

Harm Reduction and
Student Substance Use:
Building Better School
Responses

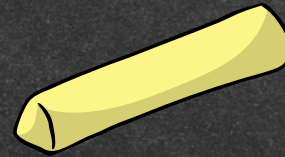
APS Crossroads Counselors
August 4th, 2026



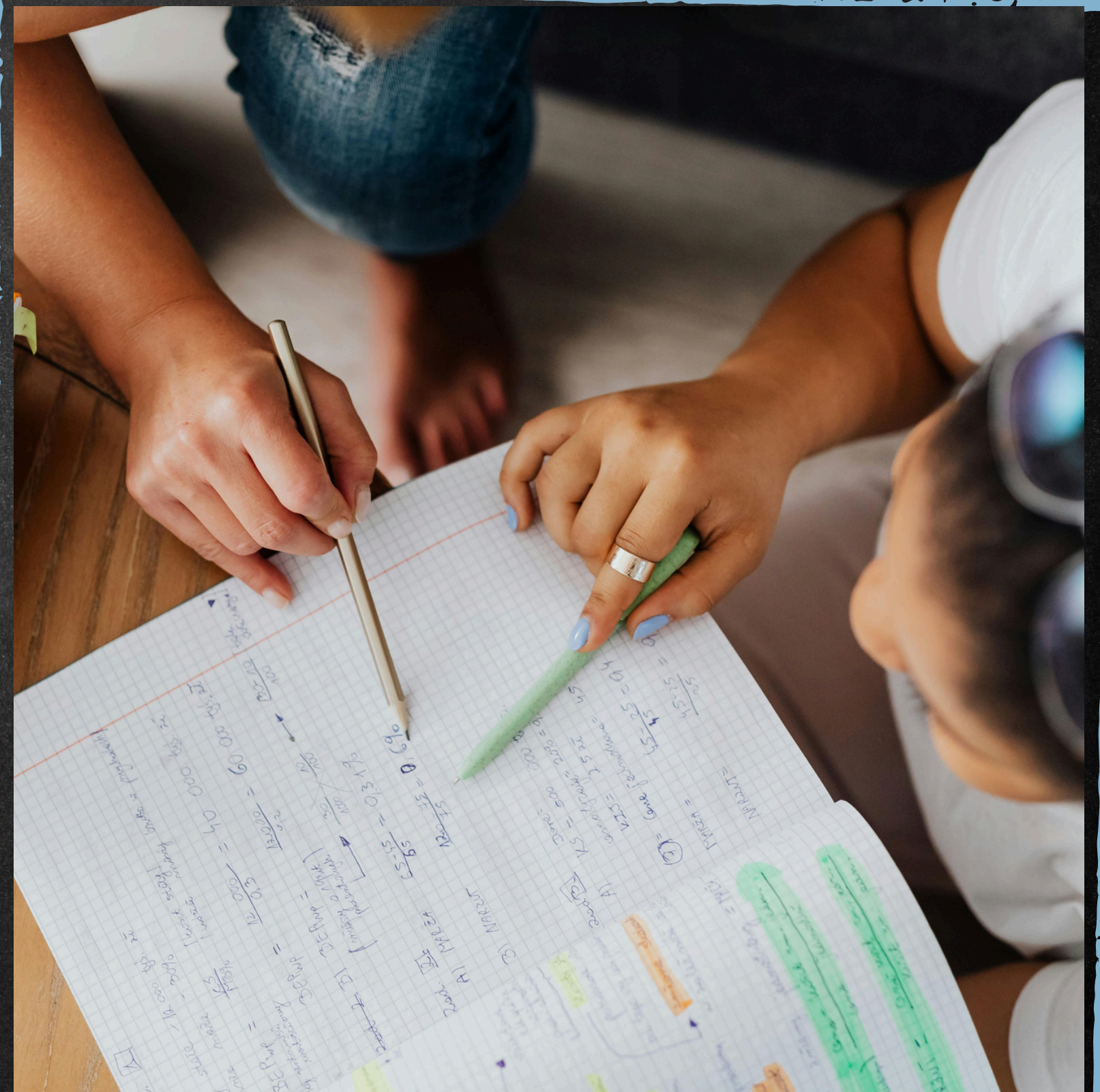
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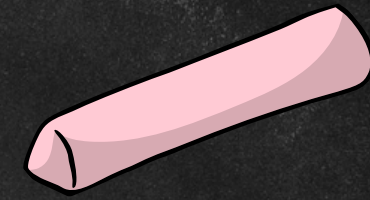
»» PRESENTED BY



