



Restorative
Thinking

Restorative Practice and a return
to the 'new normal'

A Children and Young Peoples' Services
(CYPS) Workforce Perspective

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COVID 19 and Psychological PPE

“We have to acknowledge the fear and uncertainty we are all feeling, without shame. We must name and normalise these emotions, giving each other permission to emote and talk about them. Key to this is creating and embedding safe spaces and safe processes, to have the conversations we might otherwise avoid.”

(Dr. Jeanne Hardacre, Impact4Health, and Dr. Alex Margetts, Clinical Psychologist, University of Leicester).

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We recommend that teams wishing to draw on restorative practice as part of a return to the workplace undertake training/coaching with a recognised training provider.

Introduction and context

When we start to return to 'normal', the workforce across CYPS will have many things to do and important starting points will be (1) re-establishing relationships between individuals in and across teams; and (2) processing the experience young people and parents will have gone through because of social distancing.

Both of these factors will need to be addressed before many staff will effectively be able to re-engage with the challenges in their case loads, some of which will be new as a result of the pressures of the last few months. It is here that Restorative Practice can be an invaluable tool within and across teams to allow the safe telling of stories by individuals, groups and the wider community.

The temptation to dive straight back into routines will be seen by many as a priority - and rightly so - but are we kidding ourselves if we think this will happen seamlessly after this long period of disruption to the lives of young people and families? What will make a difference though is the deliberate use of Restorative Practice to bridge the transition.

Restorative Practice is too often seen as a process to deal reactively with behaviour (a justice model using language like 'harmed' and 'harmer'), but it is so much more than this; it creates a context for dialogue, reflection, expressions of concern, and the sharing of successes; as well as giving young people the skills to process their own and others' thoughts and feelings.

It is likely that everyone in the workplace will have been affected by the isolation and claustrophobia that social distancing has created. But not everyone will have experienced it in the same way. A deliberate decision by CYPS to make a priority of social and relational interactions will help individuals and groups talk safely about their experiences of the last few months: what they have learnt, and what they found difficult. Without this context we will see personal 'traumas', fears and experiences communicated

through challenging behaviours that CYPS will find difficult to manage at a time when all staff need to process their experiences.

We believe we can use Restorative Practice to transition from 'social distancing' to an interconnected healthy workforce community through the deliberate use of the restorative processes described in this document.

We use the word 'deliberate', intentionally. There must be a real purpose to the use of Restorative Practice within a workforce (at all levels of hierarchy) and with families. This facilitates the rebuilding and reframing of relationships that are at the heart of a safe, healthy, nurturing environment that supports a positive relationship-led culture. It is not enough to hope that things will fall into place by some miraculous happenstance. Like all Restorative Practice work it has to be explicitly planned for, with a clear understanding that the methods used must equal the goals we want to achieve.

Restorative Practice

All of the processes described in this document can be delivered with all teams. Ideally, schools will be doing similar work so that a holistic approach to meeting needs is being addressed by all services that support families. These processes should not be seen as a 'one-off-approach': that's relationships done! - but as a series of processes in a range of settings that will see restorative practice become organic to the initial experiences of managers and staff as they leave the isolation of social distancing.

Circles

Well-managed circle processes can help create the transition back to work in a way that supports all interactions in the workplace. Circles will start the process of addressing any underlying issues, providing a safe environment for individuals and teams to process emotions, feelings, thoughts and to start to rebuild social capital and a sense of belonging.

There is much to be said about the value of circle practices in themselves, and we believe that the more organic to the working day they can be made, the more effective they will be for the dual purpose of (1) bridging the transition and (2) preparing the foundations for restoration. Staff will also get a sense of which team members need more support (and what sort of support) during and after circle sessions; they can then direct support to those who need it in the way/s it is needed. Circles processes are varied and all have very specific purposes for the development of staff relationships and re-engagement with the return to work. Their delivery in isolation will have an impact but it is their interrelationship that makes the sum greater than the parts. We believe the processes that follow can all involve the use of circles – though some are more circular than others!

