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Restorative Questions

Before, During & After Harm

A practical guide for conversations that protect dignity, build accountability, and make room for meaningful repair.

RESTORATIVE DOES NOT MEAN RUSHED RECONCILIATION

Safety first. Regulation before reflection. A face-to-face conversation is not always the right next step, and the person who was harmed should not be required to meet, forgive, apologize, shake hands, or provide closure.

BEFORE Prepare the conditions	DURING Understand impact & responsibility	AFTER Repair, reenter & follow through
• Is everyone safe enough and regulated enough for reflection? • Who needs voice, support, space, or time before any conversation begins? • Would separate conversations be safer or more useful than a joint one? • What do I know from observation, and what am I assuming? • What language, developmental, sensory, cultural, or power differences matter here? • What is actually needed: understanding, a boundary, repair, a plan, reentry, or formal follow-up?	• Start with the story before moving to judgment or solution. • Name impact without turning the person into the behavior. • Invite responsibility without demanding shame. • Make room for the person harmed to name impact and needs, if they want to. • Look for a repair that matches the harm and is possible to carry out. • Ask what skill, support, boundary, or condition needs to change next time.	• Make the agreement concrete: who will do what, by when? • Support repair without forcing contact or forgiveness. • Welcome the student or adult back into the community explicitly. • Check later: did the repair actually help? • Reteach, adjust the environment, or add support if the pattern continues. • Document observable facts and follow safety or reporting procedures when needed.

A simple way to open

"I want to understand what happened, who was affected, and what needs to happen next."

Small language shifts matter

Instead of...	Try...
"Why did you do that?"	"What were you trying to make happen?"
"Say you're sorry."	"What would meaningful repair look like?"
"You know better."	"What got in the way of using what you know?"
"Are you ready to behave?"	"What do you need to rejoin successfully?"

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Stabilize first. Restore later.

Question Bank: Use what fits. This is a conversation, not an interrogation.

START HERE

1. Story & meaning

- □ Tell me what happened from your point of view.
- □ What was happening just before this?
- □ What were you trying to make happen or get across in that moment?
- □ What were you noticing, thinking, or feeling?
- □ What have you thought about since?

MOVE OUTWARD

2. Impact

- □ Who was affected by what happened? In what ways?
- □ What changed for the other person, the group, the work, or the sense of safety?
- □ What do you understand now that you may not have understood in the moment?
- □ What do you think was hardest for the people affected?

WITHOUT SHAME

3. Responsibility

- □ What part of this can you take responsibility for?
- □ What do you wish you had done differently?
- □ What choice could you make if something similar happens again?
- □ What skill or support would make that choice easier next time?

VOICE WITHOUT PRESSURE

4. For the person harmed

- □ What did you notice or experience?
- □ What impact has this had on you?
- □ What has been the hardest part?
- □ What do you need now to feel safer, supported, or able to move forward?
- □ Is there any form of repair that would feel meaningful to you?
- □ Is there anything you are not ready for or do not want?

MAKE IT MEANINGFUL

5. Repair

- □ What needs repair: safety, trust, time, learning, property, relationship, or something else?
- □ What can you do to help make this right?
- □ Does that repair match the harm and feel possible to carry out?
- □ What support do you need to follow through?

BELONGING CONTINUES

6. Reentry & next time

- □ What needs to happen before you rejoin the activity or community?
- □ What agreement or boundary needs to be clear going forward?
- □ How will we know things are moving in a better direction?
- □ When should we check back in?

Adjust the questions to the person, not the other way around.

DEVELOPMENTALLY

- Young children may need fewer words, concrete choices, modeling, and adult-assisted repair.
- Older children and adults can usually hold more perspective-taking, reflection, ownership, and collaborative planning.

MULTILINGUALLY

- Offer language choice, interpretation, visuals, wait time, or another way to communicate when needed.
- Do not mistake difficulty expressing reflection in one language for an absence of reflection, empathy, or understanding.

End with belonging, not banishment.

"You are still part of this community. We are going to make a plan for what happens next."

Sources & professional foundations

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