

PART 1

# Thinking Restoratively

*Challenging Paradigms about What to  
Do when Things Go Wrong*



## Chapter 1

# An Intractable Conflict

### **Case study: Tristan and Jason**

To give you a strong sense of what restorative practice is, and how it works, I use real stories drawn from school life throughout the book. Below I start with the story of two boys, Tristan and Jason, and their intractable conflict. (Note: Jason and Tristan's story is based on a real situation that I became involved with as an external consultant to the school. I facilitated the process. The names and places have been changed.)

#### *The conflict*

Things had become bad between Jason, a 13-year-old boy, and Tristan, a 12-year-old boy in the same class. At the beginning of the school year something had sparked a conflict. Nobody really knew what, but since then, the boys' interactions had been characterised by regular episodes of teasing, and even awful comments about each other's families. This had sometimes escalated into defacing one another's schoolbooks, deliberately hiding belongings from one another and, on occasions, the boys had come to blows, although Jason, a much bigger boy, had a physical advantage.

There were times of ceasefire between the boys, when they managed to go about their day spending time in the same friendship group without confrontation. This was temporary, as both boys had developed a hair trigger when it came to one another's words and actions, so something as small as a sideways glance or a difference of opinion would quickly descend into taunts, insults and challenges to fight at the school gates after school. Some of the other students in the class saw this as great entertainment and sometimes said and did things to set the scene for more conflict between Jason and Tristan.

Due to the escalating nature of the incidents and the rising distress of the boys' parents and staff, the school principal, Mr Barker, felt that he had no choice but to separate the boys at break times. This arrangement saw Jason or

Tristan spending break times in the school's computer suite, on alternate days, while the other was free to move about the play areas. Mr Barker had invested hours of his time and energy trying to minimise the harm the boys could bring to one another. It seemed as though this was the only solution to an ongoing conflict where both boys believed that they were the victim.

### *The boys' profiles*

#### **Jason**

Jason was older, taller and physically stronger than Tristan. He presented as a quietly spoken and kind boy and had an air of self-assurance about him, which perhaps came from the fact that he was taller than most of the other boys. On occasion, Jason used his physical supremacy to gain status or to get his way. Like most boys his age, Jason's mask of quiet confidence hid a scared little boy who spent a lot of time worrying about how he fitted in and what he was good at achieving.

#### **Tristan**

Tristan was Jason's physical opposite: he was short for his age and all of the other boys stood taller. Tristan had an engaging personality and was more of an open book than Jason when it came to discussing life, friends and school. Tristan's insecurities were easy to see and he was socially immature for his age. He was eager to ask questions about friendship and life and was yet to develop some of the finer skills for making and keeping friends. Tristan, however, had a quick mouth and an expansive vocabulary that made him a formidable opponent for anyone who engaged him in a battle of words. Tristan had learned to manipulate, divide and conquer to keep a hold on friendships. It was all he knew, and mild social anxiety drove many of his social decisions.

### *More about the conflict*

What had been happening? How had people been affected?

Over several months, Mr Barker had investigated issue after issue between Jason and Tristan, ranging from reports of teasing to pushing, giving each other dead arms (a punch in the bicep), as well as a few public verbal exchanges, including taunts and threats at the school gates. Both boys had been suspended for their roles in these incidents. Each time, this only seemed to further galvanise each boy into seeing himself as the victim and further inflamed the boys'

parents, especially Tristan's mother, Louise, who believed that these responses were unfair to Tristan while letting Jason get away with bullying.

Louise had made enquiries about legal action against the school for the harm that she believed had come to Tristan. A law student herself, Louise was deeply distressed by the stories that Tristan was telling and believed that the separation order that Mr Barker had put in place was impacting Tristan's ability to maintain his friendships with other boys in his class and, therefore, damaging his mental health.

In a moment of extreme stress, Louise had, a few weeks earlier, entered the boys' classroom unannounced, without signing in to the school, and publically threatened Jason that she was watching him and would involve the police if he didn't leave Tristan alone. This incident embarrassed Tristan, made Jason fearful, distressed Mrs Jansen (the class teacher) and caused a stir within the community. Mr Barker was concerned with Louise's disregard of the school's child safety procedures and wrote her a formal letter, cleared by the school district's legal team, indicating that she had breached child safety policies. The letter stated that, from then on, Louise was only to move within the school grounds accompanied by a member of the school's leadership. Louise steeled herself for a legal challenge to this letter and was preparing her case against the school.

Galina, Jason's mother, took a different view of the situation. The quarrelling between the boys concerned her, but she viewed the issue as something from which both boys could learn valuable lessons. In her opinion, what was happening between Jason and Tristan was part of growing up and could be overcome with sensible guidance from adults. Galina had encouraged Jason to make better choices when Tristan did something that insulted him. Galina did not know Louise well but had been made aware of how Louise had entered Jason's classroom and confronted him. Galina felt angry with Louise for this but felt some empathy towards Louise, understanding that she must have been very distressed to have chosen this course of action.

