

Affective questioning

Restorative conversations focus on the behaviour of concern or incident, promote a positive approach to resolving conflict and stabilize the identity of all students involved in the matter of concern. Effective questions elicit empathy, remorse and learning. It is important to:

- Ask questions that encourage self-reflection and problem-solving.
- Be empathetic. Students are often distressed during conflict. Put things into perspective by asking distressed students “is this the worst thing in the world?”
- Listen to understand. Allow students involved in the conflict to tell their side of the story. Validate their feelings with statements like, “I can see you are feeling frustrated” or “I can see this has really upset you”.
- Avoid interrogation and personal judgments. This can cause defensive responses.
- Recognise that in some situations there are no ‘quick fixes’ and it may require further intervention or support to see positive behaviour change.

Restorative questions

These questions can be used in one-to-one conversations, small groups or more formal restorative mediation conferences.

- What happened? Value the student’s voices and perspectives. Focus on the timeline of events without blame. Understand and identify the triggers.
- What did you want? Establish the need. We all behave to meet specific needs.
- Is it okay to want _____? Validate the need.
- Did what you do work for you? Identify behaviour of concern
- What could you try next time that would work for you? Identify replacement behaviours
- Do you think that might work? Validate replacement behaviour
- Who has been affected by what happened? The key question to trigger empathy and remorse. Think beyond those directly involved to see the ‘ripple effect’ of actions and consider the personal impact.
- In what way have they been affected? Name or describe the impact and acknowledge the consequences.
- What do you think you need to do to make things right? Devise agreed, realistic and meaningful resolutions to heal the harm.
- If the same thing happened again, what would you do differently? An opportunity for learning and verbalising alternative strategies.