

Relational and Restorative Practice in Education

One Minute Guide

Relational and Restorative Practice is an evidence-based way of being and doing that understands the quality of human experiences (individually and collectively) as directly correlating with positive experiences of making, maintaining and mending relationships (PCC 2024).

The goal of all schools should be to establish the best possible climate for learning for students. Students learn best when they feel safe, not just physically but also emotionally. Feeling safe means feeling valued, respected, and included in school life.¹

Relational and Restorative Practice (R&RP) provides a framework for creating and sustaining a school climate where teaching and learning can take place effectively and where students and adults can thrive as they learn from each other. Creating a relational and restorative school is a deliberate act of design that flows through structure, policies, procedures, and everyday interactions.

R&RP describes a way of being, an underpinning ethos, which enables us to build and maintain healthy relationships. It provides a strong framework within which we can promote a whole-school ethos founded on the importance of relationships. This includes a range of approaches to managing conflict and tensions in a way that repairs harm and mends relationships if and when these relationships do break down. Relational Practice is not a "programme" or an "intervention". It is an embedded cultural mindset rather than a model.

Although its roots are clearly in restorative justice - as a way of repairing harm - R&RP has the bolder ambition of proactively developing the sense of community and seeking to increase the social capital between and across the school and, from there into the wider community.² Our local vision is for all Portsmouth Schools and Colleges to have support to ensure pupils and staff experience the lifelong benefits of R&RP in and beyond education.

The Portsmouth Context

Relational and Restorative Practice (R&RP) in Portsmouth gained traction from 2016 in many areas of City life and is reflected in the strategic vision of the Children's Trust Plan (2020-2023), and the Portsmouth Education Strategy (2023-2026). This is part of the PEP's [citywide strategy to improve school attendance and reduce exclusions](#), which takes a whole-system strategic approach to tackling school absence and suspension.

The Portsmouth Safeguarding Children Partnership has delivered multi and single agency R&RP training across the city to safeguarding partners, including schools, since 2017. Some city schools were early adopters of this way of being and Trafalgar School³ (on behalf of the PEP) specifically supported

¹ <https://www.euforumrj.org/en/restorative-schools>

² [Restorative Practice](#), Mark Finnis, 2021, independent thinking press

³ **Trafalgar School** have exemplified what can be achieved through R&RP and by taking the whole-school approach, with one clear measurable impact being extremely low suspensions, underlined by the fact that in 2020/21 the school recorded just two suspensions and the same in 2021/22 compared to mainstream secondary school averages of 95 and 120 respectively.

many schools who were in the initial 'waves'. More recently the offer to support schools on their relational and restorative journey has increased. Funding from the Designated Schools Grant secured support for 2023-2027, including work from The Salterns Academy Trust (Trafalgar School) and other national and local leaders working with schools. The Relational Practice Steering Group has strategic oversight of this work and a new post 'Relational and Restorative Practice in Schools Implementation Lead' was created (from March 2024) to further increase capacity. This now means a whole city offer has been developed (see the infographic below) to resource all schools and is increasingly seen as 'the way we do things here'. This support takes many forms including coaching, leadership development, action learning and training. From September 2024 23 Headteachers have joined the two cohorts of R&RP Leaders Programme to support this work. A third cohort is anticipated.

The Practice

R&RP is not a liberal 'hug-it-out' approach! Rather it recognises that punitive and retributive approaches rarely bring the hoped-for change in culture or behaviour, so instead cultivates relationships and invites those who have caused harm to be part of the solution with a strong emphasis on responsibility and accountability, support and challenge. The underlying premise of R&RP rests with the belief that people will make positive changes when those in positions of authority work *with* them, rather than doing things *to* them or *for* them⁴. This is achieved by providing a combination of high challenge and high support. "Challenge" does not mean confrontation, but setting, rules, limits, and expectations. There are consequences to actions, concerns are outlined openly and honestly, and responsibility and accountability are encouraged. "Support" includes ensuring people have the tools to meet the expectations and are shown empathy, encouragement, compassion, kindness and respect. 'High Challenge and High Support' is often represented in the Social Discipline Window (or Four ways).