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WELCOME



Group Norms

- Respect
- Curiosity
- Confidentiality
- Collaboration

Acknowledgement:

Conversations about substance use can be personal and emotional for participants.

Please take care of your needs.



SESSION GOALS & OBJECTIVES



Session Goals

By the end of this session, participants will:

- Strengthen understanding of harm reduction and restorative approaches
- Explore how stigma impacts students and school culture
- Build practical strategies for compassionate accountability
- Promote safer, supportive learning environments



Learning Objectives



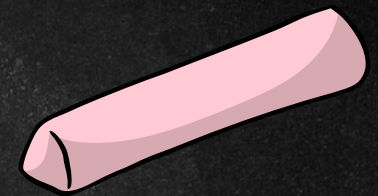
Participants will be able to:

1. Identify: How stigma impacts student behavior and trust
2. Explain: Differences between punitive and restorative responses
3. Apply: Stigma-reducing language in interactions
4. Advocate: For effective harm reduction-focused responses
5. Recognize: Opportunities for systems change and wellbeing

Key Focus Areas:

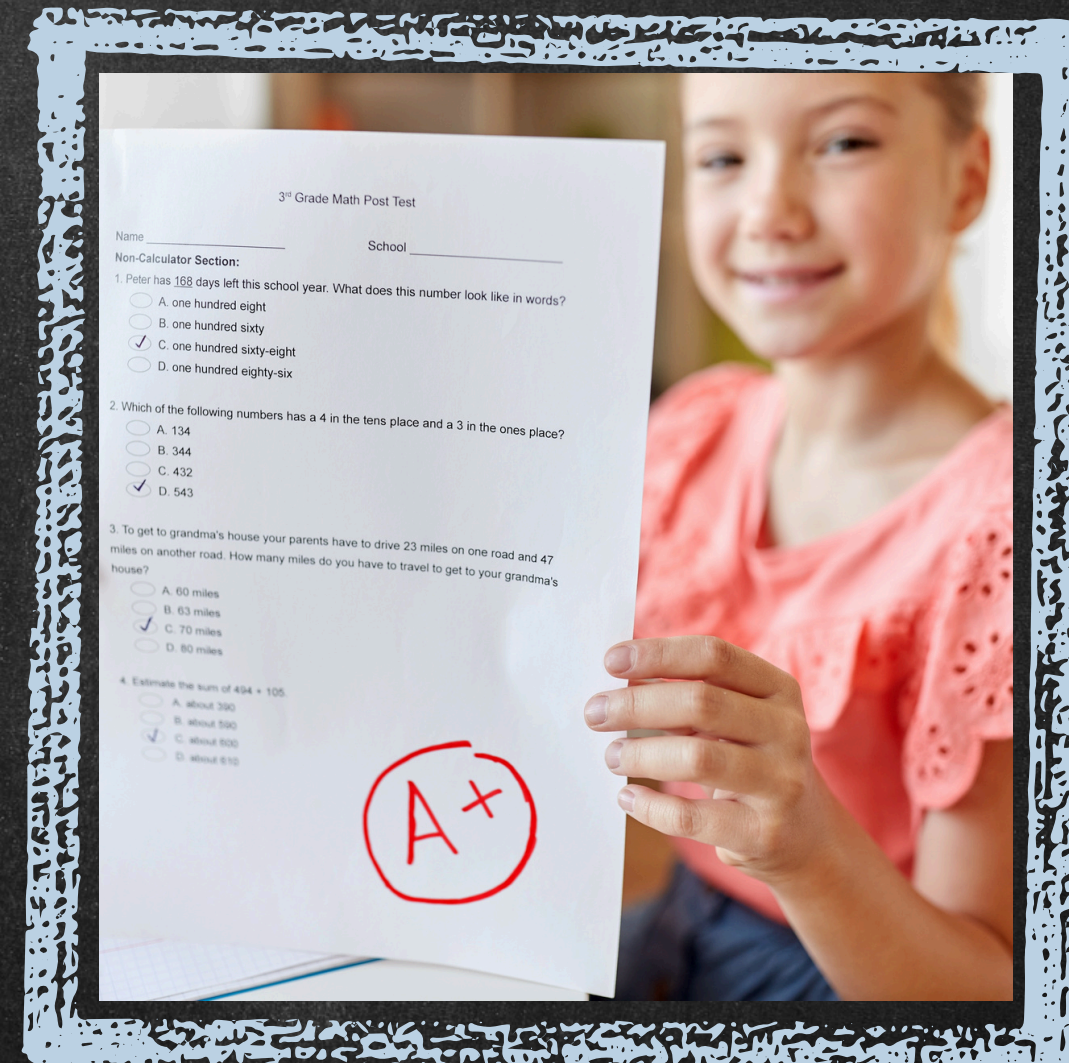
Harm Reduction, Restorative Practices, Student Dignity, Culture of Care

