

Restorative and Transformative Justice in Preventative School Safety and Behavioral Safety Assessment

Toolkit and Guidance for Educators

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Table of Contents

Toolkit Overview	4
How Educators and School Teams Can Use This Toolkit	4
How to Navigate This Toolkit	5
Disclaimer	6
Definitions	8
Opening Acknowledgement	11
Historical Overview of Behavioral Safety (threat) Assessment in Oregon	12
System Specifics	15
Ensuring equity in the process	16
Applying Restorative Justice Principles within Behavioral Safety Assessment Teams	18
Recommendations for Student Behavioral Safety Assessment Teams to ensure equitable approaches in the process	21
1. Introduction to Restorative Justice and Behavioral Safety Assessment	24
Overview of Restorative Justice	24
Purpose of Behavioral Safety Assessment	25
Integration of Restorative Justice and Behavioral Safety Assessment	26
Conclusion	27
2. Core Principles of Restorative Justice	28
Accountability and Responsibility	28
Repairing Harm	28
Involvement of Partners	29
Empathy and Understanding	30
Restorative Dialogue and Communication	30
Conclusion	31
3. Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment Process	32
Identifying Threats	32
Risk Assessment	33
Gathering Information	34
Considerations for Students Receiving Special Education or 504 Services	35
Considerations for Multilingual Learners and Emerging Bilingual Students	36
Restorative Elements in the Assessment Process	36

4. Training and Capacity Building for Restorative Behavioral Safety Systems.....	38
Training for Professionals	38
Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices and Trauma-Informed Care	39
Ongoing Support and Reflection.....	41
Conclusion.....	42
5. Supportive Strategies Using a Restorative Approach	44
Accountability and Healing	44
Restorative Justice Conferencing.....	44
Circle Processes.....	45
Mediation.....	46
Restorative Agreements	47
Conclusion.....	47
6. Engaging the Affected Community in Restorative Safety Practices & Engaging the Impacted Community: Families and Caregivers	49
Impacted Party Support.....	49
Community Reintegration.....	50
Building a Support Network.....	50
Integration of Support, Reintegration, and Networks	51
Engaging the Impacted Community: Families and Caregivers.....	52
Conclusion.....	54
7. Monitoring and Evaluating the Restorative Justice Process	55
Tracking Progress	55
Evaluating Outcomes	56
Adjustments and Improvements	57
Conclusion.....	59
8. Ethical and Legal Considerations in Restorative Justice and Behavioral Safety Practices	60
Confidentiality and Privacy	60
Informed Consent	60
Balancing Safety with Justice	61
Legal Implications	62
Conclusion.....	63
9. Case Studies and Examples	64

Restorative and Transformative Justice in Preventative School Safety and Behavioral Safety Assessment

1. Real-World Scenarios: Restorative Justice in Behavioral Safety (threat) Assessment Contexts	64
2. Level 1 Scenario: Full Case Study Using Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade Protocol.....	66
3. Lessons Learned	69
Conclusion.....	70
10. Conclusion: Restorative Justice in Behavioral Safety Assessment.....	71
Final Thoughts on Restorative Justice in Behavioral Safety Assessment.....	71
Future Directions	72
Closing Reflection	73
References	74
Quick Start Guide for Educators	76

Toolkit Overview

This toolkit provides educators, administrators, school and district behavioral safety assessment teams, and community partners with a comprehensive framework for integrating restorative justice practices with behavioral safety assessment processes. The purpose of the toolkit is to support schools and organizations in responding to concerning behaviors in ways that prioritize safety, accountability, healing, and community well-being.

The materials contained in this toolkit bring together several complementary approaches. Restorative justice emphasizes repairing harm, restoring relationships, and strengthening community connections. Behavioral safety assessment frameworks, including structured threat assessment models such as the Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade System, focus on identifying concerning behaviors, evaluating potential risk, and implementing interventions designed to prevent harm. When thoughtfully integrated, these approaches provide a balanced system that addresses both immediate safety concerns and the longer-term relational impacts of harmful behavior.

The toolkit includes guidance on key principles, implementation strategies, community engagement practices, ethical considerations, monitoring and evaluation processes, and applied case examples. It is designed to help educators and safety teams build relational capacity within schools while maintaining clear procedures for identifying and responding to behavioral concerns.

Rather than presenting restorative justice as an alternative to safety protocols, this toolkit demonstrates how restorative practices can strengthen behavioral safety systems by promoting accountability, supporting impacted individuals, and creating pathways for meaningful reintegration into the school community.

How Educators and School Teams Can Use This Toolkit

Educators and school teams may utilize this toolkit in several ways depending on their roles and the needs of their school or district.

Professional Learning and Training

School leaders and professional development facilitators may use this toolkit to introduce staff to the relationship between restorative justice and behavioral safety assessment. Sections of the toolkit can be incorporated into professional learning sessions focused on restorative practices, trauma-informed approaches, or school safety planning.

Behavioral Safety and Threat Assessment Teams

Members of behavioral safety or threat assessment teams may use this toolkit to better understand how restorative practices can complement structured threat assessment processes. The toolkit provides guidance for supporting impacted individuals, facilitating accountability, and planning reintegration when safety has been stabilized.

Restorative Practice Implementation

Educators interested in expanding restorative practices in classrooms or school communities can use the toolkit to learn about circle processes, restorative conferencing, mediation strategies, and methods for building supportive peer and community networks.

Student Support Planning

School counselors, school social workers, coaches, administrators, and student support staff may reference the toolkit when developing individualized support plans for students involved in incidents involving conflict, harm, or concerning behavior. The framework emphasizes collaborative problem-solving, community engagement, and restorative accountability.

Program Development and Policy Alignment

District leaders and policy developers may use the toolkit as a reference when designing or refining school safety protocols, restorative justice programs, or behavioral intervention policies. The integration of restorative principles with behavioral safety frameworks can support a more comprehensive and equitable approach to school climate and safety.

How to Navigate This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to support educators, administrators, district and ESD personnel, behavioral safety assessment teams, and community partners in understanding and implementing an integrated approach to **restorative justice and behavioral safety assessment**. Because readers may engage with this resource in different ways depending on their roles, the toolkit is organized into sections that can be used either sequentially or independently.

Readers who are new to restorative justice or behavioral safety assessment are encouraged to begin with the **Introduction and Framework sections**, which provide foundational context for understanding the relationship between restorative practices and behavioral safety (threat) assessment systems such as the Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade model. These sections explain the guiding principles of restorative justice, the purpose of behavioral safety assessment, and the rationale for integrating these approaches.

For practitioners responsible for implementation, the sections on **Core Principles, Supportive Restorative Strategies, and Training and Capacity Building** provide practical guidance on developing the relational skills and structures necessary for successful restorative practice. These chapters outline facilitation methods, circle processes, restorative conferencing strategies, and trauma-informed approaches that support both prevention and response.

Members of **Behavioral Safety Assessment Teams** may focus on the sections that describe the intersection between restorative practices and safety protocols. These sections explain how restorative processes can support impacted individuals, strengthen accountability, and assist with reintegration after safety stabilization has occurred.

The **Case Studies and Toolkit Examples** provide practical illustrations of how the integrated model can be applied in real-world situations. These scenarios demonstrate how restorative processes can complement structured behavioral safety assessments when addressing concerning behaviors in school communities.

Finally, the **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Ethical Considerations sections** offer guidance on ensuring that implementation remains safe, ethical, and effective over time. These sections support continuous improvement and help schools measure the impact of restorative interventions on both safety and school climate.

Readers may return to specific sections as needed when implementing restorative practices or supporting behavioral safety processes. The toolkit is intended to serve as a **reference guide, training resource, and implementation framework** for schools and organizations seeking to strengthen both safety and community relationships.

Disclaimer

This toolkit is intended as an educational and informational resource for educators, administrators, and community partners seeking to integrate restorative justice practices with behavioral safety assessment processes. The information presented reflects current research, established restorative justice principles, and widely recognized behavioral threat assessment practices. However, it is not intended to replace professional judgment, district policies, or legally mandated procedures.

Implementation of restorative practices and behavioral safety assessment should always occur within the context of local, state, and federal laws, as well as established school district policies and safety protocols. Schools and organizations should ensure that all staff involved in

behavioral safety assessments and restorative processes receive appropriate training and supervision.

Restorative practices should only be used when it is safe and appropriate to do so, and participation must be voluntary and informed. In situations involving credible threats, criminal behavior, or immediate safety risks, law enforcement involvement and formal safety procedures may be necessary.

The examples and case studies included in this toolkit are illustrative and are intended to support learning and discussion. They should not be interpreted as prescriptive responses for all situations. Each incident involving concerning behavior requires careful evaluation by trained professionals and multidisciplinary teams.

This toolkit also acknowledges that restorative justice practices are rooted in the traditions and wisdom of Indigenous and diverse cultural communities. The adaptation of these practices within schools and institutions should be approached with cultural humility, respect, and a commitment to equity and inclusion.

Definitions

Key Terms Used in Restorative Justice and Behavioral Safety Assessment Framework

Accountability: The process by which an individual who caused harm acknowledges the impact of their actions and takes meaningful steps to repair harm and prevent recurrence.

Behavioral Safety Assessment (BSA): A structured, multidisciplinary process used to identify, assess, and respond to concerning behaviors that may pose a risk of harm, with a focus on prevention and intervention. In Oregon, Behavioral Safety Assessment is the term used to describe what is also known as Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management.

Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management (BTAM): An evidence-based framework for identifying, evaluating, and managing potential threats of violence through structured information gathering and intervention planning.

Circle Process: A restorative practice in which participants sit in a circle and engage in structured dialogue guided by a facilitator to build community, address conflict, and promote understanding.

Community Reintegration: The process of supporting an individual who has caused harm in returning to the community in a way that promotes accountability, relationship repair, and prevention of future harm.

Confidentiality: The ethical responsibility to protect sensitive information shared during restorative or assessment processes, within the limits of mandatory reporting and safety laws.

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI): An ongoing process of evaluating outcomes, collecting feedback, and refining practices to improve effectiveness and fidelity.

Cultural Responsiveness: The practice of recognizing, respecting, and integrating individuals' cultural identities and contexts into assessment and restorative processes.

Impact Statement: A structured opportunity for individuals affected by harm to describe how the incident impacted them emotionally, socially, or physically.

Informed Consent: A clear explanation of a process that ensures all participants understand the purpose, procedures, benefits, risks, and limits of confidentiality before agreeing to participate.

Integrated Model: An approach that combines restorative justice principles with behavioral safety assessment systems to balance accountability, healing, and safety.

Level 1 Assessment: The initial school-based behavioral safety assessment conducted by a multidisciplinary team to evaluate risk, gather information, and determine appropriate interventions.

Mediation: A structured and neutral process in which a trained facilitator assists individuals in conflict to communicate and develop mutually agreed-upon solutions.

Ongoing Monitoring: Continued follow-up after an intervention or restorative process to ensure safety, track progress, and support agreement implementation.

Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment: Behavioral Safety [threat] Assessment protocol and framework grounded in the SK Cascade Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management System

Restorative Agreement: A collaboratively developed action plan outlining steps an individual will take to repair harm and prevent future incidents.

Restorative Conferencing: A structured restorative process that brings together individuals affected by harm to discuss impact, accountability, and repair.

Restorative Justice (RJ): A relational approach to addressing harm that emphasizes repairing damage, centering impacted individuals, fostering accountability, and strengthening community relationships.

Risk Assessment: The structured evaluation of the seriousness, immediacy, and nature of a potential threat, including consideration of risk and protective factors.

Safety Stabilization: Immediate actions taken to reduce risk and ensure physical and emotional safety following a concerning incident.

SK Cascade (SK Cascade Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management System): A structured, two-level threat assessment and management model that guides schools in identifying, evaluating, and responding to behavioral threats through multidisciplinary collaboration.

Threat: Any expression or behavior that suggests potential harm to self or others, which requires evaluation through a structured assessment process.

Trauma-Informed Care: An approach that recognizes the impact of trauma on behavior and emphasizes safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment, and cultural responsiveness.

Transient Risk: A short-term, impulsive threat that does not indicate sustained intent or planning and can often be addressed through supportive intervention.

