

Connection Before Correction:
The Power of Relational Discipline

@characterstrong



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### **Objectives**



Identify WHY relational discipline matters



Define WHAT relational discipline is



Review HOW to engage in proactive and responsive relational discipline practices

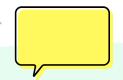


# **FACULTY** AND STAFF PARKIN G





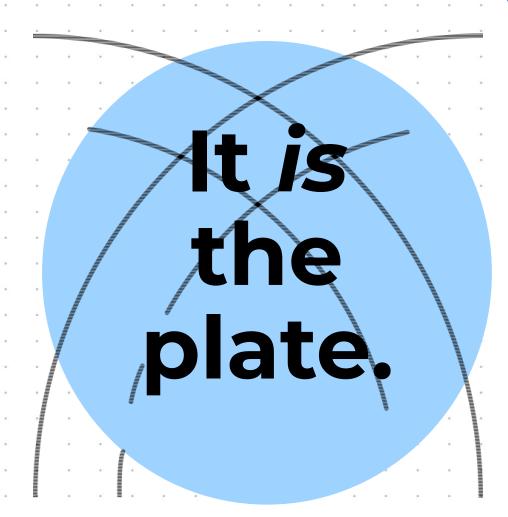




### **Turn & Talk:**

What is the number one thing a student who is dealing with ACES in their life need the most?

**Building strong**relationships is the
foundation that makes
classroom management,
behavior, engagement
—work more smoothly.





# Relational Discipline Matters



- Exclusionary Discipline
- Nationwide, students suspended once show an average 0.9 drop in GPA over time.
- Exclusion leads to lost instructional time, missed relationships, and disengagement.



How often is removal (like suspension or exclusion) used as a first response in your setting?











1= Rarely

5= Very Often



- Chronic Absenteeism
- Over **14 million students** (23%) were chronically absent in 2021–22.
- Absenteeism is tightly linked to discipline—each suspension increases risk.













1= Not a concern

5= Deeply affecting students/sustem



- Staff Burnout & Retention
- Nearly 1 in 2 educators report burnout.
- Drivers: behavior escalation, lack of support, emotional fatigue..













1= Rarely Visible

5= Widespread Concern



- School Climate
- Positive climate → higher achievement, fewer discipline referrals.
- Negative climate → more stress, higher conflict, and lower trust.
- What's one word that describes the feeling or tone of your building this past?



**Strong** 

**Strained** 

Mixed

Unclear





Turn & Talk:
What are the current challenges in your school(s)?



# WHAT is Relational Discipline



# Student behavior is **directly** tied to relationships –

with educators

with schools

with their peers

with themselves.



# If we are not using proactive and relational discipline practices, we are setting students up for future failure.



# Leaders **can shift culture** from punitive to relational.



# Relational Discipline moves us from ...

compliance to connection





# Relational Discipline combines ...

strong relationships with clear

accountability





### **Shifting from**



## Punishment Relationship

### **Traditional Approaches**

**Relational Approaches** 

Focus on the broken rule

Focus on the impact and needs

Assign consequence

Guide reflection and repair

Exclude to punish

Include to support growth

Teacher-directed

Collaborative problem-solving

### Two Approaches to Discipline

Sophia was up all night listening to her parents argue and fight. The next morning, she almost misses the bus, and the bus driver yells at her. In her rush, she drops her book bag and loses her notebook. Let's see how two different school approaches handle what happens next:

#### **Punitive Approach**

#### Cold Start

Sophia is greeted by metal detectors and a stern police search, increasing her anxiety.

#### **Public Scolding**

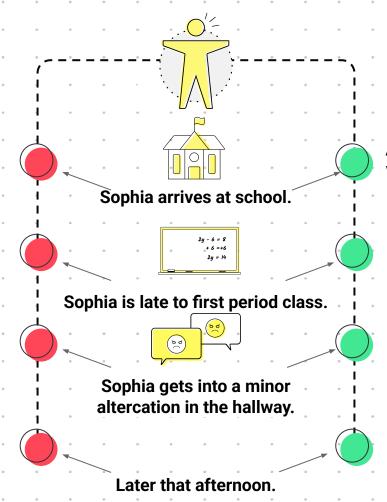
The teacher scolds Sophia in front of the class. She talks back and gets detention.

