RESTORE

Circle time sessions to support primary pupils during COVID-19
At the beginning of lockdown due to COVID-19, a group of organisations in the UK, passionate about peace and Restorative Practice, came together to think about how they could support schools during this time. The group produced a framework, RESTORE, as their contribution. RESTORE offers questions, methodologies and thinkpieces for school communities as they seek to re-build relationships between staff, pupils and parents and consider the social and emotional impacts this collective experience is having. The framework is structured around the letters of RESTORE:

**Recognition**  
**Empathy**  
**Safety**  
**Trauma**  
**Opportunity**  
**Relationships**  
**Engagement**

Peacemakers is an educational charity working with adults and children, mostly in school settings, in the West Midlands. We are one of the organisations involved with RESTORE. We have over 30 years experience of running circles that support children's social and emotional wellbeing.

This resource emerged from a conversation with a school we have worked with. As schools opened their doors to Yr 6 pupils, the Yr 5/6 Phase Leader at Hagley Primary School contacted us to say how useful the RESTORE framework had been for staff, as they thought about the needs of their school community. She asked us for feedback on some resources she had prepared. The conversation that followed, prompted us to put together some ideas for her to use during circle time with her pupils. We have put these ideas, and more, together to create this resource so it can be shared more widely. They are a collection of ideas that can be used as written, or adapted to suit your classes, and we expect they will be used as jumping off points for other ideas and activities.

Before you dive into the activities, we recommend you explore the RESTORE website, and particularly the section called Methods, so that you can reap the most benefit from using the ideas presented here. Please contact us or the other organisations involved, if you are looking for support with running circles and restorative practice, with pupils and/or staff.
Circles are the ideal space to bring people together. When underpinned by the values of positive peace, equity, equality, respect, dignity and inclusion, they can offer a space for building connection and community. Circles happen in schools for different reasons. They can be used for meetings, for inquiry, for restorative conferencing and for circle time. They can be used with the whole class or for small groups.

At Peacemakers, circles support the development of peace-building skills such as listening, conflict resolution, collaboration, emotional literacy and cooperation. We use them as a space where children, young people and adults can practice these skills and reflect on the experience. Children can say what is working well for them and what isn't, knowing they will be heard. The RESTORE website describes different types of circle and has other ideas of activities you can do.

The ideas in this resource are there to inspire you. You might choose one idea from each theme to have a go at, or they may inspire new ideas. We have described a structured circle on the next page, to get you started. We had social distancing in mind when we put them together and you will have your own policies to adhere to. If setting up a circle inside is problematic then we encourage you to take your circles outside.

As well as ideas here and on the RESTORE website, you can download a copy of our resource Learning for Peace, which is now available for free. There are lots of other ideas here that can help with planning.
Structuring the Circle

The Talking piece
It's hard to imagine running a circle without a talking piece. However in these times, passing an object around the circle may not be advisable. Instead, with the class, you could agree on an imaginary talking piece that will be ‘passed’ across the circle to indicate who is speaking next. Participants put their hands out on their laps to receive it and the person passing it will ‘throw’ it across the circle, saying the name of the person they are passing to. Ask the class ‘What shape will our talking piece be?’; ‘What is it made of?’; ‘What shall we name it?’ Invest time so everyone feels connected to it. What other ideas do you have for talking pieces?

1. Check In
The imaginary talking piece is passed from person to person. Keep the Check In very simple eg. your favourite dessert, your favourite game, your favourite word, how you feel when someone smiles at you, for example. At this stage, you are settling the group, so think carefully about the question. ‘What skill did you learn on lockdown?’, for example, will not work for everyone.

2. Game/Activity
Choose something here that is light hearted, fun and builds connection. For example:
- Pass the smile around the circle [or do this with the check in]
- Mirror Pairs – in pairs – one person makes slow movements with their hands/feet/heads/bodies and their partner copies/shadows the movement.
- 1,2, 3 – in pairs – first person says 1, partner says 2, first person says 3, repeat a few times. Replace 1 with a clap and repeat a few times.
- Replace 1 with a clap and 2 with a stamp foot – repeat a few times.
- My Bonny Lies over the Ocean. Stand up every time you say ‘Bonny’.
- Getting to know each other activities like sharing the meaning or story behind your name, or paired activities with chatterboxes.
- There are other games in Learning for Peace, like Fives, you can adapt in line with your COVID-19 policies.