WHO IS IN THE ROOM ?



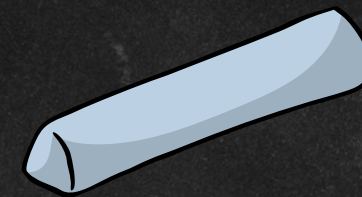
Audience Poll (RAISE YOUR HAND IF YOU ARE...)

- Teachers
- Counselors / Social Workers
- Administrators
- Support Staff
- Nurses / Health Staff
- Community Partners



Key Takeaway: Creating a supportive school environment requires the participation of everyone present.

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?



Prompt Options

What is one challenge schools face when responding to student substance use?

— OR —

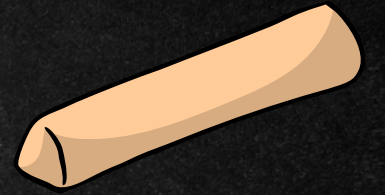
What brought you to this session today?



INSTRUCTIONS

1. Discuss in pairs or small groups at your tables.
2. Share key themes with the larger group.

INTRODUCTION TO HARM REDUCTION

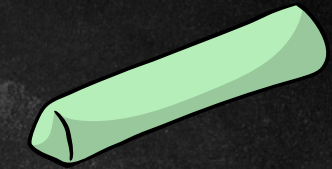


Discussion Question

»» What do you think when you hear the term harm reduction?



INTRODUCTION TO HARM REDUCTION

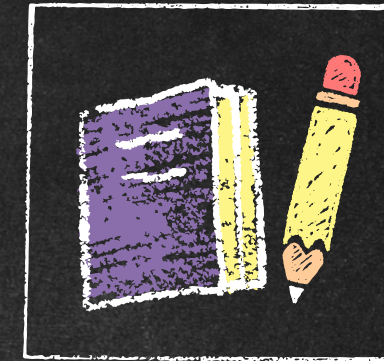


DEFINITION



Harm reduction focuses on reducing harm and increasing safety, rather than punishment or shame.

CORE PRINCIPLES



- Compassion
- Safety
- Nonjudgment
- Student-centered support
- Meeting students where they are

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

"Harm reduction encourages substance use."

