



# Restorative Practices and Discipline: MAECE Technique

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*This progression and practices below were developed by David Dahl's experience working with adolescent and preadolescent students at NorthBay Education, Inc. and as a Zen practitioner.*

The essence of restorative practices is building and repairing relationships. A student's role and standing in the community has a profound effect on both their self-esteem and self-concept. Improving the way a student sees and feels about themselves can lead to improved academic performance and decision-making abilities. Restorative practices are in contrast to punitive practices, which teach students to endure consequences and avoid getting caught. Punitive practices cause separation between the student, the educator, and the community.

All behavior is a form of communication. When a student acts in a way that separates them from others, they are telling us, "I have something I am struggling with." By using proactive restorative techniques (check-ins, circles, teambuilding, etc.) we can create a space where youth practice sharing feelings and learning empathy. When a member of the community has been harmed, we can use restorative practices (mindfulness, MAECE, teambuilding, etc.) to get to the root of the behavior, thereby turning the situation into a teachable moment.

The key to restorative practices is unconditional positive regard. To practice this, we see that the person is already whole, perfect, and complete. What we need to work on are the behaviors that separate the person from their community, and strategies for them to get their needs met in a positive way.

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## MAECE

**MAECE** is a mindfulness exercise and restorative discipline progression created at NorthBay Education. It can be used in response to a discipline situation by following the steps in order. Additionally, the first section can be used exclusively focusing only on the mindfulness piece as a proactive restorative practice.

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# Mindfulness

**Initiate conscious awareness of the individual's experience in the present moment by bringing attention to the natural processes of the body, ongoing activity of the surrounding environment, and thinking. Actions speak louder than words when a student is in crisis.**

## Grounding Techniques

1. Begin by asking the student to take a big breath or two. Notice that their shoulders and upper chest will most likely move up and down as they inhale and exhale. This happens under stress as we tighten up our abdominal muscles.
2. Next, demonstrate a "correct" breath. The stomach should move outward as we inhale and inward as we exhale. The shoulders and chest should not move much. This is how we breathed as infants. As we age, tension reverses this, resulting in our bodies working harder for less oxygen. Now invite the student to take five deep "correct" breaths with you as described. You can also refer to this type of breathing as "belly breathing."
3. Ask the student how they feel. Do they feel the oxygen entering their body as it reaches every cell in their body?

## Sixth Sense

Our thoughts and emotions communicate with our body, creating tension in our muscles. This in turn keeps our minds in a state of anxiety and we become withdrawn or defensive. Using proprioception and breathing, notice the inner body sensations.

1. Invite the students to place their feet firmly on the ground and pay attention to how it feels. Ask them to pay attention to all the sensations of their feet, in and out of shoes, on the ground. If they are in a chair and cannot reach the ground, ask them to wiggle their toes and notice how their feet feel in their shoes.
2. Take two deep breaths from the stomach with the student. Invite them to pay attention to their breathing at the same time as we focus on our body sensations.
3. Invite them to guide their awareness to their legs. How does it feel to have legs? We can go our entire day without noticing our lower body, creating unnecessary tension. Next, ask them to notice how the seat feels. Is it hard or soft? Comfortable or uncomfortable?
4. Now guide their awareness to the stomach. Ask them to pay attention to any tension in their gut and let it relax. Remind them to use their breath to allow tension to fall away.
5. Ask them to pay attention to their lower back. If it is tight, pay attention to the muscles and spine and allow everything to relax. Use breathing to assist. Do the same for the upper back by moving awareness up to the shoulders and base of the neck. Encourage them to let their shoulders hang, especially if they look tense.
6. Take a couple deep breaths from the stomach.
7. Move awareness down the arms and relax the hands. Next, invite them to roll their head around to loosen up their neck. Using their mind, they can notice their face. Are our brows furrowed? Jaw clenched? Allow it all to hang naturally.
8. Ask the student how they feel now.

# Mindfulness

You will notice a reduction in stress and tension, as well as a change in the student's cognitive process. When we are focused on negative thoughts and emotions during a challenging experience, it can be difficult to see past our own egoic self-preservation. This causes a defensive reaction, which results in more separation of the individual from their community. By shifting awareness into the body, we calm the fear-based reactive thinking and move ourselves into a natural state of openness. From this space, we can mend relationships and make healthy decisions.