#### Immediate Intervention

A school security officer intervenes and sends both students to the office.

Both are suspended.

Isolation and Detention
Sophia spends the afternoon in detention,
missing class and feeling isolated.



#### **Responsive Approach**

#### **Warm Welcoming**

After going through safety & security, Sophia is warmly greeted by a staff member, who asks if everything is okay.

#### \*Private Conversation

The teacher waits until after class to speak privately with Sophia and sets up a meeting with a counselor.

#### Collaborative Resolution

A nearby teacher invites the students into a restorative circle to resolve the issue and repair their relationship.

#### Supportive Follow-Up

Sophia meets with a counselor and her parents to discuss home issues and learns stress-management strategies.





What story is your school/district telling through its current response to behavior?



### **Key Outcomes of Relational Discipline**

- 1. Give students a voice, they need to feel heard.
- 2. Sees behavioral errors as an opportunity for relationship building
- 3. Refocuses back on the expectations and desired behaviors.
- 4. Involve showing empathy.
- 5. Build life skills.
- 6. Invest in repair focused conversations.



# Implementing Relational Discipline



# BE PROACTIVE

Building Relationships First



# Connection must happen before correction.





## **Make Time for Connection**

Engage in relationship building consistently

- Connect during assemblies, open houses, and clubs
- Begin or end classes/days with relationship activities
- Set regular connection times in morning meetings and advisory

#### Pause & Plan



When in your current schedule could you consistently integrate relational discipline?