Values exercise

A starting point for staff teams is a values exercise. This provides explicit language and behaviours to help staff move forward, and a collective sense of 'how we will work here'. This is a chance to revisit existing team values/norms and reflect on how far they are still appropriate in the 'new' conditions in which all staff now find themselves. The values chosen will also underpin all of the other suggested exercises described in this document.

As a staff: collectively come up with the key value words that you feel the team should hold at the heart of all its business and relationships. Do this in small groups then feedback to the larger staff group. This will need to be facilitated and the words/values collected centrally.

There then needs to be a second exercise where staff reduce the number of words down to 5 or 6 – this will require cross-group discussions and will need to be carefully facilitated to encourage all the voices in the room and to manage the important areas of 'friction' that the distilling of values will undoubtedly engender.

We now have a small number of words that will become the central underpinning of all workforce activities. The important thing now is to describe each of the words as language and behaviours. For instance, if one of the value words is 'fairness', then the activity to explicitly define the language and behaviours that illustrate 'fairness' should be undertaken by the whole staff community (there is of course a need for a facilitator to manage the work streams and act as secretariat during these phases).

What the teams need to do is describe the word as a way of being: rather than an abstract dictionary definition, something like:

In team X we believe in 'Fairness'; this looks like, feels like, sounds like, etc..

The process of reaching consensus, defining the words as language and behaviours, runs as a thread through the team, making the dialogue around values explicit and concrete.

This allows everyone in the team to share a consistent language that feeds into conversations about behaviour and relationships. This way, values become part of the currency of language used in team interactions and through the interactions with families and young people. This revisiting of team values will strengthen bonds as teams start to return to 'normal' working practices.



Restorative enquiry

Using restorative enquiry provides a consistent structure for language across teams. The questions allow staff at all levels of competency and confidence to manage circles in ways that have coherence. The questions also work in ways that are sympathetic with the wider processes in use within and across teams, and with families.

The questions allow staff to explore the story of the last few months, for themselves as individuals, as well as learning about the stories of their peers. The structure allows us to explore thoughts and feelings in a safe way; to look at the affect on those around us, and the wider community; and, finally, to discuss any learning that we can take for ourselves and others from the experience(s).

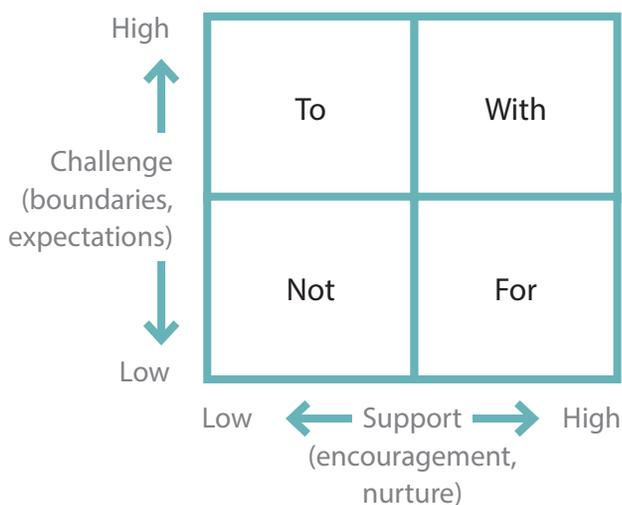
The questions:

- What happened?
- What were your thoughts and feelings at the time (different points over the time)?
- What do you think now and how do you feel about what has happened since?
- Who has been affected, and how, by the events of the last few months?
- What can you/we take from the experience to move forward?

This language structure gives managers and staff who are unfamiliar with, or lack confidence in, a more 'free-form' circle, a way of working through the circle process. It gives the team a real time snap-shot of the places staff may be with regard to their reactions to the isolation they have experienced and therefore allows colleagues and managers to better target support.