Tristan and Jason's class teacher, Mrs Jansen, was run off her feet from having to closely monitor the boys' every interaction within the classroom and document her observations. There was a growing likelihood that these notes would become evidence in a courtroom some time in the future. As well as teaching a class of 30 students ranging from 11 to 13 years of age, Mrs Jansen had to constantly think about how any classroom activity might bring Tristan and Jason into contact with one another, and the potential consequences of this contact. Group work, class sports, excursions – even just eating time – all

had become an exercise in risk management for Mrs Jansen. This was taking its toll.

Tristan and Jason shared a group of friends. These friends felt like the meat in the sandwich and were finding the constant bickering and one-upmanship between Jason and Tristan exhausting. Having to second-guess the potential consequences of spending time with either of the boys was taking up a lot of head space for the boys' friends, particularly Adam and Aston. Understandably, Tristan and Jason would subtly encourage the boys to side with them, using their rostered play times to desperately re-establish their friendships, anxious that they had lost ground to the other during their previous stay in the computer suite. How else would boys of this age act under these circumstances?

Mr Barker phoned me to see whether I could work with the school to find a solution to the problems. He wondered whether a fresh set of eyes and a restorative approach could be the catalyst for positive change. This was a difficult step for Mr Barker, because involving an outside person in this situation was, perhaps, an admission that what the school had done to date had not been effective. Mr Barker was also adroit enough to know that Louise no longer trusted him to make decisions that she felt were in Tristan's best interests. Communications with Louise were strained and this was, of course, impacting on how Mr Barker could work with Tristan. It had got to the stage that every interaction Mr Barker had with Tristan would result in another strongly worded, legalistic email from Louise, who had become so anguished that there was nothing Mr Barker could do that wasn't immediately misinterpreted by her as a deliberate attempt to make Tristan's existence at school miserable. Of course, Tristan was doing what most children in this position would do, that is, taking every possible opportunity to complain to Louise about Jason's and Mr Barker's unfairness and mistreatment of him. After all, this got his mother's attention.

I'm sure elements of this story will be familiar to many readers. In the next chapter we look at restorative approaches as an effective alternative to addressing situations like this one, and we will return to Tristan and Jason's story later in the book.

## Chapter 2

# Courage, Connectedness and Restorative Work

Restorative practice is a constructivist, learning-based approach to conflict and wrongdoing that distinguishes between ‘managing behaviour’ and ‘managing relationships’. Those who’ve worked with restorative practice understand that when we change the way people see one another and feel about one another, people’s behaviour can change quickly. Underlying this is a truism that people’s behaviour is heavily influenced by the quality of their relationships.

Morrison (2007), in her analysis of research carried out by Baumeister and colleagues on the effects of social exclusion and rejection, sums things up by saying that the inference Baumeister is making is that who we are as individuals is ‘intimately caught up with who we are as a member of society’ and that our ‘social identities, understood as the psychological link between individuals and social groups, mould who we are and how we behave’ (p.29).

Based on the principles of restorative justice, restorative practice involves those who’ve become entangled in an incident of harm or conflict working together to find solutions and ways forward. A restorative mindset holds that the best way to deal with a problem or incident is to bring those involved, and affected, together (if possible) to discuss what has happened and how people have been affected. The next task is to help people to take responsibility for their misdeeds and bad decisions, and decide on a way that the harm might be repaired. This is a far more sophisticated approach than simply punishing those we judge to have wronged others. So restorative practice is essentially a face-to-face response to disruption and wrongdoing in schools. The ability to do this face-to-face restorative work is something that we can teach young people to do, beginning the moment they enter formal education settings. It is useful to think of restorative practice as a pedagogy rather than a bag of tricks that we pull out to use with some students in some situations.

The alternative to face-to-face work is the business of separating young people after a conflict, or after one has hurt the other, and making all of the decisions about how the problem will be dealt with on their behalf. The effort involved with keeping people who have been in conflict apart and trying to impose our solutions, or punishments, to their problems wastes precious time and energy in schools and rarely brings lasting behaviour change. This divide-and-conquer approach almost always further damages relationships, increasing the chance that the same issues will reappear. Schools need to ask themselves whether their approaches to wrongdoing and disruption strengthen relationships between people or whether these approaches erode relationships. In other words, do people feel better or worse about one another after the school has intervened?

## **Better relationships, better behaviour**

Restorative practice improves behaviour by improving relationships between people in schools, particularly in the wake of incidents where relationships have been strained or fractured by the inevitable bumps and scrapes of school life. Yes, upset and conflict in schools is inevitable; things do go awfully wrong from time to time in classrooms, hallways and schoolyards; good people sometimes say and do bad things to one another. But we do young people and their parents a terrible disservice when we send messages like ‘what happens at school will always be fair’ and that ‘if something goes wrong at school, then someone isn’t doing their job properly’. A clever principal I worked with once said, ‘We can teach kids to cross the road but we can’t stop the traffic.’ This is how I see restorative practice working: we give young people the skills to cross life’s many roads knowing that the traffic will probably not stop for them.

