NAGOYA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

Restorative Approaches to Student Behavior

OUR LEARNING COMMITMENT TO YOUR CHILDREN



Restorative Approaches to Student Behavior

A DIFFERENT WAY OF THINKING ABOUT BEHAVIOR

For many parents, school discipline is familiar. A rule is broken, a consequence follows, and the situation is considered resolved. At NIS, our approach is different. We believe that when a child makes a mistake, it is not only a moment to correct behavior, it is a moment to **teach, reflect, and grow.** Rather than focusing only on what rule was broken, we focus on **who was affected, what was learned, and how relationships can be repaired.** This approach is called a restorative approach, and it is the foundation of how we respond to behavior at NIS.

What is a Restorative Approach?

A restorative approach focuses on repairing harm and rebuilding relationships, rather than simply assigning punishment. It helps students:

- Understand the impact of their actions
- Take responsibility in a meaningful way
- Develop empathy and awareness
- Learn how to make better choices in the future

In traditional discipline systems, the focus is often on the rule that was broken. In a restorative approach, the focus shifts to the **people and relationships that were affected.** This does not mean that expectations are lower. In fact, students are asked to do something more challenging, to reflect, take ownership, and actively repair harm.

Why we use this approach

Research and experience across schools show that restorative approaches are more effective because they:

- Give students a voice in resolving situations
- Encourage ownership of both the problem and the solution
- Place the needs of those affected at the center
- Recognize the complexity of relationships and social development
- Help children build long-term skills, not just short-term compliance

At NIS, our goal is not just to stop behavior in the moment, but to help students develop the skills they need to navigate relationships throughout their lives.

What this looks like in practice

When an issue occurs, students are guided through a structured process that helps them understand and repair the situation.

The Three Key Steps

- **Acknowledge the Harm:** Students reflect on what happened and recognize how their actions affected others.
- **Repair the Harm:** Students take action to make things right, this may include a conversation, an agreement, or another meaningful step.
- **Rebuild Trust:** Students commit to future behavior and rebuild confidence within the relationship or community.

The Questions That Guide the Process

Students are supported through conversations built around three key questions:

- What happened?
- Who has been harmed, and how?
- What needs to be done to make things right?

These questions help students move beyond denial or blame and toward understanding, accountability, and action.

Supporting the student who has been harmed

An important part of a restorative approach is supporting the student who has been harmed. Restorative practices are not only about helping the student who caused harm understand their actions. They are also about making sure that the student who was harmed feels heard, supported, and safe.

When harm occurs, we take time to understand the experience of the student who has been affected. We listen to what happened from their perspective, consider the impact it has had on them, and ask what they need in order to feel safe and move forward.

Depending on the situation, this support may include:

- Regular check-ins with a trusted adult
- Support from our wellbeing team
- Changes to routines, spaces, or interactions where appropriate
- Opportunities to share how they have been affected
- Clear agreements and boundaries to help them feel safe
- Ongoing follow-up to make sure that the situation is improving

It is also important to understand that a restorative approach does not require a student who has been harmed to forgive, become friends with, or immediately rebuild a relationship with the student who caused the harm. A restorative conversation between students will only take place when it is appropriate and when students are ready to participate.

Repairing harm can look different in different situations. It might mean an apology, a change in behavior, an agreement about future interactions, rebuilding trust over time, or simply creating the space and boundaries needed for everyone to feel safe at school.

Most importantly, the responsibility for repairing harm does not sit with the student who was harmed. The student who caused the harm is expected to take responsibility for their actions and demonstrate change. The school's responsibility is to support that process while continuing to protect the well-being, safety, and dignity of the student who has been harmed.

What parents might notice

Because this approach is different from traditional discipline, it may not always look like what parents expect.

You may notice that:

- Conversations take time and may happen over multiple days
- Students are asked to reflect and participate actively
- Outcomes are personalized, rather than standardized punishments
- The focus is on restoring relationships, not just assigning consequences

This can sometimes feel less visible than a traditional consequence, but it is often **more meaningful and more lasting.**

One of the most common questions parents have is whether or not this approach is "too soft." A restorative approach is not about avoiding consequences. It is about ensuring that consequences are meaningful, understood and connected to the impact of the behavior. Students are not simply "let off." They are required to reflect honestly, take responsibility, repair harm and demonstrate change.

This all requires more effort and deeper learning than simply receiving a punishment!

Serious or repeated behavior

Restorative approaches are always our **preferred first response**, but they are not the only response. At NIS, we use **two pathways**: either a **restorative approach** (preferred), or a **disciplinary approach** (when needed).

If a student chooses not to engage in the restorative process, or repeatedly demonstrates the same behavior, or does not participate in a genuine way, then more traditional disciplinary steps may be used, including:

- Warnings
- Parent involvement
- Formal meetings and action plans
- Suspension or, in serious cases, expulsion

This ensures that we maintain a **safe and respectful environment for all students**, while still prioritizing learning and growth wherever possible.

Understanding bullying in this context

Bullying is treated with the utmost seriousness at NIS. Not all unkind behavior is bullying, but all harmful behavior is addressed. NIS defines bullying as behavior that:

- Intends to cause harm
- Involves an imbalance of power
- Is repeated over time

When bullying occurs:

- Information is gathered from all involved
- A restorative process is initiated where appropriate
- Disciplinary measures may also be used if necessary

In Japan, the international concept of 'bullying' is often translated as 'ijime'. In reality, *ijime* is a broader category of behaviors and experiences which cause any child to feel harmed, regardless of severity, intent or power. NIS addresses *ijime* of all kinds as appropriate in our work to ensure every child feels safe, included and has a sense of belonging.

Our priority is always the well-being, safety, and dignity of **every student**.

The role of the school and the importance of trust

One of the more challenging aspects of behavior management in a school setting is that **parents do not always see the full picture**. Just as we know that parents see things at home that teachers do not, we hope parents understand that teachers see things that parents do not. And, of course, students may see things that neither parents or teachers may see. Together, we need to build understanding and trust.

At the same time, schools are required to protect the confidentiality of all students. This means there may be times when we cannot share every detail of a situation, even when we understand that parents want clarity. Our commitment is that every situation is handled with care, fairness, professional judgment and always with a focus on student well-being.

A shared goal

Ultimately, our approach is grounded in a simple belief: If a child does not yet know how to behave, we must **teach them**, just as we would teach reading, writing, or mathematics. By focusing on understanding, responsibility, and relationships, we are helping students develop the skills they need not just for school, but for life.