THE REALITY:

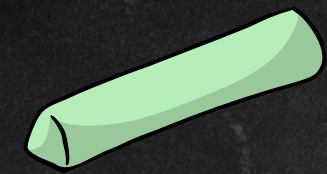


It does NOT encourage use; it prioritizes safety, trust, and preventing greater harm.

HARM REDUCTION 101



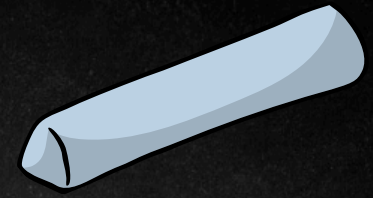
HARM REDUCTION TOOLS



- Overdose prevention using Narcan/Naloxone nasal spray
- Drug checking through fentanyl test strips
- Educate students to avoid using, stop using, or cut down
- Teach students to never use drugs alone
- Provide accurate information
- Teach students to avoid mixing substances
- Good Samaritan Law in New Mexico



HARM REDUCTION: RESTORATIVE VS. PUNITIVE APPROACHES



DEFINING RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

Focus on healing and connection:

- Building relationships
- Repairing harm
- Accountability through support
- Reintegration rather than exclusion



PUNITIVE APPROACHES

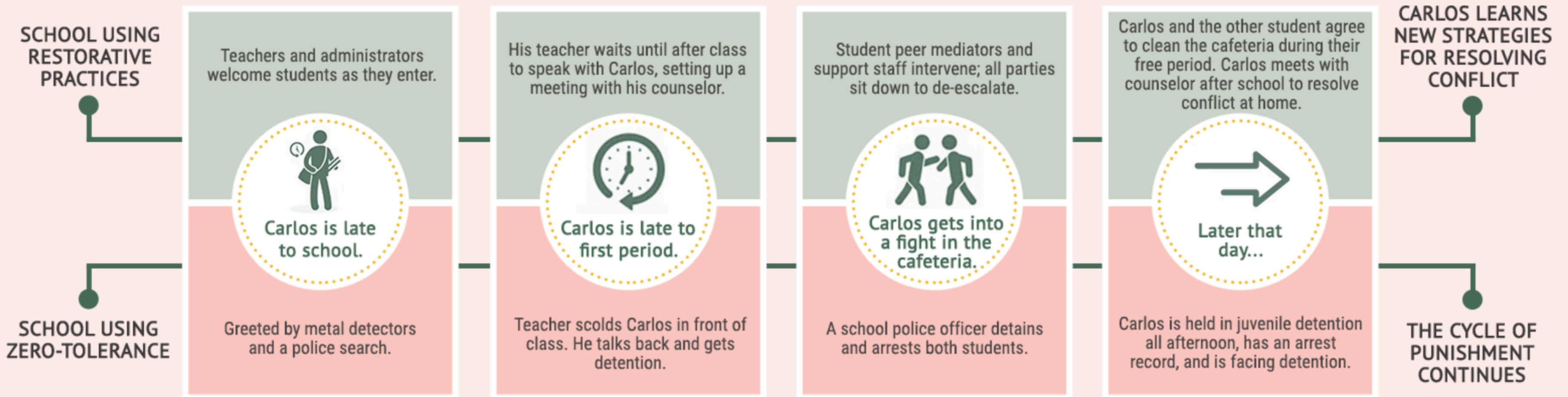
Traditional disciplinary focus:

- Punishment focused
- Suspensions / zero-tolerance
- Compliance over understanding
- Exclusionary over reintegration

HARM REDUCTION: RESTORATIVE VS. PUNITIVE APPROACHES



A Tale of Two Schools

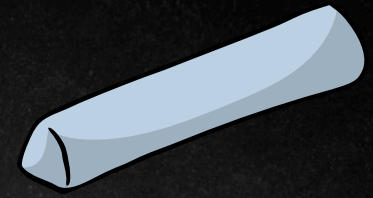


RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Discussion Prompt

What differences did you notice between the two approaches?