One of the greatest gifts we can give the next generation is emotional intelligence and a set of skills and attitudes to apply this intelligence to address conflict and wrongdoing more effectively than generations before them. Restorative practice is a stunningly effective pedagogy for achieving this outcome. I have had the good fortune to have been part of the cultural transformation that restorative practice brings and have come to see restorative practice as a vehicle for school improvement, not just a way of managing behaviour and improving relationships in schools.

When schools commit to restorative practice, a spirit of dialogue and an ability to understand one another’s perspective begins to take precedence over the primal urge for retribution and quick fixes. Peace ‘breaks out’ because

restorative practice allows us all to be human with one another again. Growing research from around the globe is building a compelling picture: going to work on the quality of relationships between people and dealing with conflict in positive, collaborative ways delivers us safer schools. The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) produced a document titled 'Findings from Schools Implementing Restorative Practices' (Lewis 2009) which shows significant reductions in incidents of violence in schools across the research schools. In light of recent attacks across the globe by radicalised extremist minorities, the call from academics and informed commentators is that we need to value and protect the connections that hold our communities together and challenge practices that push people to the fringes of our communities. Schools seem an obvious place to start.

## **School connectedness**

School connectedness is about the quality of relationships that young people have with others (teachers and peers) at school. Connectedness is often explained as the extent to which students feel accepted, valued, respected and included in the school, and has recently surfaced as one of the most important predictors of adolescent mental health (Shochet, Smyth and Homel 2007, p.2). When young people (particularly adolescents) feel connected to and cared for by people at their school, they are less likely to use substances, engage in violence and become sexually active at an early age. Feeling connected to school has been strongly correlated with higher levels of emotional well-being (McNeely, Nonnemaker and Blum 2002, p.138). Connectedness to school has also been proven by numerous researchers to be a protective factor against delinquency and gang membership. For example, McNeely *et al.* (2002) state:

When teachers are empathic, consistent, encourage student self-management and allow students to make decisions, the classroom management climate improves. The overall level of school connectedness is lower in schools that temporarily expel students for relatively minor infractions such as possessing alcohol, compared to schools with more lenient discipline policies... Zero tolerance policies...seek to make schools safer. Yet students in schools with harsh discipline policies report feeling less safe at school than do students in schools with more moderate policies. (p.145)



## Risk management?

In the current climate many school systems have become over-cautious around issues of student safety and well-being. The crushing burden of trying to foresee, manage and respond to every possible risk to student well-being has resulted in schools spending inordinate amounts of time on reports and bureaucracy about what's being done to stop things from going wrong in schools. We have lost the plot, and the result is ever-increasing numbers of overwhelmed school leaders, disenchanted teachers and less-well young people.

Going back to our earlier metaphor, trying to stop the traffic for young people has taken the focus away from teaching, learning, relationships and connectedness. So, when restorative justice advocates talk about bringing distressed young people and their distressed, possibly angry parents or caregivers together to sit in a Circle to talk about incidents of harm, many school leaders go wobbly at the knees. It can seem too risky, and many schools do whatever possible to avoid conflict.

However, schools that are skilled in doing this type of wobbly-knee work – that acknowledge conflict and meet it head on – do best when it comes to the task of keeping young people connected, behaving well and learning well. Morrison (2007) states:

Johnson and Johnson (1995) have acknowledged the failure of many schools to deal with conflict head on. They differentiated between 'conflict negative' schools, those that manage conflict destructively, and 'conflict positive' schools, those that manage conflict constructively. They note that most schools today are conflict negative, where conflict is dealt with through denial, suppression or avoidance. They advocate a cultural change to conflict positive schools, where conflict is addressed openly. Through using restorative justice practices, students will have the opportunity to learn productively from their experiences of conflict. (p.101)

Over-paternalistic styles of dealing with conflict and wrongdoing makes schools conflict negative. In these cultures, young people are robbed of opportunities to learn from conflict and develop resilience. All of us need to challenge the belief that young people aren't able to develop the skills to be part of the problem-solving process and that they must be shielded from conflict by grown-ups. We have been underestimating our young people for too long, and their resilience has been the casualty. Has our preoccupation with safety and student well-being created less-well young people?

## Restorative discipline

By contrast, as Stutzman Amstutz and Mullet (2005, pp.26–29) point out, restorative discipline is an approach which:

- acknowledges that relationships are central to building community
- builds systems that address misbehaviour and harm in a way that strengthens relationships
- focuses on the harm done rather than only on rule-breaking
- gives voice to people who have been harmed
- engages in collaborative problem-solving
- empowers change and growth
- enhances student responsibility.

As you read this book I hope that you will come to see that restorative practice is not for the faint-hearted. Working restoratively requires courage, because it demands that we come face to face with the negative emotions that are stirred up when things go wrong. Working restoratively is highly emotional work. This is why a large section of this book is dedicated to a theory of emotion that explains restorative practice. (Skip this section at your peril!)

Working restoratively simultaneously demands the best from young people and those who work with them in schools. So my question to you is the same question I've asked thousands of young people faced with the scary prospect of sitting down with others to sort out conflicts, upsets and problems, or to face up to their misdeeds: Are you up for the challenge? (I think you are!)