Opening Acknowledgement

The concepts and practices that inform restorative justice did not originate within modern educational, legal, or institutional systems. Rather, they are rooted in longstanding traditions of community accountability, relational responsibility, and collective healing practiced by Indigenous peoples and cultures around the world (Zehr, 2015). Many Indigenous communities—including First Nations, Māori, Native American, and other traditional societies—have long used circle processes, community dialogue, and collective decision-making to address harm, repair relationships, and restore balance within the community (Pranis, Stuart, & Wedge, 2003; Tauri, 2014).

These traditions emphasize that harm is not simply a violation of rules or laws, but a disruption of relationships within a community. Restorative approaches therefore focus on bringing together those affected by harm to engage in meaningful dialogue, acknowledge impact, and collaboratively determine how harm can be repaired (Braithwaite, 2002; Zehr, 2015). Contemporary restorative justice frameworks, including those used in schools and community organizations, draw significantly from these cultural teachings, particularly the use of circle dialogue, community participation, and an emphasis on relational repair (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Pranis et al., 2003).

This work also reflects the important contributions of scholars, practitioners, and community leaders from diverse racial, cultural, and social backgrounds who have adapted restorative principles within schools, justice systems, and community settings. Their work has helped ensure that restorative justice remains grounded in principles of equity, dignity, and cultural responsiveness while responding to the needs of contemporary institutions (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012; Wachtel, 2016).

In acknowledging these roots, we recognize the importance of approaching restorative justice with humility and respect for the communities that have stewarded these practices across generations. We also affirm a commitment to honoring these traditions by implementing restorative approaches in ways that prioritize inclusion, cultural awareness and sustainability, and the well-being of all members of the community.

We also want to acknowledge the contributions of Oregon practitioners in the field who reviewed, edited, and contributed to this toolkit. An ODE workgroup that contributed to this toolkit included school, district, ESD, and community member representation and we thank them for their expertise and commitment to making this content available for Oregon communities.

Historical Overview of Behavioral Safety (threat) Assessment in Oregon

Brief History of the SK Cascade Model of Preventative Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management. Used with permission, John VanDreal, 2026

In 1999, most education policy that addressed threats and threatening behavior ranged from reactive measures to positions of complete denial. Some initial programs were well intended but ineffective in their pursuit of risk factors that were not supported by research or practice. Students frequently used threatening language, just as they do today, and educators were faced with the question of how to respond and when to treat threats as serious risks. Many students were held out of school for days, sometimes weeks, or even expelled before they were evaluated and re-entry planning could take place, if it took place at all (Van Dreal, Cunningham, and Nishioka, 2005). Additionally, mental health practitioners became increasingly uncomfortable administering risk assessments based on psychological indicators alone.

These concerns, along with the desire to create a psychologically safe environment where teachers and students could teach and learn without the distraction of fear, motivated the development of an efficient, time-sensitive threat assessment system for youths. The project was led by John Van Dreal, a school psychologist working for Salem-Keizer Public Schools in collaboration with a team of youth-serving agencies consisting of law enforcement, juvenile justice services, county court personnel, public mental health practitioners, and child welfare services.

This collaboration was fortunate in that the school district was already a participant in a partnership with law enforcement, public health services, and juvenile justice services through a structure called the Youth Services Team (YST), which, along with the Marion County Adult Threat Advisory Team, served as a model for implementation in late fall of 2000. The collaboration was joined later by the Willamette Education Service District and is now referred to as the Salem-Keizer Cascade Model or SK Cascade for short because of its broad implementation throughout Oregon and Washington.

The system was designed and refined through a thorough survey of research and leading practices recommendations in consultation with local practitioners who regularly assessed potentially violent situations involving youths. Committee work was also completed with a variety of education professionals, risk management personnel, mental health practitioners, law enforcement officers, and juvenile justice personnel.

The system has been developed to operate from a continuing quality-improvement perspective, which allows experience and new data to be incorporated into operational

practices that are then updated in annual training. These updates are also included in training provided to stakeholders outside of the Salem, Oregon area. Feedback from practitioners, educators, students, families, ongoing research, and other sources has always been an important aspect of program improvement.

The system in place today is a two-tiered prevention and intervention process that operates through assessment protocols, supervision and management consultation, and access to available community resources.

The first tier, called Level 1, is school site based and composed of administrators, counselors or other school-based mental health staff members, and sworn law enforcement officers.

The second tier, called Level 2, is community based and composed of personnel from K-12 school districts, law enforcement, public mental health services, the district attorney's office, victim advocacy, and juvenile justice.

Members of the Level 2 team are trained to the highest standards available and provide investigative assistance, assessment, consultation, and resource development directly to the schools.

Like most multiagency collaborations, the program encountered several hurdles. Foremost among the challenges were a lack of available services, differences in agency philosophies, the absence of policies to address issues regarding record sharing and confidentiality, information storage, and funding limitations. Nevertheless, each agency committed to providing support and training, and the resulting system is an example of a disciplined, collaborative problem-solving structure that has become institutional within the Mid-Willamette Valley and is being adopted throughout the Northwest and other parts of the United States.

In brief, the objectives of the system are to:

1. Identify and assess threats of potentially harmful or lethal behavior and determine the level of concern and action required.
2. Organize prevention strategies to manage situations involving students that pose threats to other students, staff members, and the community.
3. Utilize resources to avoid exclusion, keep youths in school, and improve meaningful connections with school staff members.

4. Maintain a sense of psychological safety among students, teachers, and parents, thus fostering a learning environment that allows for teaching and learning and that is free of distractions caused by fear.

The benefits of this system include:

1. Shared ownership, responsibility, and liability.
2. The inclusion of trauma-informed care, restorative practice, an inclusion perspective, and a well-rooted foundation of prevention thinking.
3. The addressing of the potential damage done by a school-to-prison pipeline.
4. A process that has been combed to eliminate opportunities for bias and that includes protocols to check for bias.
5. A collaborative approach that allows different professional perspectives, which decreases bias, eliminates stereotyping and profiling, and stops any potential routing of students from school to prison.
6. Questions that are aligned with the recommendations of international experts and focus on situational variables, not demographic characteristics that could lead to bias.
7. An expeditious but methodical preventive assessment and intervention process.
8. Intervention that identifies and decreases high-risk situational factors while increasing protective factors, inclusion, and connection to peers and adults within the district.
9. Early intervention that leads away from the discipline system and does not support the use of exclusionary measures (both of which actually increase safety concerns in the majority of situations).
10. The identification of safety concerns in clear terms and a clarity of language that is more easily communicated to parents, teachers, and students.
11. Interventions and supervision strategies that are fitting to the situation and accurately address safety concerns (avoiding knee-jerk overreactions) and provide those involved with an accurate and realistic understanding of the problem and solutions.
12. Safety planning that keeps many students in school who otherwise would be removed through expulsion or arrest.

13. An increase in both the physical safety and the psychological safety of a school—essential to a successful learning and teaching climate for students and staff members.

14. An increase in physical and psychological safety that strengthens education and supports the teaching and learning process.

15. The inclusion of family members in the prevention and intervention process, especially before the behavior warrants adjudication or involvement of the child welfare system.

System Specifics

The two-tiered model utilizes a centralized reporting structure and examines threats of aggression, moving from assessment to management of threatening situations (at both levels) using strategies that reasonably and prudently address the risk factors and situational variables elevating the concern. It includes ongoing follow-up and reassessment to examine changing risk factors as the level of concern adjusts to the supervision and intervention.

The system is administered through a multidisciplinary, multiagency collaboration with a focus on mitigating the circumstances that exacerbate the potential for violent behavior. As such, it operates without the use of labels, myths, profiling, and overreaction. Furthermore, it has operational strategies that check implicit bias and includes the recommendation to review the local process through use of an equity lens.

The system is engaged at Level 1 when a threatening situation is detected or suspected. A threatening situation might include the communication of a direct threat, a veiled or indirect threat, the display of known risk factors for targeted violence, or an act of aggression.

Additionally, the system can be engaged to address any situation that causes concern because of the possibility of an aggressive outcome. The system is not to be used for students who are considering suicide, engaged in sexual harm, or misusing fire, unless they are doing so in combination with or as a function of an act of extreme aggression intending severe or lethal injury to others. School districts should have other protocols addressing suicidal ideation, sexual harm, and fire misuse.

Ensuring equity in the process:

Using an **equitable approach** in student **behavioral safety assessment processes** helps ensure that responses to student behavior are **fair, non-discriminatory, and culturally responsive**, while maintaining safety. Here are the key connections between the two:

Bias Mitigation

- **Equity lens tools** help teams examine and reflect on implicit biases that might influence how student behavior is interpreted.
 - In behavioral safety assessments, this ensures that **students of color, students with disabilities, or those from marginalized groups** are not disproportionately referred or punished.
-

Contextual Understanding

- Equity frameworks emphasize **understanding students within the context of their environment**, including trauma, systemic inequality, and cultural background.
 - This helps behavioral safety assessment teams interpret behavior not just as a sign of danger but as a **response to unmet needs or adverse experiences**.
-

Inclusive Decision-Making

- Using an equity lens encourages **diverse representation** on assessment teams (e.g., staff from different cultural, racial, or professional backgrounds).
 - This leads to more **comprehensive, balanced, and inclusive decisions** when determining the level of threat and the appropriate interventions.
-

Focus on Support over Punishment

- Equity-driven processes favor **restorative practices and support-based interventions** over exclusionary discipline like suspension or expulsion.

- Behavioral safety assessments guided by equity ensure that **interventions are aimed at student growth and reintegration**, not just discipline.
-

Data Monitoring & Accountability

- Equity lens tools promote **monitoring for patterns of disproportionality** (e.g., who is being referred, assessed, or disciplined).
 - This ensures that **systems are adjusted** to avoid systemic overrepresentation of certain groups in assessments.
-

Student Voice and Family Engagement

- Equity frameworks prioritize **student and family perspectives** in the assessment process.
- Including families helps build trust and **ensures culturally appropriate interventions** that align with the student's community values.

Applying Restorative Justice Principles within Behavioral Safety Assessment Teams

Behavioral safety (threat) assessment teams play a critical role in preventing violence and responding to concerning behavior within schools and organizations. These multidisciplinary teams typically include administrators, counselors, psychologists, qualified mental health professionals, behavior specialists, safety personnel, law enforcement, and other professionals who work together to identify potential risks, assess concerning behaviors, and determine appropriate interventions. While traditional threat assessment models emphasize identifying and managing risk, integrating restorative justice principles can strengthen these processes by addressing relational harm, promoting accountability, and supporting the long-term well-being of individuals and the broader community.

Restorative justice does not replace behavioral safety (threat) assessment protocols or safety procedures; rather, it complements them by adding relational and healing-focused components to the response. When used thoughtfully, restorative approaches can help safety (threat) assessment teams respond to incidents in ways that balance safety, accountability, and community repair.

Supporting Accountability within Safety Interventions

Behavioral safety (threat) assessment teams often work with individuals who have engaged in threatening or concerning behaviors. Traditional responses may involve disciplinary consequences, safety plans, or increased supervision. While these responses may be necessary to ensure immediate safety, they do not always help individuals understand the full impact of their actions.

Restorative justice principles can strengthen these interventions by encouraging meaningful accountability. Through facilitated restorative conversations, individuals who have caused harm can reflect on the consequences of their behavior and recognize how their actions affected others in the community. This process allows them to move beyond denial or defensiveness and toward taking responsibility in a constructive and supportive environment (Zehr, 2015).

For behavioral safety assessment teams, incorporating restorative accountability might involve structured reflection meetings, restorative conferences following an incident, or agreements that outline steps the individual will take to repair harm and rebuild trust within the community. These strategies help ensure that accountability is connected to learning and personal growth rather than solely punitive consequences.

Addressing Harm and Supporting Impacted Individuals

Threatening behavior or safety incidents can have significant emotional and psychological impacts on those involved. Students, staff members, or community members who feel targeted or unsafe may experience fear, stress, or a loss of trust in the environment. Traditional threat assessment processes often focus primarily on managing the individual who made the threat, sometimes overlooking the needs of those affected by the incident.

Restorative justice emphasizes centering the experiences and needs of harmed parties. Behavioral safety teams can integrate this principle by creating opportunities for those affected to share their experiences and identify what they need to feel safe and supported moving forward. This might include facilitated dialogue, restorative circles, or individualized support plans that address emotional and relational impacts.