RESTORATIVE VS. PUNITIVE APPROACHES: IMPACT ON STUDENTS



Restorative Responses

- Cultivate trust
- Enhance sense of belonging
- Promote help-seeking behaviors
- Fortify interpersonal relationships



PUNITIVE APPROACHES

- Exacerbate feelings of shame
- Induce disconnection
- Diminish confidence in adult figures
- Increase risk taking behaviors

HARM REDUCTION:
UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF STIGMA

DISCUSSION QUESTION
HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE STIGMA?



HARM REDUCTION: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF STIGMA

What is Stigma

Stigma in regards to substance use is a set of negative attitudes, stereotypes, and discriminatory behaviors that society directs toward individuals. It often frames use as a moral failing rather than a treatable medical condition.

Stigma Can Lead To:

- Trust and relationship breakdown
- Reduced willingness to seek help
- Increased isolation
- Increased emotional harm
- Fear of punishment

Stigma Includes:

- Harmful language
- Assumptions
- Bias
- Labeling students

Students are more likely to seek support when they feel safe, respected, and understood.

HARM REDUCTION: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF STIGMA

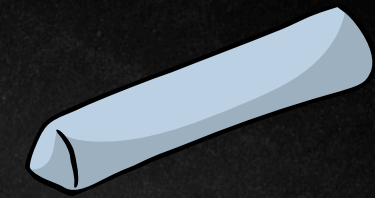


Reflection Activity

What language have you heard about substance use that may be stigmatizing?



HARM REDUCTION: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF STIGMA



Language shifts that reduce stigma

Stigmatizing Language

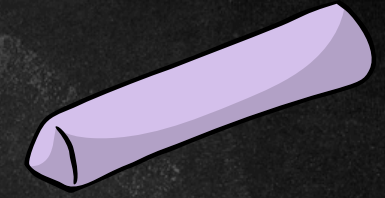
- Addict
- Druggie/junkie
- Clean/dirty
- Bad choices

Non-stigmatizing Language

- Person experiencing substance use challenges
- Person using substances
- Tested positive/negative
- Coping behavior/unmet needs

Key message: Language can shape school culture.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: BUILDING BETTER SCHOOL RESPONSES



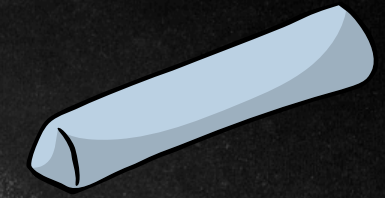
Restorative and Harm Reduction Practices Examples



- 💡 Restorative conversations
- 💡 Check-ins
- 💡 Safety planning
- 💡 Support pathways
- 💡 Re-entry meetings after incidents
- 💡 Collaboration with families and support staff



BUILDING BETTER SCHOOL RESPONSES



Small Changes Big Impact

Classroom Level Practices

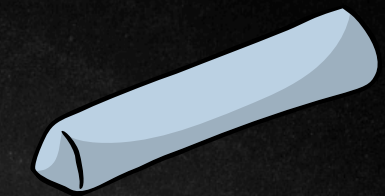
- Relationship-building routines
- Inclusive language
- Emotional check-ins

School Wide Culture Shifts

- Restorative discipline
- Staff training
- Student-centered policies

Goal: Support long-term well being

BUILDING BETTER SCHOOL RESPONSES



Practical Strategies

Shift the question

Relationship-Centered

- Listen before reacting
- Stay calm and curious
- Focus on safety
- Build trust consistently

Safe Environments

- Normalize asking for help
- Share student info on a need to know basis
- Avoid public confrontation

Instead of:

What's wrong with this student?

Ask:

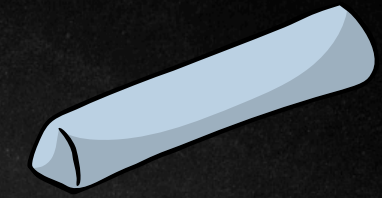
What happened?
What support might they need?
How can we respond safely?