The next chapter introduces you to the social control window, a powerful way to conceptualise the role of adults (those in charge) and the different ways adults exert control on, and provide support to, young people in the pursuit of learning environments that are safe and productive.

## Chapter 3

# How to be in Charge – Four Modes of Discipline and Control

## *More Asking and Less Telling*

The social control window (Wachtel 1999) is a mainstay of restorative thinking. This model describes how restorative justice (i.e. restorative practice) differs from other modes of being in charge or having authority over people. Its four quadrants eloquently explain four sets of ways that people in charge generally behave. These four patterns of leadership styles are each based in particular beliefs about the nature of people and ways of interacting with people that gets results. Who am I referring to when I talk about leaders? In schools, this is any situation when one person has some level of authority or responsibility over another person. In schools, these may be:

- principals leading assistant principals, heads of house, grade coordinators or administrative support staff
- assistant principals, heads of house or grade coordinators leading teaching staff
- teaching staff leading students
- teaching staff leading teacher assistants
- student leaders leading students.

Regardless of the hierarchical structure in a school (or any other organisation), somewhere along the line someone will have authority over someone else. Even in so-called flat leadership models, certain individuals eventually rise to the top and inherit particular responsibilities that see them calling the shots in one way or another. In my work helping organisations address conflict and harm in the workplace through restorative practice, a lack of clarity about who is in charge

of whom has been a common ingredient contributing to breakdowns in good will and the emergence of destructive behaviour.

## Social control window

The social control window (see Figure 3.1) teaches us that when someone has responsibility or authority over other people, their leadership or management style can be experienced in two main ways: somewhere on a continuum of low to high support, or on a continuum of low to high control.

Low support ←————→ High support

At the high-support end of this continuum, high levels of understanding, nurturance, encouragement and flexibility are offered to those being led. If asked, the people being led would typically describe the person with authority as friendly, patient, supportive and perhaps even lenient. In this zone, the person with authority is very interested in people feeling looked after, because after all, he or she takes a keen interest in how people feel. That person wants to see those being led achieving and feeling good about themselves, so he or she works hard at explicitly teaching, reminding, encouraging and coaching. The feedback given to people by the person with authority is overwhelmingly positive. In the endeavour to be warm and supportive, such a person is highly flexible in accommodating different personalities and styles, and will often bend expectations so that everyone feels taken care of.

At the opposite end of this support continuum, low support, the person with authority works in a way where he or she offers very little in the way of support, nurturance and understanding. That person is generally indifferent to how people feel. He or she believes that whether or not people thrive under his or her supervision is up to them, so that person doesn't see it as their job to go out of their way to help people. Such a person would be described as the type of leader who leaves people to their own devices and has an air of 'don't bother me – work it out for yourself'. He or she doesn't provide feedback in any form and doesn't change anything about how work is performed to accommodate others.

Low control ←————→ High control

At the high-control extreme of this continuum, the person with authority micromanages and takes an almost obsessive interest in things being done their

way. He or she is big on rules and routines, and people know what expected behaviour looks like. Such a person would be described as overbearing, controlling and a disciplinarian. Behavioural and performance boundaries are clearly laid out and well communicated. When people fail to live up to such a person’s expectations, the person holds them accountable and never shies away from giving negative feedback. Things need to be done the way the person with authority expects, because after all, that way is the best way.

At the other extreme of this continuum, the person with authority adopts an approach that offers others nothing in the way of guidance about expected behaviour. He or she leaves people alone to decide how they will do things – and even if they *will* do things! Structure and routine are not part of what such a person values. Their style would be described by others as ‘anything goes’. Because such a person lacks any clarity about what they want from others, they don’t provide performance-based feedback in any form.

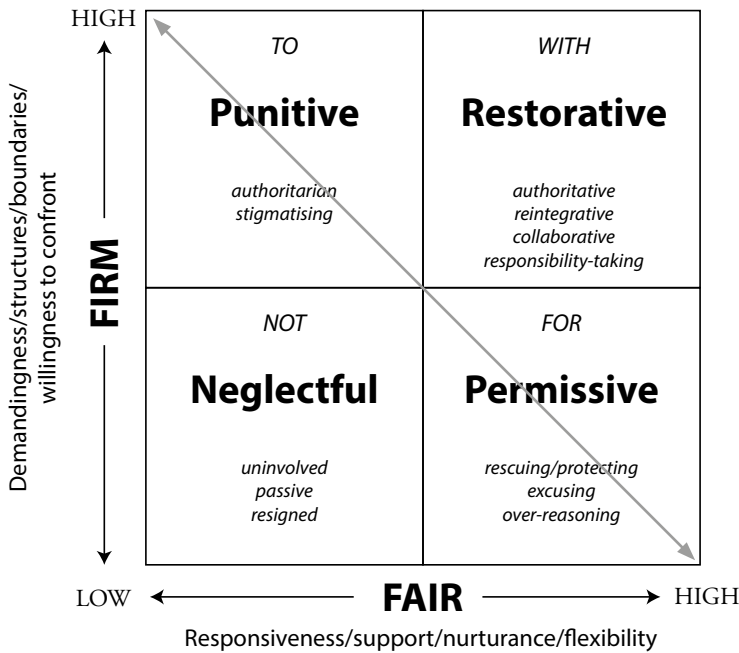


Figure 3.1 Social control window

*Combining the support and control continuums*

When one brings a continuum of support together with a continuum of control, a powerful way of thinking emerges about how leadership should

occur. In explaining the social control window from here on, I will place it in the context of students and adults (teachers and teacher leaders) in school settings.

