



Creating Connected School Communities

A practical guide for strengthening relationships, trust, and belonging across the school community

Strong school culture is not created by posters, slogans, or discipline policies. It is built through the everyday interactions students, educators, administrators, staff, and families have with one another. When relationships are strong, schools are better positioned to navigate conflict, respond to harm, communicate across differences, and create environments where people feel seen and connected.



Watch for These Signs

- the same conflicts keep resurfacing
- behavior concerns are addressed without examining what is underneath them
- students do not feel heard until a situation escalates
- staff relationships are strained or communication has become transactional
- restorative practices are treated as something used only after harm occurs
- belonging is discussed more often than it is experienced



Five Practices That Strengthen School Community

- 1 Build Before You Repair**
Do not wait for conflict to introduce relationship-building practices. Create regular opportunities for students and adults to connect before something goes wrong.
- 2 Ask What Happened Before Asking What Rule Was Broken**
Understanding context does not eliminate accountability. It creates the information needed for a more meaningful response.
- 3 Make Student Voice Part of the Process**
Students are more likely to engage when they have meaningful opportunities to speak, listen, reflect, and participate in what happens next.
- 4 Strengthen Adult Relationships Too**
Restorative school culture cannot exist only between adults and students. Staff culture matters.
- 5 Treat Restorative Practice as Culture, Not a Program**
Circles are one tool. The larger work is building the capacity to communicate, navigate conflict, take responsibility, repair harm, and strengthen relationships.



Take This Into Your Next Staff Meeting

- Where in our school are relationships strongest?
- Where are they most strained?
- What are we currently treating as a behavior problem that may also be a relationship problem?
- What could we begin doing before conflict occurs?