# Connection rarely happens on accident



# BE EXPLICIT

Teach Conflict Resolution Skills



# Most behaviors students exhibit in class are

normal



# Behavior is

# communication.

# Tree of Choices

Conflict Resolution

~~~~~

#### Breathe it out

- Breathe and then talk it out
- Breathe and move on
- Breathe and think of next steps

### **3** Branches

Make a choice

#### Talk it out

- Use I-Statements
- Talk about a compromise
- Talk to a trusted adult

#### Move it out

- Move away from the problem area
- Move to a calming space
- Move to a new group or game

2 Heart

Name your emotions: "I feel..."

Perpoetull Perple 1 Roots

Type of Problem: Big or small?



### **10 Proactive Micro-Interventions**

- Private Pre-Correction
- Personalized Encouragement Note

Two-Minute Connect

- Preferred Task Starter
- Nonverbal Signal System Regulation Buddy

- "Break Ticket" Access
- Positive Narration

Restoration Station

Exit Ticket with Emotion Check



### Teach, Empower, Prevent

00:30



Teach, Prevent, Empower students to resolve conflicts

- Create space and time for reflection and cool downs
- Let students process the situation with prompts like: "What happened?" → "How did it make you feel?" → "What can you do next?"
- Provide a safe adult or space where students feel seen, not punished.

#### Pause & Plan



What's one small shift we can make to better support students in conflict?

Write down a specific strategy you'd like to see.





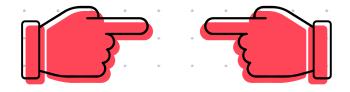
# BE INTENTIONAL

# CREATE A RELATIONAL DISCIPLINE POLICY



# Teachers don't feel the admin have their back.

Admin don't feel like teachers are doing their best to keep the student in that setting.





### **School Culture**

Culture: "...goes much deeper than a mission statement... culture is how group members actually behave, repeatedly and habitually."

— James C. Hunter

"You either have a school culture by design or a school culture by default."

- Phil Boyte

Character Strong

"When it comes to school culture change we are first and foremost in the business of adult behavior change."

- Dr. Clay Cook



### Adult Behavior Change

How to Support New Habits



Behavior

Change

Character Strong



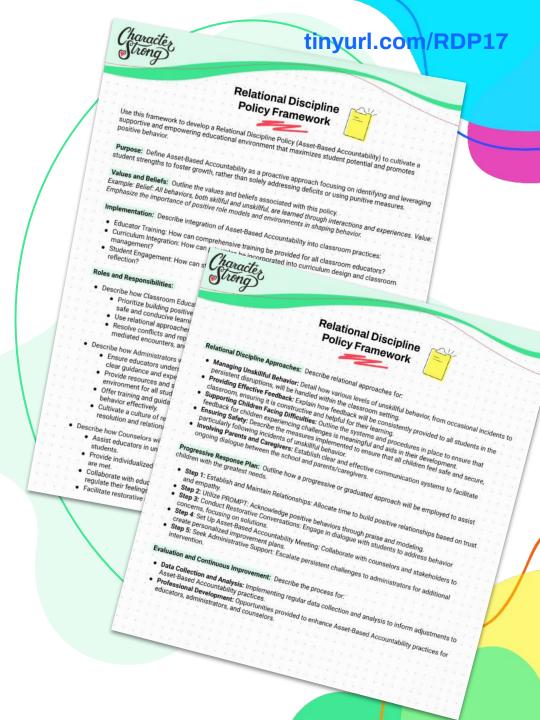
Accountability that builds people up starts with our beliefs—and shows in our systems.



## **Step 1:** Create a Relational Discipline Policy

### Stop and Jot

- 1. **Values & Beliefs:** What beliefs drive your current discipline practices?
- 2. **Implementation:** What training or structures are needed to support asset-based practices?
- 3. Roles & Responsibilities: How are discipline roles clear or unclear in your school?
- 4. **Relational Approaches:** What daily practices help students feel safe, seen, and capable?
- 5. **Progressive Response Plan:** How do you currently respond to recurring behavior?
- 6. **Evaluation:** How do you measure impact? What data do you track?







Small shifts in how we respond to students and staff can build a culture of growth, trust, and clarity.



### The Compass

Compasses (like values) help guide people and orient them in the world. On the next slide, we'll see key components of the Relational Discipline Framework.

In the center, there will be a prompt. For each prompt, you will move in *the direction* of the component YOU believe answers that prompt. Then you will have 60 seconds to reflect on why with your turn & talk team.

NW

**Values** 

Ν

**Beliefs** 

NE

Roles & Responsibilities

W

Relational Approaches

The component my staff NEEDS to work on the most...

Ε

Progressive Response Plan

SW

**Implementation** 

S

**Evaluation** 

SE

All Components

# The Compass

Turn & Talk: Share your answer to either of these questions...

What do you think will be difficult/easy about strengthening this component?

Where do you see gaps in your current practice?

00:25

NW

**Values** 

Ν

**Beliefs** 

NE

Roles & Responsibilities

W

Relational Approaches

The component my staff NEEDS to work on the most...

Ε

Progressive Response Plan

SW

**Implementation** 

S

**Evaluation** 

SE

All Components

NE N NW **Beliefs** Roles & **Values** Responsibilities Ε The component I want to W **Progressive WORK ON the most is...** Response Relational Plan **Approaches** SE SW S All **Implementation Evaluation Components** 

# The Compass

Turn & Talk: Share your answer to either of these questions...

What do you think will be difficult/easy about strengthening this component?

Where do you see gaps in your current practice?

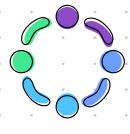
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Character Strong



True discipline is not about control, but about connection—firm in accountability, rich in support.





## **Behavior Response Protocol**

5 Step Process to Provide High Support and High Accountability



### 5 Step:

- 1. Empathy & Understanding
- 2. Restorative Accountability
- 3. Teach Behavior
- 4. Create a Plan
- 5. Restore Relationship

### **Behavior Response Protocol**

to Provide High Accountability, High Support



