?

Explain that in order to internalize the restorative shift, we will apply these two sets of questions to a scenario together.

Read a short incident scenario out loud to the group (or ask someone from the group to volunteer to read the scenario).

Example Scenario:

“Sarah, a first year University student, was in her dorm room working on a paper that was due the next day. She went next door to ask her neighbor Jill a question. When she returned to her room a short time later, her laptop was missing. She immediately called her Residential Advisor, Harry. Harry filed a report about the missing laptop including that it had a green ‘Tree Hugger’ sticker on the front. Sarah had not backed up her paper, so she also sent an email to her professor explaining what happened and asking for an extension. A week later, Harry happened to see a laptop with a green ‘Tree Hugger’ sticker on it on Tom’s desk. He asked Tom where he got the laptop and Tom stumbled over his words for a while before admitting that he had taken it from Sarah’s room.”

As a group, apply the three retributive questions to the scenario. This can be facilitated as an open conversation with the group. For the third question, you may need to specify related to your context (i.e. “What punishment could Tom expect to receive in our university?”).

Next, apply the restorative questions to the scenario as a group. When addressing the first question (“What happened?”), you may want to highlight that there is additional information missing by saying, “I have given you a basic account of what happened. What else do you need to know in order to fully understand what happened?”

When addressing the second question (“Who was affected and how?”), take time as a group to make a long list of people impacted in order to highlight the extent of the ripple effect of the incident. Allow time for this learning to land with the group.

When addressing the third question (“What can be done to repair the harm?”), encourage creativity and ensure that ideas for repairing harm do not cause further harm to the characters in the scenario. If ideas that sound more like punishment come up, help the group to identify the need for repair underlying the suggested punishment, and together find a restorative way that it could be addressed. You may choose to share character descriptions including the strengths and assets of responsible and harmed parties in order to fuel participants’ creativity in generating ideas for reparation.

DEBRIEF

What shift did you notice when we changed the questions we ask? What did you notice about the people and concerns that were included and addressed with each set of questions? How did the questions asked impact the outcome?

LESSON

The restorative shift is very simple, but very powerful. Changing the questions we ask allows us to focus on those directly impacted and to seek repair. The interconnected fabric of our community becomes plainly visible when we engage with the restorative questions.