

The Restorative Classroom Information Packet

Overview

The Restorative Classroom (RC) is a group of professionals who have dedicated their professional lives to the service of struggling children. We cherish children and we see past their difficulties. Children can't be bad. It is not their *will* that get in their way it's their *skill* (Greene & Albson, 2006).

To help children we use kindness, compassion, and the best psychological research available. Our motto is, "let's stop, talk about it, and figure it out together." We are an evidence-based, therapeutic program operated by the White River Valley Supervisory Union. This program provides students (K – 8th) who struggle with emotional difficulties with therapeutic and educational supports. We provide these students the necessary supports to enable them to return to a typical classroom. The primary goals of The Restorative Classrooms are to address social, emotional, and behavioral concerns. The program is grounded on the premise that for some children, emotional difficulties constitute the chief obstacle for their learning, and that these children require that adults pay closer attention to them. It is the aim of the program to bolster students' self-esteem, as well as emotional and behavioral regulation, in an effort to enable them to return to participate in a regular classroom setting. Our program is regionally, nationally, and internationally known.

The RC Program:

The Restorative Classroom program consists of three highly supportive classrooms. Each classroom has slightly different expectations:

- RC1 supports Kindergarten through second grade students.
- RC2 supports third grade to fifth grade students.
- RC3 supports sixth through eighth grade students.

Program Goals:

The Restorative Classroom addresses students' emotional needs by inviting children to recognize:

- behaviors have meaning for themselves and others
- behaviors have both negative and positive consequences
- people are responsible for their actions

These goals will be met using a combination of relational approaches, de-escalation techniques, and specifically tailored interventions aimed at increasing personal responsibility and understanding of the importance of school community and citizenship. The overall goal of The Restorative Classroom is to teach students the skills necessary to navigate a typical classroom setting.

Approach:

The Restorative Classroom relies on three interwoven approaches: group process, self-esteem development, and de-escalation. The following outlines each of the three components. The foundation of The Restorative Classroom is group therapy. Students will be provided open-ended process group opportunities each day. Group time helps students learn about themselves and how their actions impact others. Secondly, staff members provide students with evidence-based relational components required for the development and maintenance of self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined as a psychological core which enables children to withstand frustration and regulate their emotions and behaviors. Third, the Restorative Classroom emphasizes de-escalation when students become too emotionally charged for learning.

We use a team approach. Students complete work, eat meals, engage in recess and group activities with Restorative Classroom peers and staff. Students are highly supervised in a classroom setting with a high staff to low student ratio. RC1 and RC2 students work in a capsule style manner. RC3 students are encouraged to attend lunches, classes, and other activities with same-age peers.

Location

The Restorative Classroom Program has three classrooms. Two classrooms are in the South Royalton Elementary School, South Royalton, VT. The third classroom our middle school program is located in the White River Valley Middle School in Bethel, VT.

South Royalton

Each of the South Royalton classrooms are equipped with:

- Activity space
- Kitchen (Stove, Oven, Refrigerator, and Sink)
- Learning Space with a desk for each individual student
- Two cool-off spaces

RC2 (grades 3rd -5th) is equipped with an private office space for teachers and an office space for students who wish to work independently with an adult.

Bethel

The Bethel Campus is equipped with a private RC bathroom, cool-off space, and office. The classroom also has a dinning/activity area. Each RC Bethel student receives his or her own desk.

Staffing:

Appropriate staffing is vital to student's success. Working with children is difficult, but it takes someone with patience, openness, and a willingness to learn to work with a child suffering from an emotional disturbance. Therefore, not everyone can work at the RC. In addition to typical hiring practices, RC faculty applicants are carefully scrutinized. Each RC staff member must commit to both actively learning new therapeutic and educational approaches, as well as working as a dedicated team member for the betterment of children. Each classroom is staffed full time with:

- A Team Leader whose role is to communicate with parents.
- A Special Educator with a specialty in behavioral issues.

- A Classroom Counselor and/or a Para-Educator with additional training.

A licensed Psychologist provides continual onsite consultation and ongoing program development and training.

Each year Restorative Classroom faculty attend additional training at regional psychotherapy and educational conferences that have included:

- Harvard Medical School, Continuing Education
- International Association of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology
- Vermont Association for Psychoanalytic Psychology
- Council of Administrators for Special Education

Students:

The Restorative Classroom elementary classes can teach up to seven students. Currently, our middle school program can accommodate four. The Restorative Program assists students whose primary difficulties are emotional regulation. Not all students will respond well to the RC. The RC program uses a group model and some students, for a variety of reasons, may not respond to the RC approach. If faculty or families believe that the RC approach is contraindicated then the RC will meet with the student's family and work together to find an appropriate placement.

To be considered for enrollment, students must have not responded to less intensive behavioral approaches, including but not limited to:

- Counseling
- Para-professional support
- General classroom based behavioral interventions

Enrollment:

All placement decisions are at the parents' or guardian's pleasure and are made through a 504 or IEP team process. Should a student, his or her team, and/or parents wish to enroll in the Restorative Classroom, they are encouraged to contact Deb Matthews, Special Education Director. The enrollment process consists of the following.