### **Being punitive**

This section explains the 'TO' quadrant shown in Figure 3.1. Here the person with authority combines a strong need to control with a weak belief in the importance of students feeling supported or looked after. The person is in authority because someone *has* to be and kids need that from adults. This person has to be the boss, always has the final say and inflicts a powerful sting on anyone daring enough to step out of line or challenge him or her. Such a person sees students as objects to be managed (Vandeering 2010, p.8). If you think of the traditional, strict teacher of the nineteenth century, dressed in black gown and mortarboard, you have a good image of this leadership style. (The music group Pink Floyd's film *The Wall* springs to mind for many when thinking of this kind of teacher.)

In this zone, the practice is likely to be described by students as punitive and authoritarian. The person with authority 'does things' to people which might make them comment to others as follows:

- 'She's overly harsh – kids are really scared and the bad kids rebel.'
- 'He likes the smart and good kids and hates the kids who don't get it or go wrong.'
- 'She just won't listen – she just makes her mind up and that's it.'
- 'He holds grudges; go wrong once and you're a marked man.'
- 'As soon as there's a fight, kids are getting suspended left, right and centre – kids have been suspended for just watching!'

In this corner of the social control window, the person with authority is interested in getting students to do what he or she wants, in exactly the *way* he or she wants, and if they don't, such a person exercises their authority through intimidation and punishment: 'After all, this is good for them and will prepare them for life in the real world.' The management language is infected with phrases like 'You must, you will, they had better...', 'You won't', 'I want' and 'Do it now!' Mistakes are not okay and are seen primarily as the result of a moral failing on the part of students.

When wrongdoing or conflict causes disruption to school life, the person with authority gets angry and immediately concerns themselves with restoring order by finding out which of *their* rules have been broken and how the miscreants should be punished. Justice is about retribution, and rule-breaking is seen as a violation of the moral code. In the haste to apply swift and efficient justice, the person with authority gets it awfully wrong, missing important details and leaving those involved feeling at best unheard, and at worst diminished, angry, resentful and even vengeful. This is, of course, all because the person with authority had already made up their mind or guessed what happened – ‘who did what’ – based on students’ reputations and past behaviour. Such a person then metes out punishments without dignity or compassion. Prejudices dominate the person’s thinking and he or she believes that ‘leopards never change their spots’. This person genuinely believes that if the rest of the teachers worked like they did, and if the school leadership stopped being so weak with the naughty kids, order would be quickly restored to the anarchy. The person despairs and yearns for the ‘good ol’ days’ when kids knew who was in charge and showed respect to adults. Deep down the person believes that young people must be kept on a short leash, because if given enough rope, they will behave irresponsibly and selfishly. Underlying this is a dim view of human nature.

In this environment, students are in self-protection mode. With fear and shame being the dominant emotional forces, many students stop taking risks in their learning. When mistakes are made, or people cause harm to one another, the default response is for students to bunker down and deny involvement or responsibility. Out of a desire to protect themselves from being harshly punished and/or being seen as a bad person, young people are far more likely to focus on their own interests and will struggle to think empathically about the needs of others. A ‘look out for number one’ culture grows and students become highly punitive in their dealings with one another. After all, this is what is being modelled to them by the person with authority. In schools where students behave severely and retributively towards one another, you will almost always find a set of disciplinary processes that are both the cause and the misguided response to this state of affairs.

#### HOW MIGHT TRISTAN AND JASON BE HANDLED PUNITIVELY?

Going back to the story of Jason and Tristan (see Chapter 1), as soon as problems begin between Jason and Tristan, the person with authority starts dealing out detentions and suspensions to whomever he or she believes started any of the many incidents along the way. Often such a person guesses who

did what and closes their mind to the possibility that perhaps this time it was a different set of circumstances. This person has made up their mind about who was most likely the culprit and has developed an unconscious bias towards one of the boys, creating situations where one of them can easily get away with murder while the other becomes extremely vulnerable to this.

The methods for getting to the truth may involve police-style interrogations, the use of witness accounts and even CCTV footage. The person with authority is not the slightest bit interested in the root causes of the issues between the boys, or how they have been affected by their own decisions. Such a person believes that stories of woe from the past and emotions just muddy the waters. The idea of brokering peace between Tristan and Jason is far from his or her mind due to an unconscious belief that the boys don't want peace – they just want to bicker, because this is what naughty boys do! What he or she is interested in is being seen by others (colleagues, students or parents) as being in control of the situation through swift, decisive and severe responses to the litany of escalating incidents. In this vein, such a person is mostly focused on making sure the wrongdoer gets their just deserts without any engagement of the harmed party. He or she makes the decisions about what will bring justice on the harmed boy's behalf.