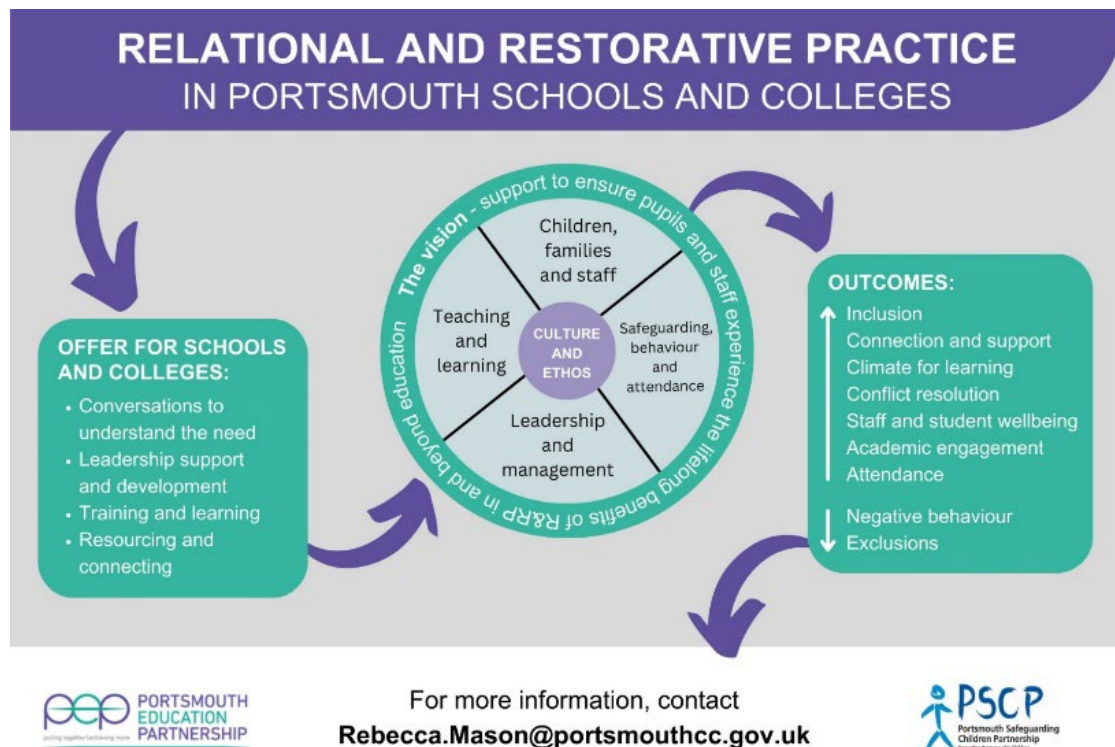


As well as a culture of strong relationships, this approach usually includes community circles – a way of intentionally being together to strengthen groups (pupils and staff) and explore issues. There are many other tools that support working 'with' others. The restorative framework (or questions) are one of the more well established R&RP tools, and provides a conversational or meeting scaffold to address challenges or facilitate putting things right/repairing harm (make, maintaining and mending relationships). It is our relational intention that breathes life into the restorative questions (having the questions on a lanyard isn't enough!) These practices move us from taking sides and having battles (which often generates resistance) to empathy and connection (fertile ground for transformation and change). This [TED Talk](#) from Michelle Stowe is a brilliant example of how this framework can be useful in schools.

⁴ https://www.iirp.edu/images/pdf/Defining-Restorative_Nov-2016.pdf

Your school engagement with R&RP could include⁵:

- Bespoke outreach support for schools, for example whole staff training, working with pastoral staff, TAs or midday assistants, reviewing policies and action plans, developing 'circles' and networking between and within schools.
- Sharing practice and visiting other schools (including Trafalgar).
- Joining the next cohort of the School Leaders Programme.
- Continuing to access multiagency training via the PSCP available [here](#).
- For further information please contact Rebecca.Mason@portsmouthcc.gov.uk



⁵ Working towards becoming more relational and restorative does not preclude schools from participating in other programmes and opportunities. On the contrary it is a way of being that is complementary to other strands of work delivered by the SEMH partnership (including the EP Team, MABs, MHST, and the ND in Schools Project).