This is a restorative, teaching-focused approach to support and respond to students who receive in-school suspension or other disciplinary actions. Thank you so so much for pulling this together.



Empathy & Understanding

Restorative Accountability Teach Behavior reate a Plan

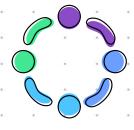
Restore Relationship



Move on to Empathy Step







## **Behavior Response Protocol**

Step 1: Empathy and Understanding



### Step 1:

- Empathy Interview
- Understanding through ABCs

#### **Behavior Response Protocol**

Step 1: Empathy & Understanding

Behavior



Accountability

Step 1: Empathy and Understanding. The aim of this step is to first seek to understand the student's perspective and feelings regarding the situation that resulted in a disciplinary action. After this, it is critical for the student to understand the unskillful behavior with regard to what caused it and the motivation behind it.



Relationship

#### PART 1

**Empathy:** Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person. It involves recognizing emotions in others, imagining how they might feel, and responding with care yet accountability at the same time. When this is done well, this helps establish connection because they feel heard and understood, which prevents them from shutting down and promotes engagement in the rest of the steps of this process. Example script **link here** to facilitate conversation.

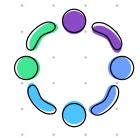
-> Tell me what you were thinking and feeling about the situation that happened.

 $\,\longrightarrow\,$  What's up? I've heard from others what happened. I'm curious to hear from you about how you feel about what happened.

#### PART 2

Understanding: Using the Antecedent-Behavior-Consequence model, work with the student to define the Unskillful Behavior (Fire), the Triggering Event (Match), any Setting Events (Lighter Fluid), and Maintaining Consequence (Fuel). Here is a link to a script on how to understand why the student engaged in the unskillful behavior that warranted this response. This will help the student understand the situation that resulted in the unskillful behavior and why they engaged in that behavior. Support the student to fill out the Behavior Reflection Form (link here).









# Behavior Response Protocol Step 2: Restorative Accountability



### Step 2:

- Restorative Questions
- Gathering input from those affected

### **Behavior Response Protocol**

Step 2: Restorative Accountability





Empathy & Understanding Restorative Accountability

Teach Behavior Create a Plan

Restore Relationship

Step 2: Restorative Accountability. The aims of this step is to provide high support and high accountability by having the student reflect on how the behavior negatively impacted self, others, and the learning environment as well as identifying how they will make the situation right through restorative actions. Below are the questions to guide the student through this step as well as scripts to guide this conversation with the student.



#### **Restorative Questions**

A restorative conference is a structured meeting where a student is held accountable for their behavior through guided questions that encourage reflection, responsibility, and collaborative problem-solving to make amends and restore relationships. Here is the Student Reflection Form to record responses to restorative questions (link here).

- · What happened?
- · Who was been affected by what you did? In what way?
- · What do you think you need to do to make things right?

If needed and appropriate, restorative questions for those who were affected by the behavior:

Here is a link to a google form or a paper copy that can be used to gather this information in order to share with the student about how their behavior impacted others.

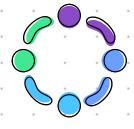
- · What did you think when you realized what had happened?
- · What impact has the incident had on you and others?
- · What has been the hardest thing for you?
- · What do you think needs to happen to make things right?

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NEXT







## **Behavior Response Protocol**

Step 3: Teach Behavior



### Step 3:

- Re-Teach Expectations
- Teach Replacement Behaviors
- Teach Lagging Skills

#### **Behavior Response Protocol**

Step 3: Teach Behavior



Empathy & Understanding

Restorative Accountability Teach Behavior Create a Plan

Restore Relationships

Step 3: Teaching Behavior. The aim of this step is to re-teach behavioral expectations/norms and teach replacement behaviors and self-regulation skills that will enable the student to more skillful respond to similar situations in the future.



#### Re-Teaching Behavioral Expectations/Norms

Re-teaching the school-wide behavioral norms and expectations is an important part of supporting the student to be prepared to be a positive contributing member of the school. Here are guidelines (link here) to facilitate a re-teaching session of the school's behavioral expectations/norms that everyone is accountable to engage in to create a safe, inclusive and positive environment.