The Relational Window

Managers and teams can use the Relational Window (Adapted from P. McCold and T. Wachtel, from Glazer 1969) to encourage staff to explore their own and their peers' experiences and plans for the next stages of working. The processes described below have been developed by staff to use as an organic part of creating context and review; as a planning tool; for target setting and in engagement with families.



Using the Relational Window with teams to revisit norms and a culture for learning will, again, support the transition back to work. This exercise can be supported by the explicit values exercise that may have been completed, as described earlier in this document.

This exercise looks to establish working in the WITH box not as a standalone way of being, but as a balanced consideration of each of the other boxes. By a careful consideration of how to best work in the 'to', 'not' and 'for' boxes, we can avoid the behaviour/attitudinal traps that are prevalent in each of them (which is where many uses of the Relational Window end).

This means managers and teams can use the individual boxes and the relationships between the boxes to structure a discussion about establishing a WITH culture.

We shouldn't see the boxes TO, FOR, NOT as places to avoid at all costs. What we do want to avoid are the negative elements of each box and also consider, and be explicit about, the positive aspects of working in each box as a means of creating the conditions for the behaviours and language of the WITH box.

This approach provides the building blocks for staff to fully realise the benefits of working in an environment that has high expectations (challenge) and support. Thus an understanding of working WITH is achieved by having real clarity about how behaviours in the other three boxes can hinder or enhance us in establishing a culture of WITH for staff and teams, their colleagues and families.

The following activity can be led and facilitated by a manager or a member of staff, using a piece of flipchart paper showing the Relational Window:

1. Focusing on the WITH box: ask staff to describe what would be happening in their work if all parties were engaging in positive ways. What would they be doing? What would colleagues be doing? Ask for descriptions of active, explicit language as to what the WITH workplace is like.
2. Turning to the TO box: the manager/ team sets the parameters for the tasks they are about to embark on, or the focus of workstreams. "This is what we have to do... and this is why?" The facilitator asks, "Will the behaviours and attitudes within the WITH box support this? Do we have to add or change anything? Is what we are doing and the way we are going to do it, in the TO box, complimentary/supported or in conflict with working WITH?"
3. Looking in the FOR box: we ask staff to discuss the kind of support individuals and groups may need in this work. Who can provide it from within the peer group? Who gets extra support? How long is this support

to last for? Will this support help produce the atmosphere/culture described in the WITH box?

4. Now the NOT box: let us deliberately and explicitly ask staff to describe the behaviours that will be counter-productive to achieving the culture described in WITH; to allow the completion of tasks in the TO box; and the support described in the FOR box. This box is essentially giving the team the opportunity to discuss the behaviours that will be counter-productive for the whole group to meet its goals.

This exercise can be constantly reviewed by the manager and the team. It also makes a well-structured self-review at the end of a week: getting teams to reflect on goals they set out with, and any areas that may need to be changed to reach them, and acknowledging the areas where managers and staff are excelling.

These activities are designed to create a context for the return to work, supporting relationships and providing teams with skills in dialogue and reflection.

Walk the talk

An exercise that is very popular sees a kinaesthetic use of the window:

Individuals are supported by colleagues in its use when they actually walk round the boxes drawn on the floor to explore a problem, a relationship or a success: "Which box are you in with this situation?... How did you arrive in there?... What is it like in there for you?...Where do you want to be? How can you/we get you in there?...What will the impact on others be?"

The same processes can be used with families in the home.

Problem Solving Circles

Well managed circle processes help create the transition back to work in a way that supports all interactions.

The 'Fish Bowl' circle follows a very clear structure that enables staff to support and challenge one another to deal with a problem or issue in a solution-focused way. Teams will incorporate 'Fish Bowl' circles into their routines in different ways, dependent on numbers of staff, the geography of buildings and other factors. This process can be used to support the back to work protocols and then throughout the year.

