



Restorative Justice Program (RJP) Circles By Bettina Graf, Student Case Manager and Restorative Justice Coordinator

The fundamental hypothesis of Restorative Justice Practices is that “human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when people in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them.”

There are two tiers for RJP – *The Circle* which is the first step intervention piece and *The Conference* which is a non-punitive philosophical approach to discipline which repairs harm done, teaches accountability for offense and how to move forward without shame.

The restorative circle structure conveys: Equality, Safety, Trust, Responsibility, Facilitation, Ownership and Community Connections. The circle establishes a strong and supportive relationship among students and teachers in the classroom. The circle promotes connectedness and facilitates the development of character which improves academic performance. The circle builds community, trust, respect for individual opinions, empathy, active listening and encourages problem solving. The circle also reduces bullying, conflict, isolation, building *strong* peer-to-peer and student-adult relationships. It gives students a chance to tell their stories and to participate in the classroom setting in a way that is very different from the traditional classroom structure.

The circle integrates Common Core through Explicit Language Instruction. This includes attention to:

- Accuracy of comprehension (listening and reading) and production (speaking and writing)
- The demands of audience, task, purpose and discipline (discourse style and register)
- Exploration of language choices and the development of meta-cognitive awareness

Rich language knowledge is needed to:

- Engage in grade-level reading and writing
- Express thinking orally and in writing
- Engage in social and academic conversations

SMUHSD integrated circles into the Guided Studies (GS) classes in 2013-2014. On Fridays during 7th period, the Guided Studies classes facilitated a classroom circle during the beginning of class for approximately 30 minutes. I facilitated the initial summer training for all district GS teachers as well as follow up mini-trainings, and classroom circle visits. The 11 grade GS class

participated in the filming of the different types of circles hosted in their classroom. Student survey results and teacher conversation supported the success of the circle. In 2015 the GS facilitators moved towards the use of PCRC to facilitate conflict circles.

In 2015-2016 Peninsula Alternative High School implemented a 5th period weekly circle for all students in their individual classes. The curriculum for the circle is based on the textbook: ***Circle Forward, Building a Restorative School Community***, by Carolyn Boyes Watson and Kay Pranis. Each week, a curriculum for the circle is prepared and meetings with teachers take place to discuss curriculum and make changes as needed. On the October 12, 2015 PD Day, staff conducted a training on RJP circles and conferencing for district deans as well as a short introduction on RJP to district counselors. On September 25, 2015, staff co-facilitated a training with district School Resource Officers (SROs) at the San Mateo Police Department. Deans are currently using circles and conferencing with students in conjunction with mediations and discipline. SRO's participate in RJP conferences and circles.

SMUHSD Alternative to Suspension Program is also based on the RJP philosophy and has applied for the 2016 Kent Award for our work with students

Sample of a circle:

Elements of a Healthy Relationship Circle

Purpose: To help participants think about the elements of relationships that bring positive benefits in their lives.

Mindfulness Moment: Pause, breathe and listen to the sound.

Check – in Round: How are you doing? Is there anything in particular on your mind that is important for us to know and that you feel comfortable sharing with the group?

Main Activity: Identifying behaviors that makes you an others feel positive.

Ask each person to brainstorm for five minutes about the following three questions and to write them down in their journal. Share out with the circle

- What do you do in your relationships with other people in your life that makes them happy, peaceful and joyful?
- What do other people do for you that make you happy, peaceful and joyful?
- Can you describe to us one relationship in your life that you consider to be a healthy relationship?

Check Out Round: In two words or less, how did you like the circle today?