When the boys' parents express concern about how the person with authority has dealt with matters, the person quickly dismisses them as overprotective 'helicopter' parents and politely (or not so politely) suggests that they mind their own business and not ask questions that breach confidentiality. (Oh yes, a veil of secrecy over what the person in authority has done saves him or her from having to justify the processes used to deal with such matters!) Student confidentiality is the reason for a lack of transparency and accountability. The boys' parents feel as though they have been kept in the dark, and their suspicion, mistrust and resentment grow daily.

Tristan and Jason become increasingly emotionally detached from one another and increasingly self-involved, thinking only about how they are being affected and how hard this is on them. They also don't spare a thought to the collateral damage their constant bickering is causing to the classroom environment. The ways the boys punish and pay each other back become increasingly inventive and damaging as a tit-for-tat cycle firmly embeds itself.

### **Being permissive**

This section explains the 'FOR' quadrant shown in Figure 3.1. This permissive style lies in stark contrast to teachers who rely on heavy-handed punitive tactics. When the leadership style occupies the 'FOR' space in the social control



window, students really know that the person in authority cares about them because this person does things *for* them. Such a person sees young people as helpless objects of need (Vandeering 2010). The person provides high levels of support to young people, who typically view him or her as nurturing, warm, understanding and ‘soft’.

The problem is that such a person is not asking for anything in return from young people in the way of appropriate and considerate behaviour or academic performance. He or she fails to provide controls through setting boundaries and limits for behaviour. This person also lacks the willingness to confront young people when their behaviour is disrespectful. He or she thinks the best road to results is to serve students in an easy-going, friendly way, and the person has blurred the line between ‘relationship’ and ‘friendship’. Under this style of leadership students’ behaviour quickly unravels, and true to form, the person in authority minimises and downplays this inappropriate behaviour by making excuses for it. The person is deeply concerned about being seen as a nice teacher and genuinely wants students to like him or her. What might young people say about such a person? Here are some examples:

- ‘She’s really friendly and stuff, but kids run over her because nobody ever gets in trouble.’
- ‘You can talk your way out of anything.’
- ‘People just run amok – it’s really funny, but nobody learns anything!’
- ‘Some kids have done some really serious stuff, like really bad bullying, and nothing’s been done about it. Heaps of kids have left the school, but the bullies have stayed.’
- ‘Even the good kids go wrong in his class.’
- ‘When kids are going wrong, they get counselling, but that’s all.’

Despite the fact that the person in authority is blind to the effect that their over-indulgent style is having on young people, he or she often feels frustrated with the behaviour of the students and also despairs that not much learning is happening. His or her first reflex is to blame themselves – and even perhaps make apologies to students for their inadequacies as a teacher!

What’s missing is a basic understanding that young people need to experience boundaries; otherwise, they will continue to test the waters. When students finally push too far, they experience the grey arrow that runs diagonally across the social control window (see Figure 3.1). The person in

authority finally snaps, and out of the blue he or she becomes vengeful and punitive: this person has reached their breaking point, and students experience a Jekyll and Hyde routine, as all of a sudden the person becomes nasty and vengeful in dealing out sanctions. Students' responses range from shocked compliance to defiant protestations about the unfairness of the sudden change in expectations. (After all, the person has jumped quadrants and has become the punitive teacher!) Not long after this spectacular change in mood, the person in authority feels awful for turning so quickly on the kids, and his or her feelings of shame motivate him or her to make up with them again. How does such a person make amends? Of course, by becoming overly friendly, easy-going, undemanding and even apologetic. In other words, the person has moved back down the grey arrow right back to where they started: in the permissive quadrant (see Figure 3.1).

In this unstable environment, young people become confused. The influence of having the person in authority jump between the 'FOR' and 'TO' quadrants disorients them and they lose trust. Students begin to look to *each other* for leadership, and the socially powerful students begin to call the shots.

#### HOW MIGHT TRISTAN AND JASON BE HANDLED PERMISSIVELY?

A permissive response is characterised by a high tolerance to the behaviours that are causing conflict between Tristan and Jason. The person in authority finds themselves making excuses for the teasing, theft and fighting, perhaps saying things like 'That's just this age' or 'Boys will be boys'. Believing that the boys may be experiencing some challenges in their home life, the person might minimise some of the awful behaviours by saying 'Poor Tristan is having a tough time because he's not seen his father in a while' or 'Jason's mother says he's not been sleeping well lately – that's why he snapped and pushed Tristan today'. Because of this, we run the risk of only supporting the wrongdoer when poor behaviour causes harm, and ignoring the needs of the student who was harmed.

Being high on understanding and nurturance, the person with authority wants the boys to feel looked after, but the person is not really holding the boys accountable to the school's code of conduct. Yes, in this zone, the school rules don't really get mentioned because the person is so focused on the people involved that he or she loses sight of the bigger picture around norms for conduct. There might not even *be* a code of conduct of which students and staff are aware. As a result, the person with authority floats from one crisis to the next with little talk about expected behaviour.