3. RESTORE
Each session discuss one of the themes from RESTORE. See the following pages for ideas. The aim here is to encourage listening – without judgement and without trying to ‘fix’ things. This is a learning process for everyone in the circle – children and adults. Once you have gathered information, you can then decide how to take forward your learning.

4. Check Out
Go round the circle again. Choose one question, for example: ‘What have you enjoyed from today’s session? What will you take with you from today’s session? What are you looking forward to today?'
Sensitive Issues

Lockdown will have affected people in different ways. There will be positive experiences that people will want to share, but there may be sensitive issues too. Bereavement, trauma, arguments, anxiety and more will have affected people’s experiences. Any of these might be raised in the circle when you are exploring the RESTORE themes. This can be a daunting prospect for you as the teacher in the room, but it shows you have created an environment where pupils feel safe enough to be authentic and to express themselves.

As Peacemaker trainers we have seen emotions expressed in a variety of ways in training with adults and pupils, when a sensitive issue had arisen. The issue may be new and raw like the illness of a relative or a much loved pet, or a discussion may trigger an historic traumatic response [see the Trauma section]. We have witnessed people:

- leave the room either for a break or for the remainder of the session.
- become upset.
- share something personally difficult for the first time.
- say something, without realising it may be sensitive for someone else, who has then become upset.
- become defensive.
- go silent and opt out of discussion.

We are all human and sometimes our emotions leak out of us, or we become stuck with them. Imagine yourself in one of the situations above. What would you be feeling? What would you like to happen? What would you like the people around you to say or do? What would you need from the trainer? These feelings and desired responses are similar whether you are 10 or 40!

**Things to say may be:**
- *I can see this is difficult for you.* [Acknowledging the person]
- *I can come back to you.* [Giving space]
- *Is there someone in the room who can be with.....now?* [Offering trusted support]
- Nothing. Just allowing everyone to feel the moment and to sit with it can be enough. [Holding the moment to acknowledge the issue].

**Things to do may be:**
- allow friends to respond - they may want to offer some words or a hug.
- move on to a group or paired activity so you can go and check on them.
- acknowledge what has been raised, and ask the whole group if they would like to respond.
- move on to a game or activity to change the mood and check in on the pupil affected after the session.

If needed, or if you are not sure if an issue needs following up, consult your designated safeguarding lead.
Controversial Issues

During lockdown children may have been talking about racism, the handling of the coronavirus situation, 'right' and 'wrong' behaviours, and so on. When your circles feel secure for everyone, you may want to plan circles to explicitly explore a controversial theme. This resource from Oxfam contains advice and activities for teaching controversial issues in the classroom.

It is important to create opportunities for young people to learn to communicate with each other by focusing on issues on which they share different viewpoints. By holding conversations in a safe space, young people can gain knowledge and understanding of issues and critically evaluate their own values and attitudes. By doing this, young people develop the skills necessary to build their capacity to cope with challenging circumstances in their own lives and communities.

But what do you do when a controversial issue arises unexpectedly, or a pupil says something that contradicts or is offensive to someone else in the circle? As facilitators we need to think on the spot and decide whether to ignore, smile, express anger or dismay, interfere, intervene, help a pupil, ditch the lesson or give more time to a particular activity.

Sometimes a difficult discussion is hard but necessary as “ignoring differences within groups frequently contributes to tension among groups” (Crenshaw, 2016). These critical moments can provide memorable and transformative learning moments.

RESTORE is a versatile framework. As well as a structure for whole school planning, and for exploring the issues we have experienced during lockdown in planned lesson time, it is a tool we can draw on in those moments when we find ourselves stuck.

R - What do we notice is happening in this moment?
E - What feelings are emerging?
S - Given the climate in the group right now, is it safe to continue?
T - Do individuals need time to regulate, and/or time to connect with others before we can talk about what has happened? Can we do this as a group?
O - What positives can I draw on?
R - How can I build connections between everyone right now?
E - How can I gather thoughts, feelings and ideas from everyone? How do I feedback to people?