By acknowledging and addressing these needs, safety (threat) assessment teams can help rebuild trust and promote healing within the community. This approach reinforces the message that safety responses should consider not only risk reduction but also the well-being of those who were harmed.

Engaging the Community in Prevention and Response

Behavioral safety (threat) assessment teams recognize that concerning behavior rarely occurs in isolation. Social dynamics, peer relationships, family circumstances, and community factors can all influence behavior. Restorative justice encourages a collaborative approach that involves multiple stakeholders in understanding and responding to incidents.

Within a safety (threat) assessment framework, this principle can be applied by engaging appropriate partners—such as teachers, counselors, family members, and peers—in developing solutions that support the individual and strengthen community safety. These partners may help identify underlying concerns, provide mentorship, or contribute to supportive interventions.

Engaging the community also helps reinforce shared responsibility for maintaining a safe environment. When individuals feel connected to their community and supported by others, the likelihood of isolation and escalating behavior may decrease. Restorative practices such as community-building circles can help strengthen relationships and create a culture of openness where concerns can be addressed before they escalate.

Fostering Empathy and Understanding in the Assessment Process

Behavioral safety (threat) assessment teams often encounter situations where individuals feel misunderstood, marginalized, or overwhelmed by personal challenges. Restorative approaches can help teams explore the broader context surrounding concerning behavior by fostering empathy and understanding among those involved.

Structured restorative conversations encourage individuals to discuss what led to their behavior, how they were feeling at the time, and what support they may need moving forward. This process can help team members better understand underlying factors such as trauma, bullying, mental health concerns, or social isolation (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Developing this understanding does not excuse harmful behavior, but it allows safety (threat) assessment teams to design interventions that address root causes. For example, rather than relying solely on disciplinary consequences, teams may connect individuals with counseling services, mentoring programs, or restorative skill-building opportunities.

Using Restorative Dialogue to Support Reintegration

Following a behavioral safety (threat) assessment intervention or disciplinary response, individuals may experience stigma or damaged relationships with peers and staff. Without intentional support, these strained relationships can contribute to continued isolation or conflict.

Restorative dialogue can play an important role in supporting reintegration after an incident has been addressed. Facilitated conversations between the responsible individual and affected parties can help clarify misunderstandings, rebuild trust, and establish shared expectations for future interactions.

These dialogues often occur after safety concerns have been addressed and when all participants feel ready to engage in constructive conversation. Skilled facilitators guide participants through a structured process that emphasizes respectful communication, listening, and collaborative problem-solving.

For safety (threat) assessment teams, incorporating restorative dialogue into reintegration plans can help strengthen community connections and reduce the likelihood of ongoing conflict or resentment.

Maintaining Effective Student-Centered Decision Making

Multidisciplinary educational teams responding to threatening behavior should embed proactive structures that reduce the risk of vicarious trauma while maintaining effective, student-centered decision-making. Establishing consistent protocols for case review—grounded in best practices such as those promoted by the National Threat Assessment Center—helps distribute responsibility across the team and prevents overexposure of any single member to high-intensity cases. Regular, structured debriefings following assessments or critical incidents should be standard practice, allowing team members to process emotional responses, clarify roles, and reinforce shared understanding. Incorporating trauma-informed principles, including predictability, transparency, and collaboration, supports both staff well-being and more thoughtful, regulated responses to student behavior (Cornell & Maeng, 2018; National Association of School Psychologists, 2021).

To mitigate vicarious trauma and sustain team effectiveness, schools should integrate wellness supports as part of the behavioral assessment process rather than as an afterthought. Research on secondary traumatic stress highlights the importance of protected time for structured debriefing, peer support, and access to mental health resources (Figley, 1995; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2014). Teams benefit from incorporating brief, routine self-regulation practices (e.g., grounding or breathing exercises), rotating high-intensity responsibilities, and fostering a culture where seeking support is normalized. Integrating self-care and wellness into team norms not only protects staff well-being but also improves decision-making capacity, reducing the likelihood that stress or cognitive overload will amplify bias in high-stakes situations (Bride, 2007; SAMHSA, 2014).

Recommendations for Student Behavioral Safety Assessment Teams to ensure equitable approaches in the process:

1. Team Composition

- Is the behavioral safety assessment team diverse in terms of race, culture, language, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and professional roles?
 - Do team members have training in cultural competence, trauma-informed care, and implicit bias?
-

2. Pre-Assessment Reflection

- Are we aware of our own assumptions or biases about this student?
 - Have we reviewed relevant disaggregated discipline or referral data for patterns of disproportionality?
 - Have we considered the impact of systemic factors (e.g., poverty, racism, trauma) on this student's behavior?
-

3. Case Evaluation

- Have we reviewed the **student's history** holistically (academic, behavioral, social, emotional)?
 - Are we considering cultural and linguistic context when interpreting behavior?
 - Are there any **cultural misunderstandings** that could explain the perceived threat?
-

4. Student & Family Engagement

- Have we engaged the **student's family or caregivers** in a respectful and culturally responsive way?
 - Was the student's **voice and perspective** included in the process?
 - Are interpreters or cultural liaisons involved if needed?
-

5. Intervention & Response

- Are **supports prioritized over punitive measures** (e.g., counseling, restorative circles)?
 - Is the intervention plan **equitable, strengths-based, and tailored** to the student's needs?
 - Have we ensured that supports are accessible and culturally appropriate?
-

6. Post-Assessment Monitoring

- Is there a plan to **review this case** for equity impact (e.g., outcome disparities, procedural fairness)?
- Do we track referral and resolution data by race, disability, gender, and language status?
- Are we **continually reviewing and revising** our safety (threat) assessment procedures using equity feedback?

1. Introduction to Restorative Justice and Behavioral Safety Assessment

Educational institutions and organizations increasingly recognize the need for approaches that both address harmful behavior and proactively prevent future harm. Traditional disciplinary or threat-assessment approaches often focus primarily on rule violations, risk identification, and containment of potential danger. While these approaches are important for maintaining safety, they may not fully address the relational and community impacts of harm. Integrating restorative justice (RJ) with behavioral safety assessment provides a more comprehensive framework that supports accountability, healing, prevention, and community well-being. This section introduces the foundational principles of restorative justice, explains the purpose of behavioral safety assessment, and explores how restorative approaches can strengthen safety assessment processes.

Overview of Restorative Justice

Restorative approaches in education center on relationship and trust building, transformative social emotional learning, trauma informed practices, and collaborative problem solving. When restorative approaches are embodied schoolwide, a foundation and structure are provided to address harm when it occurs through multiple individualized strategies based in restorative justice principles. Restorative justice is a relational and community-centered approach to addressing harm that focuses on repairing relationships, restoring trust, and meeting the needs of those impacted. Rather than focusing primarily on punishment or rule enforcement, restorative justice asks key questions such as: *Who has been harmed? What are their needs? Whose responsibility is it to repair the harm?* (Zehr, 2015).

At its core, restorative justice is grounded in several key principles:

Accountability

In restorative justice, accountability goes beyond accepting blame. Individuals who have caused harm are encouraged to understand the impact of their actions and actively participate in repairing that harm. This process emphasizes responsibility and growth rather than simple compliance with disciplinary consequences (Vaandering, 2014).

Repairing Harm

A central aim of restorative justice is to repair the harm experienced by individuals and communities. This may include apologies, restitution, collaborative problem-solving, or actions that rebuild trust and relationships. The process seeks meaningful outcomes that address emotional, relational, and community impacts (Braithwaite, 2002).

Dialogue and Participation

Restorative practices prioritize dialogue among those affected by harm. Structured conversations—such as restorative circles or conferences—allow harmed parties, responsible parties, and community members to share perspectives, express needs, and collaboratively determine next steps (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Community Building

Restorative justice emphasizes strengthening relationships and fostering a sense of belonging. By building relational capacity and shared responsibility within a community, restorative practices help prevent future harm and create environments where individuals feel supported and accountable to one another.

Centering the Needs of Harmed Parties

Traditional disciplinary systems often focus on rule violations or institutional responses. Restorative justice shifts the focus toward those who experienced harm, ensuring their voices are heard and their needs are addressed as part of the resolution process (Zehr, 2015).

Within schools and organizations, restorative practices can include community-building circles, facilitated dialogue, mediation, and restorative conferences. These approaches help address conflict, rebuild relationships, and create stronger community norms that promote safety and respect.

Purpose of Behavioral Safety Assessment

Behavioral safety assessment—often referred to as behavioral threat or safety assessment—is a structured process used by schools and organizations to identify individuals who may pose a risk of harm to themselves or others. The goal is not simply to predict violence but to identify concerning behaviors early and provide appropriate interventions before a crisis occurs (Van Dreal, J., McCarthy, & Van Dreal, C., 2022).

Key goals of behavioral safety assessment include:

Identifying Potential Risk

Assessment teams evaluate behaviors, communications, and contextual factors that may indicate potential harm. This process typically involves gathering information from multiple sources to determine the level of concern and appropriate response.

Preventing Violence

Behavioral safety assessment focuses on prevention. Rather than waiting for an incident to occur, teams seek to identify warning signs and intervene early to reduce risk (Van Dreal, J., McCarthy, & Van Dreal, C., 2022).

Supporting At-Promise Individuals

Many individuals who exhibit concerning behaviors are experiencing stress, trauma, isolation, or other challenges. Effective safety assessment includes identifying support systems and interventions that address underlying needs rather than relying solely on punitive responses.

Coordinated Team Response

Behavioral safety assessment processes should involve multidisciplinary teams that may include administrators, counselors, psychologists, and safety personnel. These teams collaborate to assess risk and determine appropriate actions to protect both individuals and the broader community.

While behavioral safety assessment provides an essential framework for identifying risk and ensuring safety, it can sometimes emphasize monitoring and intervention without fully addressing relational harm or opportunities for community healing. This is where restorative justice can play a valuable complementary role. The Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment grounded in the SK Cascade Model of Behavioral Threat Assessment includes restorative approaches as a management strategy and this will be highlighted in the resources and training materials provided. (Van Dreal, J., McCarthy, & Van Dreal, C., 2022).

Integration of Restorative Justice and Behavioral Safety Assessment

Integrating restorative justice principles into behavioral safety assessment processes can help create a more holistic approach to safety, accountability, and prevention. While safety assessment focuses on evaluating risk and determining appropriate interventions, restorative practices strengthen the relational and community dimensions of response. (Van Dreal, J., McCarthy, & Van Dreal, C., 2022).

Supporting Meaningful Accountability

When concerning behavior causes harm, restorative processes allow individuals to understand the impact of their actions and participate in repairing that harm. This can enhance accountability while promoting personal growth and reducing the likelihood of repeated harmful behavior.

Addressing Underlying Needs

Many behaviors identified in safety assessments are connected to unmet needs, trauma, or social isolation. Restorative approaches create opportunities for dialogue and connection, helping individuals feel heard and supported while addressing root causes of concerning behavior.

Strengthening Community Response

Restorative practices engage the broader community in addressing harm and supporting positive change. By involving peers, educators, and community members in dialogue and problem-solving, schools and organizations can reinforce shared responsibility for safety and well-being.

Promoting Reintegration and Healing

After a safety incident or intervention, individuals may struggle with stigma or damaged relationships. Restorative processes can help facilitate reintegration, rebuild trust, and restore a sense of belonging within the community.

Balancing Safety and Relationship-Centered Responses

Behavioral safety assessment prioritizes protecting individuals and communities from harm, while restorative justice emphasizes repairing relationships and strengthening community connections. Together, these approaches create a balanced framework that addresses both immediate safety concerns and long-term relational health.

Conclusion

Restorative justice and behavioral safety assessment each provide valuable approaches for addressing harm and promoting safety in schools and organizations. Behavioral safety assessment focuses on identifying risks and preventing violence through structured evaluation and coordinated interventions. Restorative justice complements this approach by emphasizing accountability, repairing harm, and strengthening relationships within the community.

When integrated thoughtfully, restorative practices can enhance safety assessment processes by fostering dialogue, addressing underlying needs, and supporting healing for those impacted by harm. This combined approach moves beyond purely punitive or surveillance-based responses and instead promotes a more comprehensive strategy for building safe, supportive, and resilient communities.