1. Complete referral packet
2. Meet with clinical director who discusses the program's strengths and weaknesses
3. Meet the program's team, role play scenarios
4. Discuss transportation details with Tracey Englehart
5. Sign consent to treat form

Daily Schedule:

Routine is important, but in and of its self is insufficient to create lasting change. Lasting change occurs through relationships. That said, the RC has a schedule, but reserves the right to be flexible. Should a student be deeply engaged in an assessment, the learning task takes priority. Moreover, should the class accomplish a goal or preform in an outstanding manner, the class may be rewarded, which may alter the schedule. The daily schedule is as follows:

Monday through Thursday

7:30 - 8:30: Staff Meeting
8:30: Student Arrival
8:30 - 11:30: Academics
11:30 - 12:30: Recess/Lunch/story time and or art time
12:30 - 2:00: Group Time/Team Building
2:15: Goodbyes
2:30: Student Dismissal
2:30 - 3:30: Staff Meeting

Friday

7:30 - 8:30: Staff Meeting
8:30: Student Arrival
8:30 - 11:30: Academics
11:30 - 12:00: Group
12:00-12:20: Lunch
12:20-12:30: Student Dismissal
12:45: Staff Training/meetings

List of Services:

List of services that the Restorative Classroom (RC) provides:

- Close supervision with a high staff to student ratio
- Staff with additional training in:
 - Reducing Anger and Violence in Schools: An Evidence-based Approach
 - De-escalation
 - Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI)
 - Cognitive-Behavioral Therapeutic Interventions
 - Relational Psychotherapy Interventions
 - Psychodynamic Interventions
- Small group and/or one-on-one differentiated instruction
 - Increased flexibility in instruction and lesson planning
 - Increased individual learning assessment and strengths-based learning
 - Increased opportunities for student input
- Student led activities
- Each student receives his or her own desk and work space
- Student centered pacing
- Private learning/focusing office areas
- Fewer staffing transitions
- Fewer transitions than a typical classroom
 - Fewer classroom relocation requirements

- Daily group/play therapy
- Cool-off, time-out spaces
- Immediate consequences for unexpected behaviors all completed with an adult
- Access at any time to a trained therapist or to process with a staff member of their choosing
- The ability to take a break from academic responsibilities at anytime
- Staff recognition of student's academic or social/emotional successes
- Academic blocks have shortened duration but increased intensity
- Increased access to hands-on learning
- Increased access to project-based learning
- Increased access to sensory/ movement breaks (students can take a break for brief periods to exercise)
- Immediate breaks for snacks when necessary
- Focus on transferable skills
- Embedded essentials (physical education, visual arts, and dance)
- Increased access to walking field trips
- Immediate rewards for academic and social/emotional successes
- Access to a trained and certified therapy dog

“Here and Now” Counseling:

A whole lot of care, for a very narrow task. The RC therapeutic approach is based on the “here and now.” Here and now therapy means that we believe what helps children grow is learning and teaching coping skills in the moment. That is, we help students learn to get along with others at school and how to manage the school day. RC faculty do not give advice about how to live or behave outside of school. This means, that RC faculty do not critic or pass judgement regarding how students or family members behave at home.

Progress Monitoring/Evaluation:

The Restorative Classroom tracks behavioral and academic progress. We use STAR 360 and other assessments to assess academic progress and clinical notes for recording social/emotional progress. Parents are called weekly with progress updates, and progress meetings are held when requested by parents or other team member(s).

At least annually, each child's 504/IEP team considers and makes decisions regarding the child's readiness for integration back to the general education environment (or other placement options), based upon the evaluative data described above. When evaluative materials (progress reports and data) show that a student may be ready to re-integrate into the general education environment before the next annual meeting, the team will meet to review progress reports and data to decide whether the student is ready to return to a general classroom placement. Parents and/or staff may

request such a meeting. Transition to a typical school is strength-based and individually tailored to each student.

Outcomes:

Measuring outcomes in mental health is a difficult. Psychology has yet to have developed a standardized approach for assessing change. Moreover, children naturally mature so determining social/emotional growth is challenging. Additionally, life happens. Tragedy and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) disrupt children's typical development. Therefore, the RC uses successful reentry into a typical classroom as an outcome rubric.

Social/Emotional Success

The RC began supporting students February 15, 2015. As of November 2019, the RC has served 27 students (each student year representing a single student). In that time, The RC has enabled 41% percent of those students to return to a typical classroom without relying on one-on-one paraprofessional support.

Conclusion

No one wants an emotional disability. It is heart breaking for anyone to learn that his or her child's emotional health prevents their child from learning. This is because both emotional health and academic skills pave the road to success. We at the RC provide troubled students with highly trained professional staff and sophisticated interventions to help children. We recognize that families come to the RC only after their student hasn't responded to a typical education. We know that it's difficult to hear that a student is struggling. We at the RC know this dilemma well and strive to provide students with the highest quality of support. This requires a significant trust among everyone to help children grow. Thus, it is important that everyone (parents, students, and faculty) support the objective, goals, and program ideals.

Presentations:

The foundation of the Restorative Classroom program has been presented in the following scientific conferences:

Ketterer, W. & Slammon, W. (2019). *Healing the self*. Ketterer Consulting. Fairlee, US.

Ketterer, W. (2018). *Using self psychology in schools*. International Association of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology (IAPSP). Vienna, Austria.

Ketterer, W. & Matthews, D. (2018). *Relationships, relationships, relationships: Using relationships to reduce school violence*. Center for Administrators in Special Education (CASE). Biloxi, US.

Ketterer, W. (2017). *Applied models of self psychology*. International Association of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology (IAPSP). Chicago, US.

Publications:

Ketterer, W. (2019). *Reducing anger and violence in schools: An evidence-based approach*. Routledge, London, England.

Additional References

Nicholson, J., Perez, L. and Kurtz, J. (2019). *Trauma-informed practices for early childhood educators: Relationship-based approaches that support healing and build resilience in young children*. Routledge: London, England.

Greene, R. and Ablon, S. (2006). *Treating explosive kids: The collaborating problem-solving approach*. Guilford Press. New York, United States.