What do we tell the children?, by Angela Gluck-Wood is a useful resource offering further support.
Recognition

RECOGNITION of what's happened, and that our experiences during lockdown have all been different, life-changing for many and significant for us all. How do we encourage everyone to share their story of what's happened and their experiences of the pandemic so far? Ideas for this circle are:

The Art Gallery

James Moonan, aged 15. ‘This is called Wild Imagination. It is a picture of me inside my house looking out and thinking of all the things I'd like to see outside my window. Like pink flying flamingos, snowy mountains, giant colourful flowers and my favourite animal, a lemur.’

Róisín Fennelly, aged seven. ‘This is a picture of me, my brother Hugo, who is five, my sister Aisling, who is three, and my daddy. My mommy is a doctor, and my daddy has been minding us while she is at work. It's been great fun, because we get to eat hot dogs for lunch and do rollerskate derbies around the house!’

Ripley Evans, aged eight. ‘This is a picture of the doctors and nurses fighting the Covid-19 monster with syringes filled with the cure.’

Ask children to draw pictures that represent their experiences of lockdown. Give a time limit of about 15 minutes and play some music. You could provide more structure – draw a square [to represent a window] and draw all the things you enjoyed in lockdown inside the square, and all the things you missed or found challenging on the outside. Is there another shape pupils would like to use to represent their experiences? Explain that they will only talk about their picture if they want to. Ask them to give their picture a title – like they would find in an art gallery. Bring everyone back together. Ask those who want to, to share their images. You could allow them to draw with chalk on the playground.

The Listening Ear, Heart and Soul

Allow a longer session for discussion and actively listen to everyone’s experiences. Put in place some rules – eg you don't have to speak, but if you want to, everyone will get the chance. No-one will comment on what you say, we will just hear you. When each person has finished encourage everyone to give a thumbs up to acknowledge that person has been heard.

The Memory Project

Ask the group if they would like to record their shared experiences of lockdown [they may or may not want to]. Is it important to create a group record of this time? How might we look back on this time in 20 years? What would we like to remember? Would words or images or both work? Could a group image be created? Each person draws one experience of lockdown on one sheet of A5 paper and these are cut out to create a single image. Each person can draw more than one. A rainbow might be created. Or an archive box made and stored for the children in the school to open in 2040.
Empathy

**Empathy** for the mix of emotions that we have in response to events at home, in school, the community and in the wider world. How can we respond with empathy, compassion and self-care, whether we are staff, students or parents? Ideas for the circle are:

**The Feelings Dictionary**

An important component of emotional literacy is to be able to voice and express feelings, as well as being able to recognise the signs of how others might be feeling. Build a dictionary of feelings words for the main feelings – happy, sad, nervous, angry. You could do a feelings carousel - 4 pieces of flipchart paper. Everyone has a pen and writes synonyms on each sheet. Does playing music reflecting different moods unlock more words? Which words are found under more than one category? Do we have times when we experience more than one feeling? If you can, talk more about anger as a secondary emotion. What other feelings are underneath it? Fear, anxiety, frustration, for example.

**The Colour of Feelings**

Working in pairs, ask pupils to choose 3 words from the lists that best describe how they feel about the lockdown period they have experienced. What colours would they choose to represent these feelings – ask them to draw a heart shape using these colours. Then choose 3 words to describe how they feel about being back at school. Draw another heart or a different shape using colours to represent these.

**Put yourself in the Picture**

Find a selection of images from lockdown. Click here for some examples. More can be found here. Choose those with people in them and try to represent a diverse range of people and experiences. In pairs or threes ask children to imagine what the people in the images are thinking and what they are feeling. If they were in the image, where would they place themselves and what would they be thinking and feeling. If possible, use A3 sized images and mini post it notes for the children to add their thoughts, feelings and stick figures of themselves.

After pair work with any of the activities come back together to process thoughts, feelings, ideas. If working outside, tape the images to the floor with masking tape, or pin them to a tree/fence. Look at the collection of images. As a set, what do they tell us about this experience we have been through? Which images are missing for your class? What is not represented that the children in your class consider to be a strong image of their experience?
SAFETY will be paramount, both emotional and physical. How do we re-establish a sense of safety for this new normal so that students are able to learn and all are able to thrive? How do we help those who may have felt unsafe whilst they've been away from school, feel safe again? Ideas for this circle are:

**What do we need?**

Discuss the word safety – which will now take on a new resonance. In this session we are talking about physical safety and emotional safety. Use a set of needs cards – remove the word safety from this set. You may find it useful to explain the different between a need and a want.