2. Core Principles of Restorative Justice

Restorative justice (RJ) is an approach to addressing harm that centers relationships, accountability, and healing within a community. Unlike traditional disciplinary systems that often emphasize punishment or rule enforcement, restorative justice focuses on understanding the impact of harmful behavior, repairing relationships, and preventing future harm. In schools and organizations, restorative practices can be particularly effective when responding to conflict, misconduct, or situations involving threats or safety concerns. The core principles of restorative justice include accountability and responsibility, repairing harm, involvement of partners, empathy and understanding, and restorative dialogue and communication. Together, these principles create a framework that promotes safety, healing, and community resilience.

Accountability and Responsibility

A central principle of restorative justice is meaningful accountability. In restorative approaches, accountability goes beyond simply admitting wrongdoing or accepting punishment. Instead, individuals who have caused harm are encouraged to understand the impact of their actions on others and take active steps to repair the harm they have caused (Zehr, 2015).

This approach reframes accountability as an opportunity for growth rather than punishment. Traditional disciplinary responses may isolate or stigmatize individuals, which can sometimes increase feelings of resentment or disconnection from the community. Restorative justice, by contrast, emphasizes responsibility in a supportive and structured environment where individuals can acknowledge their actions, hear directly from those affected, and participate in creating solutions (Braithwaite, 2002).

Practitioners facilitate this process by helping the responsible party reflect on questions such as: *What happened? Who was affected? What needs to be done to make things right?* Through this process, individuals develop a deeper understanding of the consequences of their behavior and are empowered to make amends. Research suggests that restorative accountability processes can promote behavioral change because they encourage reflection, empathy, and ownership of one's actions rather than compliance with imposed sanctions (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Repairing Harm

Another key principle of restorative justice is the intentional repair of harm. Harmful incidents often affect not only the immediate individuals involved but also the broader community.

Restorative practices aim to address these impacts by providing structured opportunities for those affected to express their experiences and identify what they need in order to move forward.

Repairing harm can take many forms, depending on the nature of the incident and the needs of those involved. Common restorative strategies include facilitated restorative conferences, mediation, community circles, written or verbal apologies, restitution, and collaborative agreements for future behavior (Wachtel, 2016). These processes allow individuals who have experienced harm to share how they were affected emotionally, socially, or academically, while also giving the responsible party an opportunity to respond and take steps toward making amends.

Importantly, repairing harm does not always mean restoring relationships to their previous state. Instead, it focuses on acknowledging harm, validating the experiences of those affected, and creating meaningful steps toward healing and resolution. When individuals feel heard and supported, they are more likely to experience closure and renewed trust in the community.

Involvement of Partners

Restorative justice recognizes that harm affects multiple individuals and groups. As a result, restorative processes involve all relevant stakeholders in addressing the situation. These partners may include the person responsible for the harm, the harmed parties, witnesses, family members, educators, and other members of the community.

Involving multiple partners helps ensure that the response reflects the needs and perspectives of everyone affected. This collaborative approach also reinforces the idea that maintaining a safe and supportive environment is a shared responsibility. By participating in restorative processes, community members contribute to developing solutions, setting expectations, and supporting positive change (Zehr, 2015).

For example, in a school setting, restorative conferences may include students, teachers, counselors, administrators, and sometimes family members. Each participant has the opportunity to share their perspective, discuss how the incident affected them, and help determine appropriate actions for repairing harm. This inclusive process strengthens relationships and builds collective accountability within the community.

Additionally, involving partners can help identify underlying factors that may have contributed to the harmful behavior, such as stress, trauma, peer conflict, or social isolation. Recognizing

these factors allows the community to provide appropriate supports and interventions that reduce the likelihood of future incidents.

Empathy and Understanding

Developing empathy and understanding is another core element of restorative justice. Harmful behavior often occurs when individuals fail to fully consider how their actions affect others. Restorative processes intentionally create opportunities for participants to hear and understand one another's experiences.

When harmed parties describe how they were impacted by an incident, the responsible party gains insight into the emotional and relational consequences of their behavior. This experience can foster empathy and encourage individuals to reflect more deeply on their actions. Research indicates that restorative approaches can strengthen empathy and reduce repeat harmful behavior by helping individuals connect with the human impact of their choices (Sherman & Strang, 2007).

Restorative practitioners use a variety of tools to cultivate empathy, including structured questioning, reflective listening, storytelling, circle processes, conferencing, and guided dialogue. These strategies encourage participants to move beyond blame and defensiveness and toward greater understanding of one another's perspectives.

Empathy development also plays an important role in addressing the root causes of harmful behavior. When individuals feel seen, heard, and supported, they may be more willing to discuss underlying challenges such as trauma, stress, or unmet needs. Addressing these issues can lead to more effective and sustainable solutions.

Restorative Dialogue and Communication

Restorative justice relies heavily on dialogue as a tool for addressing harm and strengthening relationships. Restorative dialogue involves structured conversations that allow participants to communicate openly, respectfully, and constructively about the incident and its impacts.

Facilitators play a critical role in guiding these conversations and ensuring that all participants feel safe and respected. Common restorative dialogue formats include restorative circles, conferences, and mediated conversations. These approaches typically follow a structured process that encourages participants to reflect on key questions such as:

- What happened?

- What were you thinking and feeling at the time?
- Who has been affected and how?
- What needs to happen to make things right?

These conversations help shift the focus from punishment to problem-solving and relationship repair. Participants are encouraged to listen actively, express their needs, and work collaboratively toward a resolution.

Effective restorative dialogue requires careful facilitation and preparation. Participants may need support in expressing themselves constructively, managing strong emotions, and respecting the perspectives of others. When implemented thoughtfully, restorative dialogue can transform conflict into an opportunity for learning, healing, and stronger community relationships (Wachtel, 2016).

Conclusion

The core principles of restorative justice—accountability and responsibility, repairing harm, involvement of partners, empathy and understanding, and restorative dialogue—provide a comprehensive framework for addressing harmful behavior in schools and organizations. By emphasizing relationship repair, shared responsibility, and meaningful participation, restorative approaches move beyond punitive responses and focus on long-term healing and community well-being.

When individuals are given the opportunity to understand the impact of their actions, repair harm, and reconnect with their community, the likelihood of positive behavioral change increases. At the same time, those who experience harm are given voice, validation, and support in the healing process. As a result, restorative justice offers a powerful pathway for building safer, more compassionate, and more resilient communities.

3. Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment Process

Integration of the SK Cascade Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management System

Behavioral Safety Assessment (BSA), also known as behavioral threat assessment, is a structured process used in schools to identify, evaluate, and respond to behaviors that may indicate potential violence or harm. Many districts in Oregon and across the United States utilize the **SK Cascade Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management System (SK Cascade)** as the foundational model guiding these assessments and Oregon has utilized this system to develop the **Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment**. Developed through collaboration between educators, mental health professionals, law enforcement, and community partners, the SK Cascade model provides a multidisciplinary, prevention-focused framework designed to identify concerning behavior early and intervene before violence occurs (Van Dreal & Okada, 2021; Van Dreal, J., McCarthy, & Van Dreal, C., 2022; Oregon Department of Education, 2023).

The Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade System operates through a **two-tiered structure**. Level 1 assessments are conducted by a school-based team and focus on gathering information, assessing risk factors, and determining immediate interventions. If a situation is complex or presents elevated risk, the case may be escalated to a **Level 2 community-based team** that includes representatives from mental health services, law enforcement, juvenile justice, and other youth-serving agencies. This collaborative structure emphasizes prevention, early intervention, and coordinated support rather than punitive disciplinary responses (Public Consulting Group, 2026; Oregon Department of Education, 2023).

The Behavioral Safety Assessment process involves several key components: identifying threats, assessing risk, gathering information, considering the needs of diverse student populations, and integrating restorative approaches that support healing and accountability.

Identifying Threats

The first step in the Behavioral Safety Assessment process involves recognizing behaviors or communications that may indicate a potential threat of harm. Threats can take multiple forms, including direct verbal statements, written messages, social media posts, implied threats, or behaviors that suggest preparation for violence. Examples may include statements about harming others, possession or fascination with weapons, escalating aggressive behavior, or expressions of grievance or revenge (Cornell, 2018; Van Dreal, J., McCarthy, & Van Dreal, C., 2022).

Within the Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade System, an assessment is initiated when there is an **implied threat or act of aggression directed toward others**. The system emphasizes evaluating behaviors within their context rather than relying on stereotypes or profiling (Van Dreal & Okada, 2021; Van Dreal, J., McCarthy, & Van Dreal, C., 2022). For example, a concerning statement made during a moment of frustration may require a different response than a sustained pattern of planning or threatening behavior.

School staff play an important role in identifying early warning signs. These may include:

- Verbal or written threats of violence
- Sudden changes in behavior or mood
- Social withdrawal or increasing isolation
- Escalating conflicts with peers or staff
- Expressions of hopelessness or grievance
- Evidence of planning or fascination with violence

Once concerning behavior is identified, the school administrator or designated team member consults with the **Level 1 Behavioral Safety Assessment team**, typically composed of an administrator, school counselor or psychologist, and sometimes a school resource officer or safety personnel (Oregon Department of Education, 2023). The team determines whether the concern requires a formal Level 1 assessment or can be addressed through other supports.

Risk Assessment

After a threat or concerning behavior has been identified, the next step involves assessing the level of risk and determining the immediacy of potential harm. Behavioral threat assessment differs from traditional discipline because it focuses on **understanding the individual's situation and the factors influencing their behavior**, rather than simply punishing rule violations (Van Dreal, J., McCarthy, & Van Dreal, C., 2022).

The Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade System guides teams through a structured set of questions that examine multiple dimensions of risk. These may include:

- The seriousness and specificity of the threat
- Evidence of planning or preparation

- Access to weapons or means of harm
- History of aggressive or violent behavior
- Mental health concerns or emotional distress
- Relationship conflicts or grievances
- Experiences of bullying or victimization
- Protective factors such as supportive relationships or positive coping skills

Assessment teams also consider whether the threat appears **reactive** (made impulsively without sustained intent) or **targeted** (indicating ongoing intent or preparation). This distinction helps determine the appropriate level of intervention and monitoring (Van Dreal, J., McCarthy, & Van Dreal, C., 2022).

If the Level 1 team determines that a situation involves significant risk or requires additional expertise, the case may be referred to the **Level 2 Oregon Model of BSA SK Cascade team**, which brings together professionals from multiple agencies to review the case and recommend intervention strategies (Public Consulting Group, 2026).

Gathering Information

A thorough threat assessment relies on collecting information from multiple sources in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the situation. The Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade System includes structured tools to guide this process, such as staff questionnaires, student interviews, witness interviews, and parent interviews (Oregon Department of Education, 2023).

Information gathering may include:

- Interviews with the student of concern
- Conversations with witnesses, teachers, and peers
- Parent or guardian interviews
- Review of academic, disciplinary, and behavioral records
- Examination of social media or digital communications when relevant
- Observations of behavior and interactions

The goal of information gathering is not to assign blame but to understand the **context surrounding the behavior**, identify risk factors, and determine appropriate supports. Teams also examine protective factors, such as positive relationships, engagement in school activities, or access to mental health services, which may reduce the likelihood of violence.

Documentation is an important component of this process. Teams maintain detailed records of the information collected, their analysis of the situation, and the interventions implemented. These records support coordinated decision-making and ensure that appropriate follow-up occurs.

Considerations for Students Receiving Special Education or 504 Services

Students who qualify for **special education services or accommodation under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** require additional considerations during the Behavioral Safety Assessment process. The Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade System includes guidance for ensuring that assessments and interventions are aligned with students' legal rights and educational needs (Public Consulting Group, 2026).

Assessment teams must consider:

- Whether the behavior may be related to the student's disability
- Whether the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan includes behavioral supports
- Whether additional services or accommodation is necessary

Collaboration with special education staff is critical to ensure that responses are appropriate and supportive. For example, a student experiencing emotional or behavioral disabilities may require counseling support, behavior intervention plans, or adjustments to their educational environment rather than solely disciplinary consequences.

Ensuring compliance with federal laws such as the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** helps protect student rights while still addressing safety concerns within the school community.

Considerations for Multilingual Learners and Emerging Bilingual Students

Behavioral Safety Assessment teams must also consider the needs of students who identify as **multilingual learners or emerging bilingual students**. Language differences, cultural contexts, and communication barriers can influence how behaviors or statements are interpreted.