## Open Perspective

Now that our minds are tuned into our bodies, we use a listening exercise to connect to the environment and expand awareness to other beings.

1. Let the student know that now we will take our minds and spread them all around our environment. Reassure them that this won't hurt a bit! This is a listening exercise that will require focus and silence for one minute.
2. Now, invite them to close their eyes or find a spot on the floor to focus on. We do not want to look around for this exercise.
3. Ask them to pay attention to their breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils and to notice their stomach rising and falling while listening to the world around them.
4. They can choose to count all of the different sounds they hear using their fingers or keeping track in their head (e.g. the sound of a bus and a chicken would equal two sounds). Encourage them to listen as far out in the distance as possible.
5. Do this exercise with the student for one minute.
6. Gently invite them to bring their awareness back and ask them what sounds they heard.

With the student's awareness enlarged beyond their own body, you may see an adjustment in what social conditions they prioritize. All of a sudden, what once seemed like big problems don't seem like much in the grand scheme of things. Additionally, this practice helps connect us to the people around us as focus shifts from our own individuality to the world around us.

## Mind Awareness

With a calm mind and relaxed body, notice any change in thoughts, feelings, and manageability.

1. Ask the student to look and listen to their thoughts. What do they notice that is different now than before the exercise? Are these thoughts lingering or passing? Loud or quiet?
2. Together, explore how we can use this technique in our daily lives. Discuss with the students how we can modify and shorten this exercise for a class environment or while interacting with others in the moment. They do not necessarily need to go through the entire process in public; that could make for an awkward situation. Can they simply plant their feet on the floor, take a few deep breaths, focus on relaxing specific tense muscles, listen to the background sounds, and choose a more helpful response?

## Awareness

**Connect the whole brain by acknowledging and accepting thoughts and feelings in a non-judgmental way.**

### Connect Emotionally

Acknowledge and validate feelings. Empathy is using our own experience to feel what the other person is feeling.

1. When a student is in crisis or just feeling emotional, they need validation, not advice. Help them label their feelings. If they share a generalized feeling like “angry,” ask them what kind of anger they are feeling. Annoyed? Overwhelmed? Rage? The intention is to get them to use words for their emotions, bringing them closer to being able to problem-solve.
2. Introduce logical thinking. Encourage the student to use narrative to recount what happened. By telling the story, they are now able to have a discussion.

### Taking Responsibility

Help the student identify what role they had in the situation. Support them in taking responsibility for their actions. If we are unable or unwilling to identify the issue, we can not begin to problem-solve.

1. Have them write or verbally describe what action they took without mentioning what anyone else may have done to contribute to the situation. They should have already told the whole story with everyone in it during the narrative. Now, they are taking responsibility for their actions alone.

## Empathy

**Guide students in relating to and experiencing another person’s thoughts and feelings. This helps the student see how they have separated themselves from their community.**

1. Help the student list the effects their actions had on others. Use questioning to allow them to see all the people their actions have affected, including themselves. They can list the names and include the negative impact.

## Compassion

**Respect and connect to others as people who suffer and have the right to alleviate suffering and be content.**

1. Guide the student to realize the ways they could have avoided the incident or stopped it from going as far as it did. Just simply “not doing...” is not sufficient. What constructive actions could they have taken?

## Engage

### **Take appropriate action to mend relationships and reintegrate into the community.**

1. *Take action* by performing community service. This needs to be framed in a restorative way. The student is tasked with devising their own plan to give back to the community. This can look like repairing actual damage they created, helping staff with duties, or improving the environment.
2. *Repair relationships* by making verbal and/or behavioral amends. The student may volunteer to apologize. Never force an insincere apology. If they chose to make verbal amends, help them formulate a meaningful apology. One method is to invite them to break an apology into three parts:
  - Taking responsibility: *I did this... and it was wrong.*
  - Acknowledging feelings: *If that happened to me, I would feel...*
  - Committing to change: *Next time I will... or will not....*
3. *Behavioral plan.* Guide the student in developing a plan to change their behavior. Encourage them to identify how they fit into their community and what goals they have regarding who they want to grow into being. Support them in making their goals reasonable, and reassure them that they are not expected to perform perfectly.
4. *Follow up.* Check in with the student to support them with their behavior change. Be consistent.