



EUROPEAN
FORUM FOR
RESTORATIVE
JUSTICE

RESTORATIVE SCHOOLS

Over the past 25 years restorative practice has contributed to making schools safer, happier more inclusive and effective learning environments in which to work and study. It provides everyone, adults and young people, with a replicable and consistent framework within which to build, maintain and, when things go wrong, repair relationships. By advocating that everyone is held accountable for the impact of their words and actions on others, there is a felt sense of justice and fairness amongst staff, pupils and families.



Restorative schools are supported by, and support, developments in the wider field of restorative justice. Sharing a deep understanding that we are all profoundly connected and that when something happens in a community it is the community that needs to be involved in finding ways to put things right. In the development of restorative cities, for instance, the development of restorative schools are often seen as an important component of the community and citywide development of restorative justice.circles.

WHY DO SCHOOLS NEED RESTORATIVE PRACTICE?

The foundational goal of all schools should be to establish the best possible climate for learning for students. Such a climate should also promote positive attitudes to learning, the development of self-managing behaviours, and more broadly, the personal and emotional development of students.

Students learn best when they feel safe, not just physically but also emotionally. Feeling safe means feeling valued, recognised and included in school life and not fearful of verbal or physical violence, ostracisation or ridicule. For this reason, schools ideally aspire to create learning environments in which relationships of respect, inclusiveness, fairness and tolerance prevail.

Schools that offer the best possible climate for learning to students rely on school staff who are student-focused and responsive to student needs. But, in order to perform their role effectively, school staff also need to feel safe and supported in their working environment.

Restorative practice provides a framework for creating and sustaining a school climate where teaching and learning can take place effectively and where students and adults can thrive as they learn from each other. A framework for a restorative school offers benefits of two kinds. First, it proactively will “create a culture of connectivity where all members of a community thrive and feel valued” (Davis, 2019, p.19). Second, because it is proactive in building positive relationships, a restorative school lowers the risk of breakdowns in relationships and poor learning outcomes (see evidence below). Restorative schools are capable of addressing harm and healing harms, but their greatest organisational advantage is that they can prevent harms from occurring in the first place. Restorative schools overturn the common assumption that restorative practice applies only when things go wrong.

WHAT IS A RESTORATIVE SCHOOL?

Creating a restorative school is a deliberate act of design that flows through structure, policies, procedures and everyday interactions. Four principles guide the implementation and embedding of restorative practices into every aspect of school life.

First, a restorative school encourages both staff and students to pursue respect for self, respect for others and respect for the environment. A restorative school is distinctive in how staff and students deliberate on their journey to these outcomes, reflect on their practice and challenge and eliminate departure from restorative principles and practice in school life, such as systemic inequity or discrimination.

Second, equality and equity sit at the heart of the school's focus.

Third, every person in the school community has a voice and has the right to be listened to and heard.

Fourth, learning and development are grounded in relationship policies that emphasise connection at the heart of learning behaviours, rather than in policies that see school staff and students as isolated actors. Restorative schools create the context for school staff and students to co-create the conditions for the strengthening of relationships and rights as well as underpinning teaching and learning.

These principles mean that the whole community (students, staff, parents/carers, wider community and governors) develop the skills, knowledge and understanding so they can build, maintain and repair relationships in accord with restorative practice. Restorative schools develop the skills in students to be active participants in the development of the culture in the school. They develop the ability to engage, proactively, in discussions about school life and can also be trained to lead in conflict resolution when offered the opportunity to train as peer mediators.

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF A RESTORATIVE SCHOOL?

Relationships are nurtured through regular meetings that are typically held in circle. Meetings of this kind are held throughout the school community: amongst the leadership team; amongst staff as a whole and also faculties/departments; amongst students in their classes; amongst parents of the children in the same class or year group.

Valuing individuals' voice is actioned through mechanisms whereby everyone is heard. Restorative schools invest in deliberative processes to ensure that everyone knows that their voice matters and they feel heard. Processes include: circles; mentoring and buddying schemes; collaborative decision-making; and communication enhancement that overcomes barriers of different languages, ethnicities or neuro-diversity.

Emotional and Social Literacy is developed and nurtured through the explicit development of skills in students and school staff on how to have restorative and relational conversations that are preventive in avoiding conflict and harm and that are reparative when conflict and harm occurs. Restorative and relational conversation is modelled by all in the life of a restorative school.

Restorative practices encompass the full gamut of school activity from the smallest informal act to the most formal of meetings. As such, restorative practice includes: the affective language used by one to another; restorative listening with others and enquiry to fully understand others' points of view; face-to-face small restorative meetings; formal restorative conferencing; and problem-solving circles.