When assessing potential threats involving multilingual learners, teams should:

- Ensure access to interpreters or translated materials when communicating with students and families
- Consider cultural differences in communication styles and emotional expression
- Avoid misinterpreting language barriers as evasiveness or noncompliance
- Engage culturally responsive supports and community resources when appropriate

Equity considerations are central to the Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade System, which emphasizes evaluating behaviors within their situational context and avoiding bias or stereotyping (Oregon Department of Education, 2023). By incorporating culturally responsive practices, teams can ensure that assessments are fair, accurate, and respectful of students' identities and experiences.

Restorative Elements in the Assessment Process

While Behavioral Safety Assessment focuses on identifying and mitigating risk, restorative justice principles can enhance the process by promoting empathy, dialogue, and community healing. Integrating restorative practices into threat assessment does not replace safety protocols but helps ensure that the process remains supportive, trauma-informed, and relationship-centered.

Restorative elements may include:

Creating a Safe Space for Dialogue

Students who are the subject of an assessment may feel anxious, defensive, or misunderstood. Using restorative communication strategies—such as active listening, respectful questioning, and non-judgmental language—can help build trust and encourage honest dialogue.

Non-Judgmental Inquiry

Rather than assuming malicious intent, restorative approaches encourage teams to ask open-ended questions that explore underlying experiences and emotions. Questions such as “*What*

was happening for you at the time?” or “Who has been affected by this situation?” help students reflect on their actions and their impact.

Centering Impacted Individuals

Restorative practices also emphasize acknowledging the experiences of individuals who were harmed or frightened by the incident. Providing opportunities for these individuals to share their perspectives can help rebuild trust and restore a sense of safety.

Supporting Accountability and Reintegration

After safety concerns have been addressed, restorative conversations or agreements may help repair relationships and support the student’s reintegration into the school community.

The integration of restorative principles aligns with the Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade System’s emphasis on **supportive interventions, trauma-informed practices, and maintaining students’ connection to school whenever possible** (Public Consulting Group, 2026). By combining structured safety (threat) assessment with restorative approaches, schools can respond to safety concerns in ways that promote both security and healing.

4. Training and Capacity Building for Restorative Behavioral Safety Systems

Effective implementation of restorative justice (RJ) within behavioral safety assessment systems requires intentional **training, cultural responsiveness, trauma-informed practice, and ongoing reflection**. Restorative approaches cannot function as standalone techniques; they must be embedded within the professional competencies of school-based teams, administrators, counselors, and law enforcement partners who participate in behavioral safety assessment and management processes. Capacity building ensures that restorative practices are applied consistently, ethically, and in alignment with safety protocols.

This section outlines three essential components of training and capacity building: (1) training for professionals, (2) culturally sustaining practices and trauma-informed care, and (3) ongoing support and reflective practice.

Training for Professionals

Behavioral safety assessment teams—often including school administrators, counselors, psychologists, school resource officers, and community partners—require structured training in restorative principles and facilitation skills to ensure effective implementation. Restorative justice is not simply a philosophy; it is a set of structured practices that require skill in dialogue facilitation, active listening, conflict mediation, and collaborative problem-solving (Zehr, 2015).

Core Competencies for Training

Professional development in restorative practices should include:

1. Foundational Restorative Principles

Participants should understand the core philosophy of restorative justice, including:

- Repairing harm rather than punishing rule violations
 - Centering the needs of those affected
 - Promoting accountability through dialogue
 - Strengthening community relationships
- (Braithwaite, 2002; Morrison & Vaandering, 2012)

2. Facilitation Skills

Restorative processes such as conferences and circles require skilled facilitation. Training should include:

- Open-ended questioning techniques
- Neutral and non-judgmental language
- Emotional regulation strategies
- Structured dialogue protocols
- Conflict de-escalation skills

3. Integration with Safety Protocols

Professionals involved in behavioral safety assessment must understand how restorative approaches complement structured behavioral safety assessment models. Training should clarify when restorative processes are appropriate (e.g., post-stabilization, after immediate safety concerns are addressed) and how they align with evidence-based behavioral safety threat assessment frameworks (Cornell, 2018).

4. Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Because behavioral safety assessment processes involve cross-sector teams, training should include collaborative case discussion, shared decision-making, and role clarity. Restorative practices require alignment across school leadership, mental health professionals, law enforcement, and other community partners to ensure consistency and trust.

Research indicates that restorative programs are more effective when staff receive comprehensive training and ongoing coaching rather than one-time workshops (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Sustainable implementation depends on institutional commitment, leadership support, and structured professional learning opportunities.

Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices and Trauma-Informed Care

Restorative justice and behavioral safety assessment protocols and processes must operate within a framework of cultural responsiveness and trauma-informed care. Behavior does not occur in isolation; it is shaped by social context, identity, systemic inequities, and lived experiences. Without attention to cultural and trauma-related factors, restorative processes may unintentionally replicate harm or misunderstanding.

Cultural Responsiveness

Culturally responsive restorative practice recognizes that:

- Communication styles vary across cultures
- Expressions of emotion or disagreement may differ

- Authority dynamics influence participation
- Historical and systemic inequities impact trust in institutions

Training should prepare professionals to examine implicit bias, understand cultural context, and avoid interpreting behaviors through a single dominant cultural lens. This is especially important in behavioral safety assessments, where misinterpretation of language, tone, or behavior could affect outcomes.

Culturally responsive practice aligns with restorative justice principles by emphasizing respect, inclusion, and shared power in dialogue processes (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Teams should ensure that interpreters, culturally responsive facilitators, and community liaisons are available when needed.

Trauma-Informed Care

Trauma significantly influences behavior, emotional regulation, perception of threat, and interpersonal interactions. Many students involved in behavioral safety assessments have experienced trauma, including bullying, family instability, community violence, or systemic discrimination.

A trauma-informed approach emphasizes:

- Safety (physical and emotional)
- Trustworthiness and transparency
- Peer and professional support
- Collaboration and empowerment
- Cultural humility

(SAMHSA, 2014)

When restorative practices are trauma-informed, facilitators:

- Avoid re-traumatization during dialogue
- Provide clear structure and predictability
- Allow participants to opt in utilizing multiple entry points and structures
- Provide alternatives when necessary and pace the process to not overwhelm

- Support emotional regulation before and during conversations
- Focus on empowerment rather than coercion

Trauma-informed restorative practices recognize that some individuals may initially respond defensively or emotionally due to past experiences. Rather than interpreting this as resistance, facilitators are trained to understand trauma responses and adapt accordingly.

Integrating trauma-informed care within behavioral safety systems ensures that accountability processes do not exacerbate distress but instead promote healing and stability.

Ongoing Support and Reflection

Sustainable implementation of restorative approaches requires continuous learning, evaluation, and reflection. One-time professional development is insufficient to build long term capacity. Instead, organizations should adopt an ongoing improvement model that includes coaching, peer support, and outcome evaluation.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice encourages professionals to examine:

- What worked well in a restorative process?
- What challenges arose?
- How did participants respond?
- Were all voices equitably included?
- Did the process promote both accountability and safety?

Structured debriefings after restorative conferences and behavioral assessments allow teams to refine their approach and strengthen consistency. These debriefings should be scheduled into meeting structures and processes to allow time for team members to continually debrief.

Reflective supervision for facilitators can improve skill development and prevent burnout. Because restorative work often involves emotionally charged situations, ongoing support helps maintain facilitator neutrality and effectiveness.

Data-Informed Improvement

Behavioral safety teams can use data to evaluate the effectiveness of restorative interventions. Metrics may include:

- Recurrence of concerning behavior
- Participant satisfaction
- School climate indicators
- Referrals to support services
- Completion of restorative agreements

Research suggests that restorative approaches can reduce repeat incidents and improve perceptions of fairness when implemented with fidelity and support (Sherman & Strang, 2007). Monitoring outcomes ensures accountability to the community and supports continuous refinement of practice.

Leadership Commitment

Organizational leadership plays a critical role in sustaining restorative capacity. Leaders should:

- Allocate time for training and professional development
- Provide structured coaching opportunities
- Embed restorative values in policy
- Support cross-agency collaboration
- Encourage a culture of learning rather than blame

When restorative practices are aligned with institutional priorities, they become part of the organizational culture rather than isolated interventions.

Conclusion

Training and capacity building are essential for integrating restorative justice into behavioral safety assessment systems. Professionals require structured education in restorative principles, facilitation skills, and collaborative decision-making to ensure effective implementation. Cultural sensitivity and trauma-informed care further strengthen restorative processes by ensuring that responses are respectful, equitable, and psychologically safe. Finally, ongoing support, reflective practice, and data-informed improvement sustain high-quality implementation over time.

When restorative approaches are embedded within comprehensive behavioral safety systems, communities benefit from responses that balance prevention, accountability, and healing. Through intentional training and continuous reflection, organizations can build the capacity necessary to create safer, more inclusive, and more connected environments.

5. Supportive Strategies Using a Restorative Approach

Restorative justice (RJ) provides a framework for responding to harmful behavior in ways that promote accountability, healing, and stronger relationships within a community. In school settings, restorative approaches are increasingly used alongside safety and behavioral assessment processes to address conflict, bullying, and threatening behavior. Rather than focusing solely on punishment, restorative strategies emphasize repairing harm, rebuilding trust, and supporting positive behavioral change. Key restorative strategies include restorative justice conferencing, circle processes, mediation, accountability and healing practices, and restorative agreements. Together, these approaches create opportunities for individuals to take responsibility for their actions while ensuring that the needs of those affected by harm are addressed.

Accountability and Healing

A key goal of restorative justice is to create opportunities for both accountability and healing. In traditional disciplinary systems, accountability is often defined as receiving punishment for wrongdoing. Restorative approaches redefine accountability as the process of recognizing harm, understanding its impact, and actively participating in repairing that harm (Zehr, 2015).

When individuals who have caused harm hear directly from those affected, they may develop a deeper sense of empathy and responsibility. This experience can encourage meaningful reflection and behavioral change. Restorative processes also allow individuals to make amends in ways that are meaningful to those who were harmed.

At the same time, restorative justice emphasizes the importance of healing for those affected by the incident. Individuals who experience harm often need opportunities to express their feelings, ask questions, and regain a sense of safety within the community. Restorative processes validate these experiences and ensure that their voices are included in determining how the situation is resolved.

By addressing both accountability and healing, restorative approaches create pathways for repairing relationships and rebuilding trust within the school community.

Restorative Justice Conferencing

Restorative justice conferencing is a structured process that brings together individuals affected by a harmful incident to discuss the impact of the behavior and collaboratively determine how

to repair the harm. Participants typically include the individual who caused the harm, those who were harmed, and other relevant community members such as family members, caregivers, educators, or support staff. A trained facilitator guides the conversation and ensures that all participants have an opportunity to share their experiences and perspectives (Wachtel, 2016).

Restorative conferences are particularly useful in situations where behavior has caused fear, conflict, or disruption within a school community. The conference process typically follows a series of structured questions that encourage reflection and dialogue, such as:

- What happened?
- What were you thinking or feeling at the time?
- Who has been affected and how?
- What needs to happen to repair the harm?

Through this process, individuals who have caused harm are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and understand the impact of their behavior. At the same time, those who were affected have an opportunity to express how the incident impacted them and identify what they need to feel safe and supported moving forward. Research suggests that restorative conferencing can reduce repeat harmful behavior while increasing satisfaction among participants because it allows for direct communication and collaborative problem-solving (Sherman & Strang, 2007).

In situations involving threats or serious conflict, restorative conferencing may take place after safety concerns have been addressed and participants are prepared to engage in constructive dialogue. When facilitated effectively, conferences can help repair relationships and restore trust within the community.

Circle Processes

Circle processes are another widely used restorative strategy in schools. Circles involve participants sitting in a circle and engaging in guided dialogue using shared agreements and structured facilitation. Circles can be used proactively to build community or responsively to address conflict, harm, or emotional challenges.

In restorative circles, participants speak one at a time, often using a talking piece that is passed around the circle. This structure encourages respectful listening and ensures that each person

has an opportunity to share their perspective. Circle processes can help address underlying issues such as peer conflict, bullying, or emotional distress that may contribute to harmful behavior (Pranis, 2015).

Circles serve multiple purposes within a restorative framework. Proactive circles help build relationships, establish community norms, and create a sense of belonging. When students feel connected and supported within their community, they may be less likely to engage in harmful behavior. Responsive circles, on the other hand, provide a structured space to address incidents, repair relationships, and rebuild trust after harm has occurred.