In Wakefield and Liverpool, where Restorative Thinking is already working with workforce teams, this process has been used in the following ways: to review the week; discuss matters that have arisen; celebrate success and explore problems. The 'Fish Bowl' is a regular item on agendas. Space is made for a topic to be raised by an individual who wants support. It can also be used at the start of the return to work after social distancing protocols to look forward at which areas individuals and the team might anticipate a problem. The 'collective responsibility' aspects, and the solution-focussed elements, to this process allow a forensic approach to problems that does not get lost in anecdote and deflecting conversations.

The process needs to be always the same (as much as possible), as set out below:

The room is set up with a chair for the person with the problem to sit in. Opposite that chair are two chairs for the 'active' listeners. Everyone else sits in a circle or horseshoe around the triad.

Explain that (name) will have up to 5 uninterrupted minutes to tell about the problem/situation and can tell whatever s/he wants about the situation, without any questions or interruptions from anyone.

There are then up to 2 minutes for the two 'active' listeners (only) to ask clarifying questions.

The two listeners then have up to 7 minutes to tell (name) what s/he should/has to do to sort the problem out. They have to make very directed and solution-focused suggestions for what the person must do. Frequently, because we want to be respectful, we say things like "Did you speak to the other person?" Today, we're going to ask you to just say, "Speak to the other person."

If the two listeners 'dry up' the rest of the group can come forward and suggest ideas (this will be done in an agreed way). Usually a tap on one of the 'active' listener's shoulders sees someone from the outer ring swap seats and make their suggestion. They then stay there until the time runs out or they are 'tapped' out.

(Name) may not respond, but should sit quietly and take notes of everything that is said.

When time is out (Name) should say two or three things that s/he is going to do. They do not have to justify why they have chosen the actions they have selected. Agree a timeline for this and a return to check on what has happened as a result.

The 'Fish Bowl' process must stay inside the 15 minutes allocated so that it remains focused and participants know it will be different to other meetings that can meander on and on!

Concluding remarks

All of these activities are designed to focus staff on the transition to a return to work, and all encourage, in a structured way, every participant to have a voice. They can each be done as stand-alone activities. The interconnection of them all as a set of processes that support, and are supported by, the other processes mean that teams develop ways of building relationships at the heart of their practice. This can be carried forward into the rest of the year. The intention is to make Restorative Practice part of a repertoire of practice that staff draw on regularly, seen as transferable to 'real life'.

Restorative Practice aims to build up communities through developing strong relationships. Its focus on empathy – understanding the 'other' - challenges the divisive rhetoric we often see elsewhere, where difference is seen as a thing to be feared. It sees communities not as an excluding concept, but as a series of overlapping, shifting groupings where fragmentation into cliques around sexuality, gender, class, race and religion is reduced. This encourages dialogue that leads to understanding, which focuses on solutions rather than barriers. It opens up the space, where necessary, for conflict to be dealt with in a positive way.

Restorative Practice emphasises the importance of balancing power relationships in any dialogue. It develops skills in individuals and groups that allow them to engage in purposeful and deliberate dialogue about the issues that concern them. It gives them the ability to then go forward and speak authentically for their communities, at a local and national level. In short, it changes the passive nature of the relationship between the individual and the state.

Restorative Practice develops peoples' capacity to tell their own story and reclaim their sense of community. It rejects the paternalistic models of politics and social care – the 'we know what is best for you' approach. Self-management and self-government are important skills that should

be explicitly fostered in democratic societies; this means rethinking the roles of government and professional organisations that too often speak for communities.

Finally, Restorative Practice helps to connect the individual to their community, at a local and national level. This allows the individual to understand the patterns of society and therefore the importance of engagement with it.

The challenge for those advocating for Restorative Practice is to place it in the centre of the debate around developing communities and developing democratic involvement; not just position it as a reactive process or an adjunct to the criminal justice system.

Restorative Practice has a role to play in developing individual and community voice and enabling self-regulating, consciously empathetic action within the democratic process. Now we need to get back out there and keep making the case.

May 2020

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Restorative Thinking is offering short (half day) sessions with Leadership and staff to support the thinking and conversations around how restorative practice can support the return to work in ways that promote positive emotional and physical wellbeing.

This can also be done via zoom.

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