Lay out the cards in the circle and ask the children – what do you need to feel safe in school right now – today – this week? [choose a time-frame]. Place a few blank sheets in the circle as well for needs that may be missing. In turn ask pupils to select the one that is most important to them. As you will have smaller classes you could ask for 2 each. If outside ask them to find a stick, pebble or leaf to place on the cards that are most important to them. You can use their responses to create a learning agreement – eg ‘We recognise that many of us need friendship right now. We will show friendship by chatting to people who we might not usually spend time with’. Come up with it together so the class feels ownership of the agreement.

**Physical Safety and Emotional Safety**

Physical safety and emotional safety are connected. For example, if I am looking after someone at home who is vulnerable to Coronavirus, then I might get upset, angry or irritable if someone stands too close to me. In that moment I might need co-operation and/or empathy.

Download the Emotional and Physical Safety Cubes from the Peacemakers website. Either make a large version of the cubes that you can use for the whole class, or smaller ones to use in group work. Each time, throw the physical safety cube and one of the emotional safety cubes. How are the two needs on the uppermost faces connected?

![Physical and Emotional Safety Cubes](link)

Eg. Here, patience is the emotional need and social distancing is the physical need. How are they connected? "If I accidentally get too close to someone, I would like them to be patient with me and politely ask me to keep my distance,?"

Eg. Here, support is the emotional need and tissues are the physical need. How are they connected? "We might need help to get tissues when we are at school.", "We might need help to remember to put used tissues in the bin."

**Storytelling**

Download the Storytelling Cubes from the Peacemakers website. In small groups give a set of these cubes along with the Physical and Emotional Safety Cubes. Small groups throw the cubes and make up a story based on the images shown. Alternatively throw one set for the whole class and each group makes up a story based on those. Each group will have the same images but can make up a different story. Ask the groups to perform their story in the circle.
Regulate

In preparation for this activity, it can be useful to understand what is happening in the brain. In this video, children explain the connection between fear, trauma and behaviour. When we are experiencing big feelings, that are hard to put into words, we may have physical reactions. We may sweat, our heart rate might increase, we might freeze to the spot, we might shout, we might run away. When we are in the midst of those feelings, we need to do things to ground us and help connect us with our bodies, regulate our emotions and allow the thinking and speaking part of our brain to come back online. Practice some grounding techniques, as shown, that can help with this. Ask pupils what other ideas they have to help connect them with the present, and how they can support one another when they witness these reactions.

Rituals

TRAUMA is now a collective as well as an individual experience, how does the school community process this? And how do we support people who have experienced very particular traumas during lockdown or as a result of facing an even more uncertain future?

We have all been through a shared experience and some people may be feeling hurt or emotional pain. As a community, you may feel the need to put some rituals in place. Rituals invite contemplation, witnessing and acknowledgment. They can be quiet, such as a minute’s silence for those who are ill or have sadly passed away. They might be about memories and so a memory board or a memory tree where pictures and words can be pinned or hung could be created. Or they can involve the creation of music, clapping and/or dance. They might involve cooking and eating together.

Relate

Children’s ability to reason and talk about what is happening for them, depends on the strength of the relationships with those around them. The circle in itself is meant to bring people together and build relationships. But this doesn’t happen just because we happen to be sitting in a circle. Everything we do in the space will become meaningful if we go into it with the intention of building and strengthening relationships between pupils, and between them and you. In the book, *Learning for Peace*, free to download, there is a section on relationships with lots of activities to help, including the Magic Carpet, It’s Good to be Me and cooperative games like The Sun Shines on You. When you see a child struggling with these games, then that is the opportunity to strengthen your relationship with that child. Enable them to take ownership over what will happen next and give them the freedom to opt out if they need to in the moment. Talk it through later. Take time to process feelings and emotions with everyone in the circle and build a culture that encourages the expression and acknowledgement of feelings.

Reason

When everyone is settled with working in a circle, you can use this time to talk through what happens in difficult situations. Use activities in *Learning for Peace* like the Conflict Escalator, I statements, Anh’s Anger and the Cola Bottle to understand what happens when we are angry, how conflicts escalate and how to express what you need.