In the context of behavioral safety concerns, circle processes can help students and staff discuss the impact of a situation, explore contributing factors, and identify strategies for moving forward together. By encouraging open communication and collective problem-solving, circles help strengthen community relationships and foster a culture of accountability and care.

Mediation

Mediation is another restorative strategy that provides a structured and neutral process for resolving conflicts or misunderstandings. In mediation, a trained facilitator helps individuals in conflict communicate with one another, clarify perspectives, and work toward a mutually agreed-upon resolution.

Unlike disciplinary proceedings, mediation focuses on dialogue and collaboration rather than determining guilt or imposing consequences. The mediator guides the conversation to ensure that each participant has an opportunity to share their perspective and listen to the perspective of the other party. Through this process, individuals often develop a deeper understanding of the conflict and identify solutions that address the needs of both sides (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Mediation can be particularly helpful in situations where interpersonal conflict contributes to threatening or concerning behavior. For example, misunderstandings between peers, ongoing bullying, or unresolved disputes may escalate into more serious incidents if not addressed. Mediation provides an opportunity to address these issues early and prevent further escalation.

By encouraging participants to collaborate in resolving their differences, mediation helps strengthen communication skills and promotes constructive conflict resolution. These skills can contribute to healthier relationships and a safer school environment.

Restorative Agreements

Restorative agreements are collaborative action plans developed during restorative conferences, circles, or mediation processes. These agreements outline specific steps that the individual who caused harm will take to repair the harm and prevent future incidents.

Restorative agreements may include a variety of actions depending on the situation, such as:

- Offering a sincere apology to those affected
- Participating in counseling or mental health support
- Engaging in community service or acts of repair
- Developing conflict resolution or communication skills
- Participating in mentoring or support programs
- Committing to specific behavioral goals or safety plans

Because these agreements are developed collaboratively, they are more likely to be meaningful and effective than consequences imposed without dialogue. Participants often feel a greater sense of ownership and commitment to the agreement because they helped shape the solution (Wachtel, 2016).

Restorative agreements also provide an opportunity for monitoring progress and ensuring accountability. School staff or community members may follow up with participants to review progress and provide ongoing support as needed.

Conclusion

Supportive strategies grounded in restorative justice provide powerful tools for addressing conflict, harm, and threatening behavior within schools and organizations. Restorative justice conferencing, circle processes, mediation, accountability practices, and restorative agreements all contribute to a comprehensive approach that prioritizes healing, responsibility, and relationship repair.

By emphasizing dialogue, empathy, and collaborative problem-solving, restorative approaches help individuals understand the impact of their actions and take meaningful steps toward repair. At the same time, they provide those affected by harm with opportunities to express their experiences and identify what they need to feel safe and supported. When integrated with broader safety and behavioral assessment systems, restorative strategies can strengthen

community relationships, reduce repeat harmful behavior, and contribute to safer and more supportive learning environments.

6. Engaging the Affected Community in Restorative Safety Practices & Engaging the Impacted Community: Families and Caregivers

Engaging the affected community is a foundational component of restorative justice (RJ) and behavioral safety systems. Harmful or threatening behavior within schools or organizations rarely impacts only the individual involved; it affects peers, educators, families, and the broader community. Addressing the relational and emotional impacts of harm requires a systematic approach to **support those affected, facilitate reintegration of individuals who caused harm, and build sustainable support networks**. When communities are actively engaged, restorative practices can enhance safety, trust, and relational capacity, promoting long-term resilience.

Impacted Party Support

The first step in community engagement is ensuring that **those affected by harm receive appropriate support**. Impacted parties—students, staff, or other community members—often experience emotional distress, fear, or diminished trust in their environment following threatening behavior. Providing structured support helps individuals feel heard, validated, and safe, which is essential for both healing and maintaining community cohesion (Zehr, 2015).

Support strategies may include:

- **Counseling or mental health services:** Professional support helps individuals process the emotional impact of the incident, develop coping strategies, and prevent long-term negative effects on wellbeing. Trauma-informed counseling is particularly important, as experiences of fear or victimization can trigger prior trauma (SAMHSA, 2014).
- **Mediation or facilitated dialogue:** In some cases, impacted parties may participate in restorative conversations with the individual responsible for the harm. Facilitated by trained professionals, these dialogues allow affected individuals to express how the behavior affected them and to contribute to mutually agreed-upon repair actions (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).
- **Active participation in restorative justice processes:** Allowing harmed individuals to participate in RJ conferences or circles empowers them to shape outcomes, voice their needs, and influence how relationships are repaired. Research indicates that victim participation in restorative processes increases satisfaction, enhances perceptions of fairness, and promotes trust in community systems (Sherman & Strang, 2007).

Providing consistent support ensures that impacted parties are not merely recipients of institutional interventions but active participants in the healing process.

Community Reintegration

A critical component of restorative safety practices is **facilitating the reintegration of individuals who have caused harm**. Exclusion or punitive responses alone may exacerbate isolation, resentment, or risk of repeated harmful behavior. Restorative approaches aim to reintegrate individuals in ways that promote accountability, repair relationships, and reduce the likelihood of recurrence (Braithwaite, 2002).

Key strategies for reintegration include:

- **Restorative conferences and agreements:** After safety concerns have been addressed, structured conferences provide a framework for discussing expectations, responsibilities, and reparative actions. These agreements can guide reintegration by clarifying behavioral expectations, outlining supports, and promoting accountability.
- **Ongoing mentoring and guidance:** Assigning mentors, counselors, or supportive peers helps individuals navigate reintegration challenges and reinforce positive decision-making.
- **Gradual community engagement:** Depending on the nature of the harm, reintegration may occur in stages, allowing the individual to re-enter school or community activities while demonstrating adherence to agreements and receiving support from staff and peers.

By combining accountability with structured support, restorative reintegration emphasizes behavioral growth and relationship repair rather than punishment alone. This approach contributes to safer and more cohesive communities while reducing the likelihood of repeated incidents.

Building a Support Network

Effective engagement of the affected community requires cultivating a **network of support among peers, family members, caregivers, and community partners**. A robust support system reinforces accountability, strengthens social bonds, and creates protective factors against future harm.

Strategies for building support networks include:

- **Peer support and mentorship:** Encouraging students or community members to mentor one another fosters positive role modeling and provides immediate relational support.
- **Family and caregiver involvement:** Engaging families and caregivers in restorative processes ensures that interventions align with home dynamics and cultural values, and strengthens consistency in expectations and support (Pranis, 2015).
- **Collaboration with community organizations:** Partnering with local mental health agencies, youth services, and community programs provides additional resources for counseling, skill-building, and conflict resolution.
- **Community-based restorative circles:** Circles that include diverse stakeholders reinforce shared responsibility and community cohesion, promoting relational accountability and mutual care.

By intentionally fostering these networks, organizations create an environment in which community members actively participate in promoting safety, supporting healing, and reinforcing shared norms. Strong support networks are associated with improved outcomes, including reduced recidivism, enhanced trust, and stronger school or organizational climate (Wachtel, 2016).

Integration of Support, Reintegration, and Networks

Restorative justice practices are most effective when **support for impacted parties, reintegration of individuals who caused harm, and network-building occur simultaneously**. For example, after a behavioral safety assessment identifies a concerning incident, the following integrated approach may be implemented:

1. **Provide immediate support** to those affected through counseling and facilitated dialogue.
2. **Conduct a restorative conference** to address harm, clarify responsibilities, and create a reintegration plan for the individual who caused the harm.
3. **Engage families, peers, and community partners** in supporting implementation of the restorative agreement and monitoring progress.

4. **Continue follow-up and reflective practice** to ensure both healing and accountability are sustained over time.

This coordinated approach addresses both the relational and behavioral dimensions of harm, promotes safety, and strengthens community resilience.

Engaging the Impacted Community: Families and Caregivers

Integrating **restorative justice strategies into the behavioral safety assessment process** with families and caregivers helps center humanity, healing, and equity—while still ensuring safety. Utilize a framework that builds on restorative principles **before, during, and after** a threat assessment, making families active partners instead of passive observers.

Key Principles:

Voice and Agency: Caregivers are not subjects of assessment, but partners in co-creating understanding and solutions.

Cultural Responsiveness: Engage with deep awareness of racialized, ableist, and socioeconomic dynamics that can influence behavioral safety assessments.

Repair and Relationship: Prioritize relationship repair—not just rule enforcement—especially where families and caregivers feel harmed or excluded.

Parents and Caregivers in the Process:

Utilize a framework that builds on restorative principles **before, during, and after** a threat assessment, making families active partners instead of passive observers.

Before: Building Relationships & Readiness

Goal: Cultivate trust and shared language before a crisis occurs.

- **RJ Family Circles Throughout the Year:** Regular community-building circles (in person or virtual) with families to develop relational trust with staff, explain RJ and BSA basics, and normalize difficult conversations.
- **Restorative Orientation to BSA:** Provide accessible materials or workshops that explain how the school's behavioral safety assessment process integrates RJ principles, emphasizing support over punishment.

- **Shared Agreements Around Safety:** Co-create guiding agreements with families on how safety, accountability, and belonging can coexist, setting the foundation for collaboration during a crisis.

During: RJ-Informed Threat Assessment

Goal: Ensure transparency, dignity, and voice for all involved.

Inclusive Participation: Invite families/caregivers to participate meaningfully in the process—not just as information providers, but as co-partners in assessing student needs and context.

Restorative Questions in Interviews: Use RJ-based inquiry with families (e.g., *“What do you think the student was needing when this happened?”*, *“Who has been affected and how?”*) to deepen understanding beyond behavior.

Trauma-Informed & Culturally Responsive Framing: Avoid language that pathologizes or criminalizes. Use RJ principles to affirm family identity, honor lived experiences, and prevent bias.

Circle or Dialogue Option (when safe/appropriate): In cases where harm occurred but safety can be assured, a **restorative dialogue or conference** can be offered, allowing all affected parties (including families) to hear impact, ask questions, and identify steps forward.

After: Restoration, Reentry, and Ongoing Support

Goal: Heal harm, repair trust, and support reintegration.

Restorative Reentry Circles: Facilitate a circle with the student, family, educators, and relevant peers to support a **successful return** to the community, co-create reintegration plans, and voice accountability and needs.

Caregiver Support Circles: Provide voluntary RJ-based circles for caregivers navigating stress, stigma, or isolation after a threat assessment, helping them feel less alone and better supported.

Long-Term Relational Monitoring: Include families in post-assessment check-ins, using restorative check-in questions like *“What’s going well? What support would feel helpful now?”* to maintain connections and healing momentum.

Feedback Loops: Create structured opportunities for caregivers to share their experiences of the process (anonymously or in facilitated spaces) and use their input to strengthen the school's RJ+BSA alignment.

Conclusion

Engaging the affected community is a critical component of restorative behavioral safety systems. By providing robust support for impacted parties, facilitating safe and accountable reintegration of those who caused harm, and building networks of peer, family, and community support, restorative practices create a framework for **healing, accountability, and long-term prevention**. When communities are active participants in both repairing harm and fostering safe environments, schools and organizations can reduce recurrence of harmful behaviors, enhance trust, and cultivate inclusive, resilient communities.

7. Monitoring and Evaluating the Restorative Justice Process

Effective restorative justice (RJ) implementation requires intentional **monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement**. Restorative approaches are most successful when organizations do not treat them as one-time interventions, but as structured processes that are tracked for impact and refined over time. Monitoring and evaluation help ensure that restorative practices are achieving their intended goals: repairing harm, strengthening relationships, promoting accountability, and enhancing community safety.

Within schools and organizations, evaluation should focus not only on individual outcomes, but also on broader indicators of **community well-being, climate, and prevention of future harm**.

Tracking Progress

Tracking progress involves collecting data to determine whether restorative interventions are producing meaningful behavioral and relational change. Because restorative justice emphasizes both accountability and healing, progress should be measured using multiple indicators rather than relying on a single metric.

Common progress indicators may include:

- **Reduction in repeat incidents or conflict behavior**
- **Completion rates of restorative agreements**
- **Participant satisfaction with the process**
- **Improved attendance, engagement, or academic performance (in school settings)**
- **Decreased referrals to disciplinary action**
- **Improved perceptions of safety and belonging**

Research suggests that restorative programs can reduce repeat offending and improve participant perceptions of fairness when implemented with fidelity (Sherman & Strang, 2007). Tracking behavioral changes over time helps organizations determine whether interventions are contributing to sustained improvement rather than short-term compliance.