Starting Conversations

- Talk with colleagues about restorative strategies
- Raise awareness about stigma
- Identify barriers to supportive responses

What changes could make students feel safer seeking help?

BUILDING BETTER SCHOOL RESPONSES



Scenario – Caught in the Bathroom

Jordan is a 7th grade student who has recently become quieter in class and has been missing assignments. Teachers have noticed that he seems tired, disengaged, and more isolated from friends than usual. Jordan has also had several recent tardies and absences over the past month.

One afternoon during passing period, a teacher smells marijuana near the boys bathroom and alerts administration. An assistant principal and campus security enter the bathroom and find Jordan and another student vaping from a marijuana cartridge. He is escorted from the bathroom to the administrative office with an audience of staff and students staring.

Perspectives:

“He’s probably high all the time.” — STUDENTS

“We can’t let this kind of behavior slide.” — ADMINISTRATION

“Jordan used to be a good kid.” — TEACHER

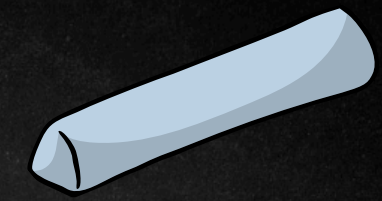
Discussion Questions

What harmful responses occurred

What restorative alternatives could have happened?

What immediate actions could support the student?

BUILDING BETTER SCHOOL RESPONSES



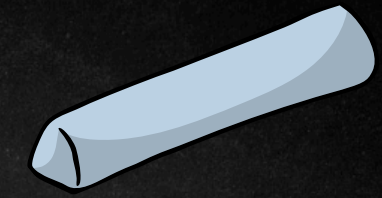
Reflection Prompt

What is one thing you can implement in your role?

Take a moment to consider the strategies discussed and how they apply to your specific daily interactions and responsibilities.

Goal: Turn insights into actionable changes for student success.

BUILDING BETTER SCHOOL RESPONSES

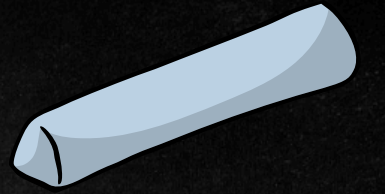


Key Takeaways

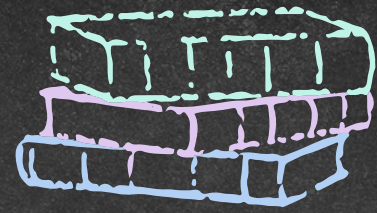
- ✔ Harm reduction supports safety and connection
- ⚠ Stigma can increase harm
- 🏫 Everyday interactions shape school culture
- ★ Educators can make a meaningful difference

Reflecting on how small changes in school response can create safer environments for all students.

FAMILY, STAFF & STUDENT RESOURCES



Education & Awareness



- Article: Adolescent Harm Reduction
- Principles of Harm Reduction
- Natural High
- SAMHSA's Harm Reduction Framework
- Stanford Medicine Safety First
- National Overdose Prevention Network
- Substance Use Prevention Toolkit for Schools
- Panorama Restorative Practices
- RestorativeJustice.com
- RestorativeResources.org

Prevention & Support Organizations

- Smart Approaches to Marijuana
- Partnership to End Addiction
- Together for Families (DEA)
- Operation Prevention
- Song for Charlie
- Little Things NM

Reducing Stigma

- Words Matter Pledge
- Anti-Stigma Toolkit



»» CONTACT INFORMATION

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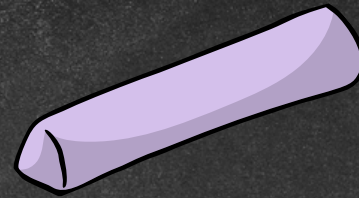
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“Students thrive when they feel safe, supported, and connected.”

FEEDBACK



» Questions

» Comments

» Thoughts