In this quadrant, the person is also reluctant to challenge the boys' behaviour because they don't want the parents to be upset with them. Consumed with a desire to please everybody all of the time, the person makes relationships the reason not to do or say anything that might make someone feel bad. He or she is missing the point that good relationships are a two-way street where tough conversations about expectations need to take place from time to time. Instead, the person avoids these conversations because they want to avoid the uncomfortable feelings involved.

When the frequency and intensity of the incidents between the boys gets to a point that causes an intolerable level of distress, the person decides that enough is enough and snaps into punitive mode, imposing a severe consequence. This really upsets Tristan, Jason and their parents, Galina and especially Louise, as the severe sanction comes as a bolt from the blue for whichever boy did the wrong thing this time. They question the fairness of the response and wonder why this didn't happen last time.

### **Being neglectful**

This section explains the 'NOT' quadrant shown in Figure 3.1. When working from the neglectful quadrant, there's not much of anything happening at all. The person with authority fails to set and communicate expectations of behaviour, and of course, he or she doesn't respond when things go wrong (or mention it when behaviour is good). The person offers very limited support, encouragement, understanding or nurturance to young people. This creates a feedback void for students, which is obviously very bad for learning.

The person with authority is largely indifferent to the emotional needs of students and gets involved only when absolutely necessary. He or she may behave this way because of exhaustion (i.e. being under immense stress from another aspect of work) or may have the wildly mistaken belief that not responding will toughen kids up and prepare them to handle life's tough moments. The person might believe that this 'emotional-connection nonsense' has nothing to do with teaching, and might be described by students in these ways:

- 'He just lets people do whatever – it gets crazy.'
- 'Every lesson she's late – people are running amok by the time she shows up.'
- 'He doesn't see what goes on in lessons – I reckon he's lost it, had a meltdown.'

- ‘Some of the language in the hallways has been really disgusting! Teachers just walk past like they didn’t hear it.’
- ‘One lesson he just worked at his desk on the computer like we weren’t there. A fight broke out between two of the girls and he just looked up, yelled at the girls to stop it and went back to it – and one of the girls left the room in tears.’
- ‘She just ignores fighting and bullying in the yard. When kids complain, she just tells them to go somewhere else, like it’s too hard.’

The message that students receive loud and clear is that they are not cared about, they don’t matter and the teacher doesn’t expect anything from them. Young people are seen as ‘objects to be ignored’ (Vandeering 2010). The only possible emotional response from young people in this environment is to feel bad. Soon, they begin to defend against the awful feelings stemming from the teacher’s disinterest by minimising their interest in whatever the teacher or the school is interested in, and this often comes in the form of rebellion. Classrooms become truly chaotic in this space, as the powerful students assume the leadership void left vacant by the teacher. A *Lord of the Flies* culture of ‘might is right’ may evolve. Widespread harm and disruption is normally the end result.

#### HOW MIGHT A NEGLECTFUL TEACHER OR LEADER DEAL WITH THE TRISTAN AND JASON SITUATION?

In this zone, there’s no response to the incidents between the boys. The person with authority turns a blind eye to what’s happening and hopes that it will take care of itself. The person leaves the situation to escalate. Tristan and Jason receive no feedback whatsoever about how their behaviour is affecting the two of them as well as the other students who have to share a classroom and schoolyard with them. As a result, the boys eventually stop reporting any of the issues to the person with authority and go about taking care of the problem themselves with their limited conflict-resolution skills. This probably won’t end well, as the boys involve more and more of the other students in the situation and things spiral wildly out of control.

#### **Being restorative**

This section explains the ‘WITH’ quadrant shown in Figure 3.1. This zone is the most effective way to develop emotionally intelligent, resilient, kind and

compassionate young people. This zone has people in authority doing more asking and less telling.

Some describe this quadrant as democratic leadership. Although the restorative quadrant, characterised by high levels of control and support, is the closest thing of the four quadrants to what might be considered democracy, I believe that this environment is perhaps better thought of as a benevolent dictatorship. In a school setting, benevolence might be described as a desire to share power with young people and involve them, as much as possible, in the decisions that affect them. Allowing young people a sense of agency is indeed a key principle of restorative practice, but we must never lose sight of the fact that those in authority (teachers and leaders) have been placed in a position of power for a good reason. We have more highly developed brains, more experience and more wisdom than young people. At the end of the day, the person with authority has a duty of care and will be held morally and legally accountable for the well-being of young people. In contrast to operating in an authoritarian mode, when this person is in the restorative quadrant, young people experience their leadership as authoritative.

Teachers and leaders in this zone accept that conflict and wrongdoing are a completely normal part of life within school communities. There is an acceptance that young people (and not-so-young people) will conflict with one another and that good people will sometimes make horrible mistakes in judgement – or just do bad things! What emerges is an environment that is conflict positive where conflict and wrongdoing is addressed head on, not swept under the carpet (neglectful), minimised and excused (permissive), or reacted to through a sense of panic and impending doom (punitive). How might this practice be explained by young people? Well, on a good day it might be something like this:

- ‘She’s nice but can be tough when she has to be.’
- ‘They talk about the rules a lot in this school.’
- ‘A teacher actually apologised to me for accusing me of something that I didn’t do. That must have been hard for him!’
- ‘You know where you stand and what’s expected of you – the rules are up in every classroom.’
- ‘Most of the teachers here don’t scream at kids in front of the class, they just ask questions or wait till later.’