In addition to individual-level metrics, organizations should monitor broader community indicators, such as:

- School or organizational climate survey results (SEED, SHS, EVE)

- Staff perceptions of safety and collaboration
- Rates of conflict escalation
- Reports of harassment or bullying

These measures provide insight into whether restorative practices are strengthening relational culture and contributing to a safer environment.

Evaluating Outcomes

Outcome evaluation assesses whether restorative justice interventions achieved their intended goals. Unlike traditional disciplinary models that may define success primarily as rule compliance, restorative outcomes are multidimensional. Effective evaluation considers:

1. Safety Outcomes

One key outcome is whether the intervention contributed to increased safety. This may include:

- Reduced threat behaviors
- Stabilization of high-risk situations
- Successful implementation of safety plans
- No recurrence of concerning behavior

When restorative practices are integrated with structured behavioral safety assessment systems, outcomes should reflect both accountability and prevention (Cornell, 2018).

Evaluating safety ensures that restorative processes complement—not replace—necessary risk management strategies.

2. Relationship Restoration

Restorative justice prioritizes repairing relationships. Evaluation should examine whether participants report:

- Improved communication
- Increased understanding between parties
- Restored trust

- Reduced hostility or resentment

Participant feedback is a critical source of data in restorative evaluation. Research indicates that individuals who participate in restorative processes often report higher levels of procedural fairness and satisfaction compared to traditional disciplinary processes (Sherman & Strang, 2007).

3. Reduction in Conflict or Threat Behavior

A central goal of restorative interventions is prevention of future harm. Organizations should track:

- Recidivism or repeat incidents
- Ongoing conflict between participants
- Escalation of grievances

Long-term tracking allows teams to determine whether restorative agreements and interventions are contributing to sustained behavioral change.

4. Community Well-Being

Beyond individual outcomes, restorative justice should positively influence community culture. Indicators of community well-being may include:

- Increased feelings of belonging
- Improved trust in leadership
- Stronger peer relationships
- Increased willingness to report concerns early

Restorative practices aim to shift organizational culture toward shared responsibility and proactive conflict resolution (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Evaluating these cultural indicators helps determine whether restorative principles are becoming embedded in daily practice.

Adjustments and Improvements

Restorative justice is not a static model; it is an adaptive process. Continuous improvement ensures that interventions remain responsive, equitable, and effective. Adjustments should be informed by data, participant feedback, and reflective practice.

1. Gathering Feedback

After restorative conferences, circles, or mediation sessions, facilitators should collect structured feedback from participants. Questions may include:

- Did you feel heard and respected?
- Did the process feel fair?
- Were your needs addressed?
- What could have improved the experience?

Feedback helps identify strengths and areas for growth. It also reinforces transparency and shared accountability within the process.

2. Reflective Team Practice

Behavioral safety and restorative teams should engage in regular reflection meetings to review cases, examine outcomes, and discuss improvements. Reflective practice may include:

- Reviewing data trends
- Analyzing intervention fidelity
- Identifying barriers to implementation
- Sharing facilitation challenges and successes

This collaborative reflection supports professional growth and consistency in implementation.

3. Adapting Interventions

Based on evaluation findings, teams may adjust restorative strategies by:

- Providing additional facilitator training
- Increasing cultural responsiveness supports
- Strengthening trauma-informed practices
- Modifying restorative agreements for clarity or feasibility
- Enhancing follow-up and monitoring procedures

Adaptation ensures that restorative processes remain aligned with community needs and safety priorities. Research emphasizes that program fidelity combined with flexibility for local context improves long-term outcomes (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

4. Continuous Quality Improvement

Organizations can embed restorative justice within a broader continuous quality improvement (CQI) framework. This includes:

- Setting measurable goals
- Collecting ongoing data
- Reviewing outcomes regularly
- Making evidence-based adjustments

This systematic approach ensures accountability to stakeholders and supports sustainable implementation.

Conclusion

Monitoring and evaluating restorative justice processes is essential for ensuring effectiveness, equity, and sustainability. Tracking progress through behavioral indicators, participant feedback, and community well-being measures allows organizations to understand whether interventions are achieving meaningful outcomes. Evaluating safety, relationship restoration, and reductions in conflict provides a comprehensive view of success. Finally, continuous adjustment based on data and feedback ensures that restorative approaches remain responsive and aligned with community needs.

When implemented within a structured evaluation framework, restorative justice becomes not only a philosophy of repair but also an evidence-informed practice that strengthens safety, accountability, and community resilience over time.

8. Ethical and Legal Considerations in Restorative Justice and Behavioral Safety Practices

Implementing restorative justice (RJ) within schools and organizations requires careful attention to **ethical standards and legal responsibilities**. While restorative approaches emphasize dialogue, accountability, and relationship repair, they must operate within clear boundaries that protect confidentiality, ensure informed participation, maintain safety, and comply with applicable laws. Ethical implementation strengthens trust in the process, supports equitable outcomes, and ensures alignment with broader behavioral safety and legal frameworks.

Confidentiality and Privacy

Confidentiality is a foundational ethical principle in restorative practice. Because restorative processes often involve sensitive discussions about harm, trauma, relationships, and personal experiences, participants must have clarity about how information will be handled and shared. Protecting privacy helps create psychological safety and encourages honest participation (Zehr, 2015).

However, confidentiality in restorative settings is not absolute. Facilitators must clarify the limits of confidentiality at the outset—particularly in school or organizational contexts where mandatory reporting laws, safety concerns, or threat assessment obligations may require disclosure. For example, if information emerges indicating imminent risk of harm to self or others, that information must be shared with appropriate safety authorities consistent with legal and organizational policies.

Clear documentation practices are also essential. Records of restorative conferences, agreements, and follow-up actions should be securely stored and accessible only to authorized personnel. Maintaining privacy builds trust in the process while ensuring compliance with institutional and legal standards.

Informed Consent

Informed consent is central to ethical restorative practice. Participants must understand:

- The purpose of the restorative process
- The steps involved

- Who will participate
- How information will be used
- The voluntary nature of participation (when applicable)
- The limits of confidentiality

Obtaining informed consent ensures that participation is based on understanding rather than coercion. This is particularly important when restorative processes are used alongside disciplinary or behavioral safety systems. Individuals should not feel forced into participation without a clear explanation of options and potential outcomes.

In school settings, consent procedures may involve communication with students and parents or guardians, depending on age and policy requirements. Facilitators should use clear, accessible language and provide opportunities for questions before beginning the process. Transparency strengthens procedural fairness, which research shows is associated with greater satisfaction and perceived legitimacy of outcomes (Sherman & Strang, 2007).

Informed consent also includes voluntary agreement from impacted parties. While restorative practices encourage participation, individuals should have the option to decline involvement if they feel unsafe or unprepared. Ethical implementation prioritizes participant readiness and emotional safety.

Balancing Safety with Justice

A core ethical challenge in restorative justice implementation is balancing **healing goals with safety obligations**. Restorative practices should never compromise physical or psychological safety in pursuit of dialogue or reconciliation.

In high-risk cases—such as credible threats of violence, serious misconduct, or ongoing safety concerns—organizations must first implement appropriate safety measures, which may include behavioral safety assessment, supervision, separation of parties, or law enforcement involvement. Restorative dialogue should only occur when it does not increase risk to participants.

Evidence-based threat assessment frameworks emphasize prevention and risk management alongside support and intervention (Cornell, 2018 Van Dreal, J., McCarthy, & Van Dreal, C., 2022). Restorative approaches can complement these systems but must operate within

established safety protocols. For example, restorative conferences may be appropriate after immediate risk has been mitigated and participants have received appropriate supports.

Balancing safety and justice also involves ensuring that restorative agreements are realistic and do not place undue burden on harmed parties. Repair plans should prioritize voluntary participation and should not pressure individuals to forgive, reconcile, or resume contact if they are not ready.

When implemented responsibly, restorative justice enhances safety by addressing root causes of harm and strengthening relationships. However, safety considerations must always guide decision-making.

Legal Implications

Restorative justice must align with local, state, and federal laws, as well as institutional policies. Understanding when restorative approaches are appropriate—and when legal or law enforcement intervention is required—is critical for ethical practice.

In cases involving serious criminal behavior, mandatory reporting requirements, child protection concerns, or imminent threats, legal obligations may supersede restorative processes. Schools and organizations must comply with laws such as:

- Mandatory reporting statutes (e.g., child abuse or neglect reporting)
- Threat assessment requirements
- Special education protections under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
- Section 504 accommodations
- Civil rights protections

Restorative practices do not replace legal accountability when required. Instead, they may function alongside legal processes when appropriate and permissible. For example, restorative dialogue may occur after legal proceedings, or in coordination with juvenile justice systems, depending on case circumstances and consent.

It is also important to distinguish between voluntary restorative processes and those used as alternatives to formal disciplinary action. Clear policy guidelines help ensure consistent application and avoid perceptions of coercion or unequal treatment.

Organizations should consult legal counsel when developing restorative programs integrated with behavioral safety systems to ensure compliance with applicable regulations. Written policies should clearly define scope, limitations, documentation procedures, and referral pathways for high-risk situations.

Conclusion

Ethical and legal considerations are essential to the responsible implementation of restorative justice within behavioral safety frameworks. Protecting confidentiality, ensuring informed consent, maintaining a careful balance between safety and restorative goals, and understanding legal obligations all contribute to trustworthy and sustainable practice. When implemented with clear boundaries and adherence to safety protocols, restorative justice can enhance accountability, strengthen community relationships, and support healing—while remaining aligned with legal requirements and ethical standards.

By grounding restorative processes in transparency, safety, and respect for participant rights, organizations can build systems that are both compassionate and responsible, fostering environments that prioritize both justice and protection.

9. Case Studies and Examples

(Integrating restorative justice with Behavioral Safety (threat) Assessment and the Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment)

This toolkit section provides applied examples of how restorative justice can be integrated into behavioral threat assessment processes, including the **Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade Behavioral Threat Assessment and Management System**. The goal is to illustrate how restorative approaches can support accountability, safety, and community healing while remaining aligned with structured threat assessment protocols (Van Dreal & Okada, 2021; Cornell, 2018).

1. Real-World Scenarios: Restorative Justice in Behavioral Safety (threat) Assessment Contexts

Restorative practices can be integrated at multiple points in a safety (threat) assessment process—particularly after immediate safety concerns have been stabilized. Below are examples from school, workplace, and community contexts.

Scenario A: School-Based Threat Expression (Post-Stabilization Response)

Situation:

A high school student posts a threatening message on social media directed at a peer following an ongoing conflict. The post creates fear among students and staff.

Behavioral Safety (threat) Assessment Response (Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade System):

Under the Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade System, the concern is referred to a **Level 1 Behavioral Safety Assessment Team**, which includes an administrator, counselor/psychologist, and designated staff. The team gathers information, interviews involved parties, evaluates risk level (transient vs. substantive), and determines that the threat appears impulsive and conflict-driven rather than planned.

Immediate safety measures are implemented (e.g., supervision adjustments, temporary separation of involved students). Risk is assessed as manageable with support and monitoring.

Restorative Integration:

After safety stabilization, the team facilitates:

- A **restorative conference** between the students (with consent)
- Pre-conference preparation with each participant
- A structured dialogue focused on impact, accountability, and future agreements

The harmed student shares how the post affected their sense of safety. The responsible student acknowledges impact and agrees to:

- Remove the post
- Apologize directly
- Participate in conflict resolution coaching
- Engage in digital citizenship education

Outcome:

The restorative agreement addresses harm, reduces ongoing conflict, and supports reintegration while the safety team continues monitoring.

This aligns with research indicating that restorative approaches can reduce repeat incidents and improve perceptions of fairness when combined with structured safety frameworks (Sherman & Strang, 2007).

Scenario B: Community Youth Conflict

Situation:

Two youth engaged in repeated online harassment that escalates to threats. Community members report fear of physical confrontation.

