

Restorative Classroom Strategy: Circle Talk

Bruin Time Practice ♦ November 1, 2018

Background:

In Jennifer Gunn's article, "Social-Emotional Learning: The Magic of Circle Talk," the author states, "Circle talks have become a staple of the restorative classroom, lowering suspensions in favor of social-emotional learning strategies to foster student, teacher, and family relationships."

FWCS is promoting circle talks in elementary, middle, and high school classrooms as part of the district's Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS) and examination of restorative justice practices. Gunn explains, "Circles . . . work well in a high school advisory classroom, sitting in a circle of chairs. The object for the teacher is to facilitate discussion, but not to rule it. And often, a teacher needn't be the facilitator at all, serving as an observer only. It's a good idea to have some conversation starter questions at the ready and a talking piece to pass around."

Procedure:

Have your students "circle-up" their desks if it's physically possible in your classroom. If that isn't practical, allow students to move around so they are facing each other and able to pass around a talking piece as much as possible (you may choose something convenient, such as a stapler, to use as the talking piece, or you may bring in something specifically for this task). Tell students that the person with the talking piece is the only person allowed to speak—everyone else should be listening respectfully to the speaker. You can help pass the talking piece from student to student, and also act as a bit of a time-keeper to keep things moving. Allow about 15 minutes for today's activity.

The conversation this week will focus on how students use cell phones in school. Share that a new study from Rutgers University has found that individual students perform less well on exams if they are allowed access to an electronic device (phone, iPad) during normal class time. Also, when electronic devices are allowed in class, overall class performance drops (even for those students who didn't use a device during class).

After sharing the info above, start the conversation with any of the following questions:

- Does it surprise you that student academic performance drops when electronic devices are allowed in classes? Why or why not?
- Do you ever check your cell phone for social reasons during class time, and if so, does your phone ever distract you from instruction? Do other people on cell phones distract you during class time?
- Do phones ever contribute to social drama during school time? Explain.
- Why do you think it's so hard for students to be without their cell phones, even for short periods of time?
- What do you think is the best way to discourage students from misusing their cell phones during class?

You may have to remind students that only the person with the talking piece may speak—students can pass the talking piece themselves or you may pass it from person to person. If the conversation naturally stalls, just prompt students with a new question. When time is up, allow someone to have the last word and return desks to their proper places.

Northrop will be following up with staff about this strategy as well as what students are saying about cell phones in the classroom.

Links to articles referenced:

<https://ukedchat.com/2018/07/27/checking-phones/>

<https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/social-emotional-learning-circles/>