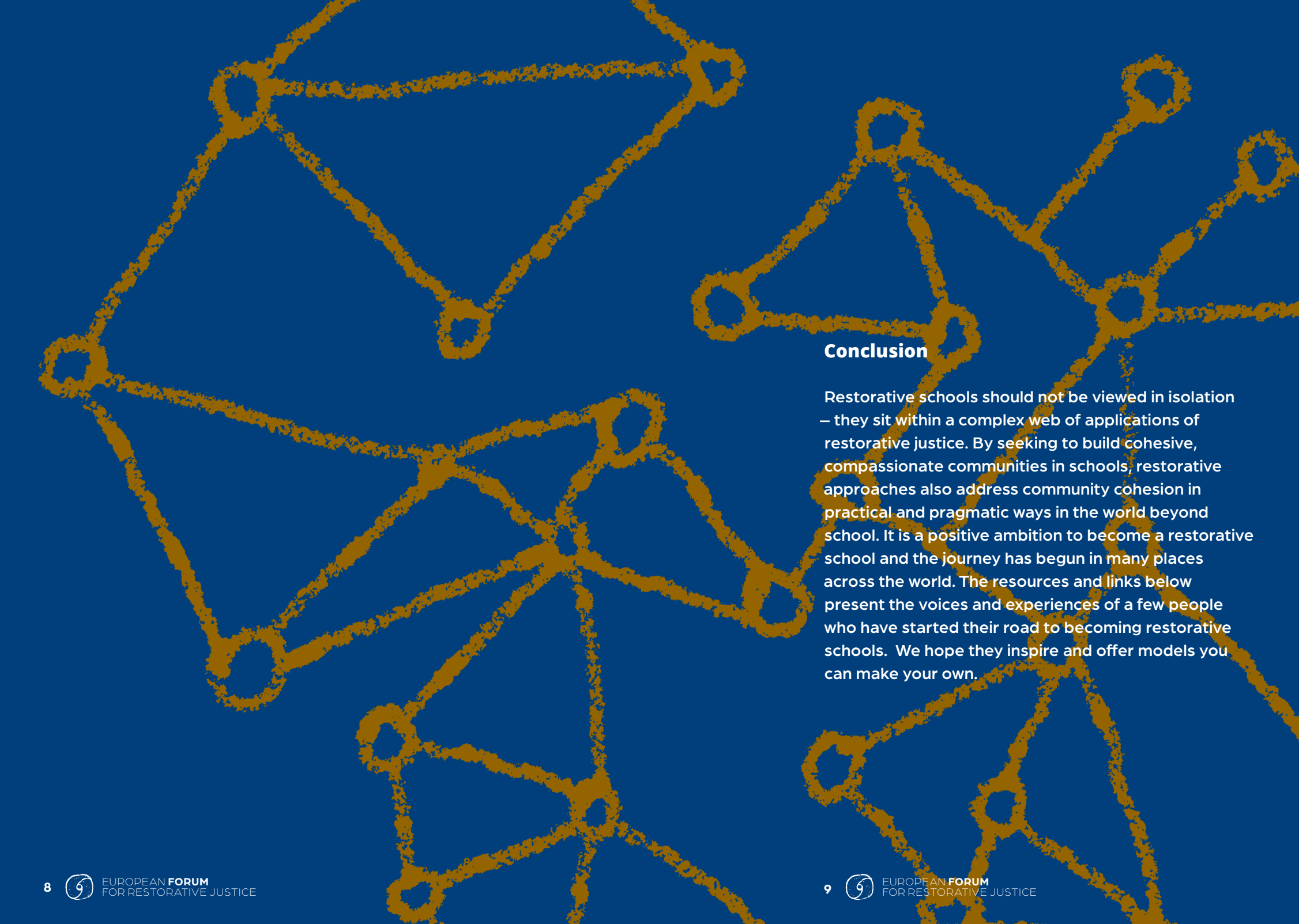
Restorative pedagogy refers to teaching which is imbued with the principles of equality and equity, voice, relational learning and development, respect for self, others and the environment, and reflection on adherence to restorative principles and practice. Restorative principles and practice are modelled in every part of the school: in how the curriculum is delivered; through integrating emotional literacy into lesson-planning; through embedding co-operative learning in all practices across the school.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF RESTORATIVE PRACTICE IN SCHOOLS?