Plus - check out Sesame Street for excellent support for younger children.
**Discussion Carousel**

Pair up pupils or, if you are able, set up a discussion carousel. Place the chairs as an inner circle and an outer circle, with chairs facing each other. The pupils in the inner circle stay where they are. Those on the outer circle move along one seat clockwise after each question, so they are talking to a new partner. Give each person 1 minute to share their opinions, using the questions above. Come back together as a complete circle and hear back responses.

**Blue-Sky Thinking**

Take the circle outside. Ask the children to lie down in silence. Read out one of the questions above and then allow children time to contemplate their answers. Don't talk between questions. After a few minutes read out the second question and then the third. Now ask the children to open their eyes and watch the clouds as they float by - what new ideas do you have – for your school, for yourselves? Come back together as a circle and hear back responses.

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**Opportunity**

**OPPORTUNITY** to change what needs to be changed, to reflect on what matters to us and if we’d like to do anything differently. How do we learn from this experience, now that we know we can question even seemingly fixed aspects of our world? Ideas for this circle are based on these questions:

- What did you enjoy from doing things differently for a while during lockdown, that you think we should learn from?
- What did you miss about school?
- What are you enjoying about doing things differently in school now?
- What things are really important to you about our school?
- Based on what’s really important, how can we make our school even better?

Thoughts, feelings and ideas about these questions will change over time. The activities can be used as part of ongoing discussions with pupils and staff. Ideas jars could be used, and the school council could be involved in taking ideas forward.

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**Opportunity Rainbow**

Create a rainbow of responses to the question with each colour representing a different question. Invite pupils and staff from the rest of the school to respond to the questions. Vote on the ideas they would most like to take forward.

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Take the circle outside. Ask the children to lie down in silence. Read out one of the questions above and then allow children time to contemplate their answers. Don't talk between questions. After a few minutes read out the second question and then the third. Now ask the children to open their eyes and watch the clouds as they float by - what new ideas do you have – for your school, for yourselves? Come back together as a circle and hear back responses.
Recipe for Friendship

Pupils will work together in pairs to come up with a recipe for friendship. They can have whatever ingredients they like, and can decide on their own units of measurement. For example, a cup of kindness, a pinch of understanding and two tablespoons of compassion. You could use a plastic hoop as a mixing bowl. Place it between the pairs and ask them to add the ingredients using their imagination, or if outside, they could add leaves, sticks, mud, etc to their ‘bowl’ to represent each ingredient. Make, provide or imagine a huge wooden spoon to stir the ingredients together. When you come back together, ask each pair to do a cookery demonstration. Which ingredients have come out as the most important by the majority? Could the class come up with a recipe card to share with other classes?

Community Tree

Ask the group what words come to mind when they think of community. You are looking for one word answers. Scribe these onto the white board or flipchart. Give pairs a sheet of paper and a pen, and ask them to choose one word that they feel most drawn to from the list. They write this word down and then use this word as the first word of a short paragraph. Give a limited time for this, 1-2 minutes. Ask them to look at what they have written, and to choose one word from this as the first word of their second paragraph. Then repeat to write a third paragraph. Ask them to look at what they have written and then to edit it to make a piece of prose or poetry. Take the group outside, set up a circle, and ask them to recite their pieces to the class. To model the activity, and in the spirit of inclusivity, the adults in the circle do this exercise as well. Write the completed pieces onto leaf shaped paper and laminate to be hung on any trees, fences outside.

Guide Talk and other Cooperative Games

One person is blindfolded. A small object is placed in one part of the circle and a flowerpot or container in another part of the circle. The aim of the game is for the blindfolded person [eg Ella] to pick up the object and place it in the container, with the help of everyone in the circle. Each person gives Ella one instruction, and must use her name and say please. For example, 'Ella, please take 3 steps forward'. The next person in the circle continues, 'Ella please turn 45 degrees to your left'. This continues until Ella has placed the object in the container. Leaning for Peace has other games that can be used such as, It’s Good to be Me and The Incredible Machine. With the machine, how can the parts be connected without touching each other? Make sure staff are fully involved in these games so the children are building connections with you as well as each other.