- ‘She’ll always catch up with you if you have a bad lesson. She gets you in the end and always asks for *your* side of things, even if it’s a day later.’
- ‘You get a chance to fix things up – that’s really important because everyone makes mistakes.’
- ‘He doesn’t hold grudges – he’s respectful.’
- ‘When there’s arguments or fights, we get to sit down and work it out with each other.’
- ‘Kids here have learned how to keep problems small by talking about them before things get out of hand.’

In the restorative quadrant, teachers and school leaders try to avoid assuming the roles of judge and executioner, and deciding who gets which punishment (a punitive response). Instead, it is the adult’s role to provide all involved with a highly rigorous process whereby people are encouraged to talk with each other about what happened, what they feel and think, how they have been affected and what those involved in the problem think needs to happen to make things better. There is a strong belief that young people – even small children – can work together to create solutions to problems when taught the skills to do so. Restorative practice is seen by those who work in this quadrant as a way of thinking that can be taught to children and developed as *they* develop. In other words, restorative practice is seen as a pedagogy rather than a quick fix we try when nothing else has worked.

Good teachers and school leaders have always known intuitively that young people feel better and do better in schools where the adults work *with* them in an open, honest and transparent way. Young people’s feelings and opinions are listened to and validated, even if they are not necessarily agreed with. When there are differences of opinion, young people are not held in contempt for how they feel. Teachers and leaders act based on a positive sense of self that allows them to permit dialogue with those involved when wrongdoing or mistakes happen. They can tolerate being a bit unpopular with students from time to time. Instead of building walls and defending their own positions, such teachers and leaders are secure enough to listen more and talk less in an effort to understand others’ points of view – and calmly state theirs without falling into the trap of trying to make themselves right by making others wrong. This ability to treat wrongdoing and mistakes as opportunities for personal growth works because of the dominant view that problematic or ‘bad’ behaviour is not the *essence* of the person. In other

words, when someone does a bad thing, this does not mean that they are a bad person (Kelly and Thorsborne 2014, p.65). The problem is the problem – the person isn't the problem.

From the student comments above, you can see that schools operating in the restorative quadrant use processes to engage students in decisions that directly affect them. One such opportunity is working with entire class groups to discuss what types of behaviours students and teachers expect from one another. Often the catalyst for these types of processes are when disruption and conflict have significantly impacted learning, but as schools become more confident with restorative practice, they begin to use creative approaches such as proactive classroom conferencing (Thorsborne and Vinegrad 2004, p.16) to help students and teachers clarify expectations and make plans for how teachers and students will respond when things go well or don't go well.

Until people have been inside these processes, it's perfectly normal for them to dismiss restorative practice as soft processes that are lenient on students who have done the wrong thing. In fact, most systems of accountability around the world, whether it be schools or the broader community, still largely operate in the punitive quadrant. Despite the spectacular failures of punitive-discipline systems to make schools safer and raise educational standards, and criminal justice systems to rehabilitate inmates, the popular rhetoric of policymakers is still largely punitive. One politician in my home state, when asked about overcrowded prisons as he talked tough on crime during an election campaign, famously responded that his government would 'rack 'em, pack 'em and stack 'em'.

Those with experience in the restorative quadrant will tell you that it is anything but a soft option. Restorative teachers and systems are big on accountability and responsibility-taking, but they recognise at the same time that students need high levels of support to work through incidents of harm. With this approach, teachers are vigilant in ensuring that all students are given opportunities to talk and that the conversation remains respectful. If students fail to take responsibility for their actions (e.g. don't admit their part in a problem or incident), fail to listen and fail to wait their turn to speak (or show deliberate disrespect to others, use put-downs, shout or act violently), the teacher respectfully instructs the student to leave the conversation (conference) and ensures that accountability comes to that student in other, more traditional – perhaps punitive – ways. Restorative practice works best in an environment of 'tough love', one that offers students high levels of control and support at the same time. A restorative approach firmly rejects harmful behaviour but does

endeavour to understand it and repair the harm based on what those harmed and others involved agree needs to happen to make things better.

This is where a restorative notion of what is fair and just makes a critical split from traditional ideas of how to deal with inappropriate and harmful behaviour. The needs of those who have been harmed are considered central in these decisions. As Wachtel and McCold (2004) state:

The fundamental unifying hypothesis of restorative practice is disarmingly simple: that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them. This hypothesis maintains that the punitive and authoritarian 'to' mode and the permissive and paternalistic 'for' mode are not as effective as the restorative, participatory, engaging 'with' mode. (pp.1–2)

Having explained the restorative 'WITH' quadrant, the task of the next chapter is to explore what a restorative approach looked like in addressing the situation between Jason and Tristan, which had spiralled out of control – distressing parents, teachers and the principal – and was looking likely to become a legal matter.