- In a systematic review of the evidence, Mas-Expósito et al. (2022) conclude that whole of school restorative approaches can be used "through all educational stages to deal with diversity and inclusion while promoting a school culture of peace based on the positive management of relationships and conflicts" (p. 1). In a systematic literature review, Lodi et al. (2021) concluded that restorative practices "can improve the school climate, discipline, positive conflict management through actions that aim at preventing suspensions, exclusions, conflicts, and misbehaviours (e.g., bullying)" (p. 96).
- Some more specific findings from evaluations of restorative school interventions are:
- Students feel safer and more connected to schools (González, 2012) with a "true sense of belonging" (Riestedberg, 2003, p. 3).
- Students and staff have improved emotional literacy (Skinns et al., 2009).
- Students and staff have improved well-being with improved communication and relationships between students and staff and between students (Skinns et al., 2009).
- Students feel more confident in speaking out and reporting incidents because they know their voice will be heard and incidents will be dealt with effectively and fairly (González, 2012; Skinns et al., 2009).

- Reports of “children developing conflict resolution skills” (McCloskey et al., 2008, p. 410): For example, 69% of students said they were better able to resolve conflicts (Riestenberg, 2003, p. 3).
- Students are generally more positive about their whole school experience and describe staff as fair and listening to “both sides of the story” (McCluskey et al., 2008, p. 410).
- Students’ attendance at school improves (González, 2012; Skinnis et al., 2009).
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- Students’ attendance at school improves (González, 2012; Skinnis et al., 2009).
- Staff morale improves (McCloskey et al., 2008).
- 62.5% fewer staff absence days after eight months of implementing restorative practices (Mirsky, 2009).
- Since introducing restorative practice in 2015, staff days lost to absence in 2016/17 have fallen by 7% compared to 2015/16 and 62% compared to 2014/15 (Restorative Thinking Ltd., 2017).
- Students and staff benefit from decreases in “lost instruction due to formal discipline referrals and suspensions” (Riestenberg, 2003, p. 3) and more generally there is less disruption to learning (Skinnis et al., 2009).
- The role of facilitator changes teachers from punishing to supporting the parties to keep their promises and change their behavior (Gellin, 2019).
- Dramatic decreases are reported in disciplinary referrals, in and out of school suspensions, expulsions and time in suspension (Riestenberg, 2003).
 - 57% drop in disciplinary referrals
 - 45–77% drop in school suspensions
- Detention referrals can drop by 35% and even more (43%) for African-American students (González, 2012, p. 309).
- Average time of in-school suspensions can drop by 35% (Riestenberg, 2003).
- Expulsion can drop by 43% (González, 2012, p. 324).
- Recidivism rates for students can be reduced (González, 2012, McCold, 2008).
- In Finland trained peer mediators mediate approximately 10,000 peer conflicts each year, 95–97% of which lead to agreement on a change in harmful behaviour, which is confirmed at follow-up meetings (<https://sovittelu.com/vertaissovittelu/in-english/>).



Conclusion

Restorative schools should not be viewed in isolation – they sit within a complex web of applications of restorative justice. By seeking to build cohesive, compassionate communities in schools, restorative approaches also address community cohesion in practical and pragmatic ways in the world beyond school. It is a positive ambition to become a restorative school and the journey has begun in many places across the world. The resources and links below present the voices and experiences of a few people who have started their road to becoming restorative schools. We hope they inspire and offer models you can make your own.

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Websites

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- <https://www.connectrp.ie/>
- <https://www.restorativethinking.co.uk/schools/about-us/>
- <https://trygglaring.no>

Videos

- <https://restorativethinking.co.uk/resources/>
- <https://www.dropbox.com/s/x2m0d7ili61zpem/World%20Conference%20Film.mp4?dl=0>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9MsWz47rYyw>
- <https://vimeo.com/662949328>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oovkerj-kUY>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EtJQjtc97fM>
- Restorative mediation "For life":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bPAQmkgnA4>

Want to know more?

- Contact us <https://www.euforumrj.org/en/restorative-schools-working-group>

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is an approach of addressing harm or the risk of harm through engaging all those affected in coming to a common understanding and agreement on how the harm or wrongdoing can be repaired and justice achieved. Its practices (such as mediation, circles, conferencing) have been offered and delivered to address harm in different conflict areas, such as justice, education, peace-building, families, organisations, and communities.

EFRJ

The European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ) is the largest European professional network on restorative justice. We count more than 400 members, including 80 organisations, working on restorative justice practices, research and policy in Europe and beyond. Since our establishment in 2000, we offer support to implement and develop restorative justice through trainings, consultancy, research, advocacy, policy developments and events. Find our publications and more information on www.euforumrj.org.

Authors: Valerie Braithwaite, Aleksandra Dopierala, Belinda Hopkins, Nino Shatberashvili, Christopher Straker, & Nina Wroldsen, European Forum for Restorative Justice

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**EUROPEAN FORUM
FOR RESTORATIVE JUSTICE** VZW

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Hooverplein 10 3000 Leuven

0474 656 137 • RPR Leuven

www.euforumrj.org

info@euforumrj.org

Tel. +32 (0)16.373.598

Mob. +32 (0)466.20.91.12



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