Storytelling Games

Great for outdoor circles. Start with a sentence [eg. 'The boy stepped off the bus.....', 'We had just arrived on the island...' ] and each person adds another sentence as and when they feel ready. You could use Dixit cards as prompts.
Engagement

ENGAGEMENT in our own health and well-being and with the issues that affect us: our teaching, learning and community. How do we foster a culture that enables staff and students to have ownership of and agency in their lives? Ideas for this circle are:

Where do we go from here?
Discuss with the class, what you want to achieve from the time you have together this week or this term or in these circle sessions. What is most important for you all, for example: Looking back, Looking forward, Being together, Learning, Relationships, Dreaming, Reflecting, Being Well. How do the pupils in your class like to express themselves? – Music, dance, writing, art, building something, talking. Agree a project idea that might generate some goals, using the above themes as a prompt and encourage the children to respond using any of their preferred media. Use the time together in the circle to plan, share ideas, revise plans and set goals, sometimes as a whole class, and sometimes in pairs or groups.

What does it mean to have agency and choice?
Use the Birthday Round to demonstrate this. Ask the group to place themselves in order of birthday, by date and month, following all the new rules in place and without help from adults. Or choose another problem-solving activity like building a bridge out of newspaper and tape whilst one person is on one chair/log and the other person is on another? In processing ask children what it was like solving this problem without help from adults? How well do they think they achieved the task on a scale of 1-5 where 1 is not well and 5 is very well? Can they give reasons for their score? How they can take responsibility for themselves during this time? If they found the task difficult, ask when is it OK to ask for help? Who can you go to for help? In discussion strike a balance between encouraging responsibility, whilst recognising that as adults we are there to help and guide. At the moment many aspects of school look and feel different, and there will be times when you need to ask for help.

Peace in School
In pairs ask children to say what peace means to them and to write these on large pieces of paper. You may find their responses will include symbols of peace, places where they feel peaceful, family and friends, different words for peace. In debriefing ask questions such as, Where is peaceful in school?, Is peace always quiet?, Where is not peaceful in school?, Who is responsible for peace? Draw out the idea that peace can mean different things to different people. Ask “what do we need to have peace?” (e.g. safety, friendship, acceptance, listening, helping each other, respect). Either as a whole class or in small groups ask, What can children do to build a more peaceful school? What will your contribution be? What can adults do to build a more peaceful school? How can we change our school environment to build a stronger sense of peace? In discussion choose or vote for 3 ideas they would like to take forward to SLT or the school council.
Notes and Ideas
A space for you to reflect on your circles

What has gone well?
Who has surprised me?
How do I feel now?
What will I do next?
Weblinks

www.restoreourschools.com
This website is home to the papers and blogs relating to each of the themes of RESTORE.

www.peacemakers.org.uk/resources#video-resources
How to play Fives and an interview with some children and their teacher, about the benefits of working in a circle.

Teaching Controversial Issues: A Guide for Teachers. This resource from Oxfam can be downloaded here.

A free copy of our resource Learning for Peace. Part 1 shares the Foundations for Peace and a spiral curriculum for primary schools. Part 2 is a toolkit of games and activities.

http://lifeworldslearning.co.uk/lfp/Resources/2.6%20Needs%20cards1.pdf
Needs cards can be downloaded here.

www.peacemakers.org.uk/resources#activities-to-help-build-connection-in-these-times
Chatterboxes and Story Cubes can be downloaded here.

Irish Times Art Competition Winners

www.npg.org.uk/hold-still/
National Portrait Gallery, Hold Still competition. Images taken during lockdown.

www.bbc.co.uk/news/in-pictures-52462204
More pictures of lockdown.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVhWwciaqOE&feature=youtu.be
Children explaining how the brain works and how trauma affects behaviour.

www.sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/traumatic-experiences/
Resources for exploring trauma with younger children and teachers.

www.libellud.com/dixit-resources/?lang=en
Dixit storytelling cards for download.

Peacemakers offers training for pupils and adults. Visit our website for more information.
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This resource has been put together by Peacemakers using the RESTORE framework

The RESTORE framework has been developed by a collective of researchers, practitioners and school leaders including:
- Andy Williams Consultancy
- Carr Manor Community School
- Conexus Conflict Consultancy
- Restorative Practice in Gloucestershire
- Iffley Academy Teaching School
- Leeds Learning Alliance
- Peacemakers
- Restorative Now
- RJ Working
- Transforming Conflict