- · Review school-wide behavioral expectations and norms.
- · Go over examples and non-examples of the behavioral expectations and norms
- Have the student identify why the behavioral expectations and norms are important as a member of the school and for life.

#### **Teach Replacement Behavior**

Revisit the information gathered in Step 1 to understand the student's behavior through the lens of the ABC Model. Goal is to identify a socially acceptable replacement behavior that serves the same function as the unskillful behavior. Here is the guidelines for teaching replacement behaviors (link here).

- · Identify replacement behaviors that serve the same purpose / function as the unskillful behavior.
- · Teach the student the replacement behaviors they can engage in next time a similar situation happens.

#### **Teach Lagging Self-Regulation Skills**

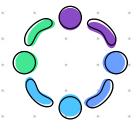
Some students benefit from learning self-regulation skills that enable them to better manage thoughts, feelings, and next time the situation happens. Here is a document that outlines specific CharacterStrong lessons that support the learn self-regulation skills.

- · Lagging Self-Regulation Skills:
  - · Emotion Regulation and Coping Skills
- · Social Skills and Relationship Skills
- Self-Management and Executive Functioning
- Self Awareness
- Social Awareness

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NEXT





## **Behavior Response Protocol**

Step 4: Create a Plan



### Step 4:

- When-Then Plan
- Motivation
- Obstacles
- Support
- Reminders

### **Behavior Response Protocol**

Step 4: Create a Plan



Step 4: Create a Plan. The aim of this step is support the student to create a When-Then Plan to engage in more skillful behavior the next time the situation comes up as well as problem-solve and overcome obstacles that may get in the way of the plan. The student will identify a trusted adult who can help them and reminders to use their plan.



#### When-Then Plan 1: Behavior and Skills

This plan is about *when* the situation that caused the unskillful behavior happens again, *then* what replacement behavior and skills will the student use instead of the unskillful behavior. In addition, it is important to explore the student's motivation to use the plan and identify any obstacles that can get in the way.

- a. When (situation that caused the behavior), Then (behavior expectations, replacement behavior, and using self-regulation skill)
- b. Explore motivation to use the plan
- c. Overcome obstacles
- d. Identify a trusted adult who can provide support
- e. Create reminders to use the plan

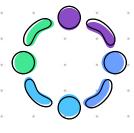
Here is a link to the Student When-Then Plan template and Educator Guidelines to facilitate the student in developing a When-Then Plan.



NEXT







## **Behavior Response Protocol**

Step 5: Restore Relationships



### Step 5:

- Who to restore the relationship
- When to restore
- How to restore

### **Behavior Response Protocol**

Step 5: Restore Relationship



Empathy & Understanding

Restorative Accountability Teach Behavior

Create a Plan

Restore Relationship

Step 5: Restore Relationships. This step involves working with educators to restore the relationship with the student to mend any harm done to the relationship. Restoring involves a skillful communication to repair any harm and re-engage the student following the disciplinary action.



#### **Educators Repairing Relationships with the Student**

For the student to re-engage after the behavioral incident, it is critical for educators to work towards restoring the relationship with the student to create a positive connection and model what restoring relationships look like after a negative interaction. Identify who, when, and how educators can restore the relationship with the student

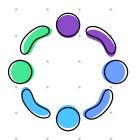
To restore a relationship after a negative interaction begins with an empathy statement. There are communication strategies that educators can use to effectively respond after a situation occurs that may have harmed the relationship with a student. Example restorative communication strategies:

- Let Go (Do Over) Communicate with the student that today is a new day. No matter what the
  conflict was, you won't hold a grudge and there are no hard feelings.
- Taking Ownership If possible, take ownership for your part of the negative interaction that could show them how you will work towards making the situation better.
- Empathy Statement Use empathy to seek to understand the student's perspective and show the student you care about how they feel.
- Statement of Care Separate the student's actions from who they are as a person. Acknowledge
  the positive qualities.

Link to example template to organize educators to restore the relationship with the student.

BACK

HOME







Relational discipline holds students to high standards while holding them in high regard.



### **Exit**

### What is 1...

action you will take create a culture of relational discipline?





# 60 Second Feedback