Restorative + Safety Response:

After a behavioral safety (threat) assessment determines no immediate weapon access or planning, the youth are engaged in:

- Individual interviews
- A restorative circle including caregivers
- Development of a structured behavioral agreement

The circle addresses:

- Impact of online behavior
- Emotional triggers
- Digital boundaries
- Peer accountability

This collaborative response reinforces community norms and builds relational accountability (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

2. Level 1 Scenario: Full Case Study Using Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade Protocol

Case Overview

Setting: Middle School

Concern: Student A tells peers, “Everyone would be better off if I just brought something to school and ended it.”

Peers report the statement to staff.

Step 1: Initial Report and Safety Response

- Staff immediately notify administration.
- Student A is supervised.
- Parents/guardians are contacted.
- Any potential access to weapons is assessed.
- Immediate risk mitigation steps are taken.

This aligns with Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade Level 1 procedures emphasizing prompt stabilization (Van Dreal & Okada, 2021).

Step 2: Level 1 Behavioral Safety Assessment

The Level 1 team (administrator, counselor, and trained staff member) conducts:

- Student interview
- Parent interview
- Review of academic/disciplinary records
- Peer witness interviews
- Contextual review of events

Findings:

- The statement occurred after a peer conflict.
- Student has no history of violence.
- No evidence of weapon access.
- Student expresses feelings of isolation and embarrassment.
- Threat appears impulsive and emotional.

Risk is categorized as **transient** rather than substantive (Cornell, 2018).

Step 3: Intervention Plan

The team implements:

- Short-term counseling support
- Increased check-ins
- Conflict mediation between peers (if appropriate)
- Social-emotional skill building

Because safety is stabilized, restorative dialogue is considered appropriate.

Step 4: Restorative Conference

With informed consent:

Participants:

- Student A
- Affected peers
- Facilitator
- Parent/guardian (as appropriate)

Process:

- Structured dialogue
- Impact statements
- Clarification of misunderstandings
- Collaborative agreement

Restorative Agreement Includes:

- Apology
- Participation in emotional regulation coaching
- Weekly counselor check-ins
- Peer mediation follow-up
- Reconnection plan with trusted adult

Step 5: Monitoring and Follow-Up

The team monitors:

- Behavioral changes
- Attendance
- Peer interactions
- Agreement completion

Outcome:

- Conflict decreases.

- Student reports improved coping skills.
- No recurrence of threats.
- Improved school climate perceptions.

This integrated approach reflects evidence that combining structured behavioral safety (threat) assessment with supportive interventions reduces risk and improves outcomes (Cornell, 2018; Sherman & Strang, 2007).

3. Lessons Learned

Successful Practices

1. Clear Separation of Safety and Dialogue

Restorative conversations are most effective after immediate risk concerns are addressed. Safety stabilization must precede restorative engagement.

2. Structured Facilitation is Essential

Untrained dialogue can escalate conflict. Skilled facilitation ensures neutrality, emotional regulation, and balanced participation (Wachtel, 2016).

3. Trauma-Informed Preparation Improves Outcomes

Participants benefit from pre-meetings to reduce anxiety and prevent re-traumatization (SAMHSA, 2014).

4. Restorative Agreements Must Be Specific and Monitored

Clear timelines and follow-up improve accountability and reduce recurrence.

Common Challenges

1. Misconception That Restorative Means Forgiveness

Restorative processes do not require reconciliation or forgiveness. Participation must remain voluntary.

2. Insufficient Training

Without proper training, staff may lack skills in managing strong emotions or complex dynamics.

3. Over-Reliance on Restorative Practices in High-Risk Situations

Restorative justice must never replace behavioral safety (threat) assessment or legal intervention when risk is imminent.

4. Cultural and Power Dynamics

Teams must be mindful of bias, cultural context, and trauma to ensure equitable practice (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Conclusion

Integrating restorative justice within behavioral safety (threat) assessment systems—such as the **Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade System**—creates a balanced framework that prioritizes both **safety and healing**. Case studies demonstrate that restorative conferencing, mediation, and circle processes can effectively address harm, rebuild trust, and support accountability when implemented after appropriate risk stabilization.

Successful integration requires:

- Structured Level 1 assessment protocols
- Trauma-informed facilitation
- Clear safety boundaries
- Ongoing monitoring
- Continuous training

When restorative approaches and behavioral safety (threat) assessment systems work together, communities benefit from reduced conflict, strengthened relationships, and improved safety outcomes.

10. Conclusion: Restorative Justice in Behavioral Safety Assessment

Final Thoughts on Restorative Justice in Behavioral Safety Assessment

The integration of restorative justice (RJ) with behavioral safety assessment represents a significant advancement in how schools, workplaces, and communities respond to harm and potential threats. Rather than positioning safety and restoration as competing priorities, this integrated framework recognizes that **effective prevention, accountability, and healing must occur together**. Behavioral safety assessment systems—such as structured behavioral (safety) threat assessment models and the Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade framework—provide evidence-based processes for identifying risk, stabilizing immediate concerns, and implementing intervention plans. Restorative justice complements these systems by strengthening relational repair, fostering meaningful accountability, and supporting long-term community well-being.

Across the toolkit sections, several consistent themes emerge. Restorative practices such as conferencing, circle processes, mediation, and structured agreements provide opportunities for dialogue, reflection, and repair (Wachtel, 2016; Zehr, 2015). When applied appropriately—after immediate safety concerns have been addressed—these strategies can reduce conflict, improve perceptions of fairness, and strengthen trust within communities (Sherman & Strang, 2007). Research also indicates that restorative approaches are most effective when implemented with fidelity, clear boundaries, and strong facilitation training (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012).

Within behavioral safety (threat) assessment contexts, restorative practices do not replace structured safety protocols. Instead, they enhance them by addressing underlying relational dynamics, emotional distress, and community impacts. Evidence-based behavioral safety (threat) assessment frameworks emphasize prevention, structured evaluation, and multidisciplinary collaboration (Cornell, 2018). When combined with restorative processes, these systems support not only the mitigation of risk but also reintegration, healing, and the strengthening of protective factors. This dual focus reflects a balanced approach—one that safeguards individuals while also nurturing community connection.

Ethical and legal considerations further reinforce the importance of careful implementation. Confidentiality, informed consent, trauma-informed care, and compliance with mandatory reporting requirements must guide practice (SAMHSA, 2014). Restorative approaches must operate within established safety parameters, particularly in high-risk cases where law enforcement or legal intervention is required. When these safeguards are maintained, restorative justice becomes a powerful complement to behavioral safety systems rather than a substitute for them.

Ultimately, restorative justice contributes to behavioral safety by building **relational capacity**—the foundation of healthy communities. When individuals experience accountability in a supportive environment, when harmed parties feel heard and validated, and when communities share responsibility for repair, the likelihood of sustained harm decreases. Restorative systems emphasize prevention through connection, making safety a collective endeavor rather than an isolated administrative function.

Future Directions

The continued evolution of restorative justice within behavioral safety systems presents meaningful opportunities for innovation, research, and best practice development. As more districts and organizations adopt integrated models like Oregon Model of Behavioral Safety Assessment SK Cascade System combined with restorative approaches, several key areas warrant further advancement.

1. Strengthening Implementation Fidelity and Training

Future efforts should prioritize comprehensive professional development for behavioral safety teams, facilitators, administrators, and community partners. Training should include restorative facilitation skills, trauma-informed practice, cultural responsiveness, and ethical decision-making. Ongoing coaching and reflective supervision will further enhance quality and sustainability (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). Developing standardized training modules that integrate behavioral safety (threat) assessment protocols with restorative competencies would help ensure consistent implementation.

2. Expanding Research on Integrated Models

While existing research supports the effectiveness of restorative justice and structured behavioral safety (threat) assessment independently, continued empirical study of integrated models is needed. Future research could examine outcomes such as:

- Reductions in repeat threat behaviors
- Improvements in school or organizational climate
- Participant perceptions of fairness and safety
- Long-term community reintegration success

Data-driven evaluation frameworks will help refine best practices and ensure that restorative integration remains evidence-informed (Sherman & Strang, 2007).

3. Advancing Trauma-Informed and Culturally Responsive Practices

Because behavioral concerns often intersect with trauma, inequity, and systemic stressors, future development should deepen trauma-informed and culturally responsive integration. Ensuring equitable participation, reducing bias in assessment, and adapting restorative practices to diverse cultural contexts will enhance fairness and effectiveness (SAMHSA, 2014). Engaging families and community stakeholders in design and evaluation processes will further strengthen trust and sustainability.

4. Embedding Continuous Improvement Systems

Organizations should continue to develop structured monitoring and evaluation systems that track restorative outcomes alongside safety metrics. Continuous quality improvement (CQI) models can support data-informed adjustments, reflective practice, and policy refinement. This iterative process ensures that restorative practices evolve based on outcomes and community feedback.

5. Strengthening Cross-Sector Collaboration

Integrated models benefit from collaboration among education, mental health, juvenile justice, and community organizations. Expanding partnerships will enhance wraparound supports, improve intervention options, and ensure alignment between safety planning and restorative reintegration pathways. Cross-agency collaboration also promotes consistency in high-risk case management.

Closing Reflection

Restorative justice, when thoughtfully integrated with behavioral safety assessment systems, offers a comprehensive approach to addressing harm and preventing future threats. It aligns accountability with empathy, safety with healing, and structure with relationship-building. Rather than choosing between discipline and dialogue, this framework recognizes that sustainable safety depends on both evidence-based risk management and community-centered restoration.

As communities continue to seek approaches that reduce harm while strengthening trust, the integration of restorative justice with structured behavioral safety systems represents a promising and responsible pathway forward. Through ongoing training, research, ethical practice, and collaborative innovation, organizations can continue to refine best practices that promote safety, equity, accountability, and long-term community well-being.

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Quick Start Guide for Educators

A Practical Overview for Immediate Implementation

This quick start guide provides a simplified overview of how educators and school teams can begin integrating restorative practices within behavioral safety frameworks. While comprehensive implementation requires training and collaboration, the following steps offer an entry point for educators seeking to strengthen both safety and community relationships.

Step 1: Build Relationships Before Harm Occurs

Restorative practices are most effective when they are part of everyday school culture rather than only used after incidents occur. Educators can build a restorative foundation by creating regular opportunities for dialogue and relationship-building within classrooms and school communities.

Examples include:

- Opening or closing class with brief **community circles**
- Encouraging students to share perspectives and experiences
- Modeling respectful listening and empathy
- Creating classroom norms collaboratively with students

These practices strengthen trust and help create an environment where students feel safe expressing concerns before conflicts escalate.

Step 2: Recognize and Respond to Concerning Behaviors

Educators play an important role in identifying early warning signs of conflict or distress. Concerning behaviors may include escalating peer conflict, expressions of anger or frustration, withdrawal from peers, or statements suggesting potential harm.

When concerning behaviors arise:

1. Document and communicate observations according to school protocols.
2. Notify appropriate staff or behavioral safety team members.

3. Maintain supportive and nonjudgmental communication with students.

Early communication and collaboration with school support staff can prevent concerns from escalating.

Step 3: Prioritize Safety and Stabilization

When a potential threat or serious conflict occurs, the first priority is always **ensuring safety**. Behavioral safety or threat assessment teams should follow established protocols for information gathering, risk assessment, and intervention planning.

Restorative practices should not replace safety procedures. Instead, they can be introduced **after safety has been stabilized** to address relational harm and support accountability.

Step 4: Use Restorative Processes to Repair Harm

When appropriate and voluntary, restorative processes may provide an opportunity for individuals affected by harm to share perspectives and work toward repair.

Restorative interventions may include:

- Facilitated restorative conferences
- Mediation between involved individuals
- Impact statements describing the effects of harm
- Collaborative agreements outlining steps for repair

These processes help individuals understand the impact of their actions while strengthening empathy and accountability.

Step 5: Support Reintegration and Continued Growth

Following an incident, it is important to support reintegration into the school community. This may include counseling, peer support, monitoring of restorative agreements, and opportunities for rebuilding relationships.

Reintegration planning helps prevent further harm and supports long-term community well-being.

Step 6: Reflect and Improve

Schools should regularly review restorative and behavioral safety practices to ensure they remain effective, equitable, and responsive to community needs.

Evaluation strategies may include:

- Reviewing behavioral trends
- Gathering feedback from participants
- Assessing completion of restorative agreements
- Monitoring changes in school climate

Continuous reflection allows schools to strengthen both restorative practices and safety systems over time.