

## **Introduction: Why Discipline That Restores?**

**By Ron and Roxanne Claassen**

It has been said that 10% of your life experience is dependent on what happens to you and 90% is based on how you respond. While this may seem like an exaggeration, the saying certainly emphasizes the importance of how we respond, especially when faced with conflict or misbehavior.

Every teacher responds in some way when a conflict arises. Often the response is unconscious, based on a habit or pattern that is quite predictable. These patterns are often the ones we learned in our early life. Sometimes, when we are fortunate, these patterns are helpful and constructive, but often they are not. The good news is that due to increased study and experience in the areas of conflict resolution and restorative justice, strategies are emerging that teachers can utilize to respond in ways that are more effective, constructive, and life-giving than the punishment habits that only result in short-term behavior change and long-term resentment and rebellion.

Roxanne Claassen has been implementing these ideas throughout her career, primarily as an eighth-grade teacher. Over the years, fellow teachers and administrators would ask her what she was doing in her classroom that made it such a lively yet orderly and safe place, where students actually valued conflict resolution and problem solving. Roxanne's colleagues wanted to know how to duplicate what she was doing in her classroom, and even how this could be implemented school-wide.

After many requests from teachers and administrators, we have written this book to make the models, skills, strategies, and structures to implement what we call Discipline That Restores (DTR) accessible to anyone who might find it useful. This book contains

the experience and insights we have gathered over the last thirty years. It contains many stories and illustrations of real experiences about real students (names and some details have been changed to protect student identities).

We believe that any teacher who wants to can implement the DTR Flowchart. Many teachers have told us that using the DTR structure reduces their stress, since they now have a plan for responding to any conflicts they encounter. They often say, as Roxanne says, that discipline has become one of their favorite parts of teaching. They also have found that they waste less time and energy in ineffective power struggles with students. DTR helps teachers create a structure that is life-giving and constructive for the teacher and *all* students (not just the "good" students).

Many teachers leave the teaching profession due to high stress related to attempting to control students. A basic question all teachers must ask is whether they are going to control students through fear of punishment (which adds stress) or by creating a cooperative community based on the development and maintenance of *right relationships* (which decreases stress). The research demonstrates that when administrators and teachers use the models within this book to respond to conflict and misbehavior, the likelihood of using a cooperative process, having a constructive outcome, and being a more effective leader increases significantly. DTR theory, skills, and strategies help create a safe and cooperative setting in which students are able to learn and teachers have more time and energy to teach.

## **Background**

The two of us, Ron and Roxanne, have been married for thirty-nine years. Our friendship has grown with each passing year. Our success as a couple has not been

because we never had conflicts. Like all couples and families (we have two grown sons who are both married), we have our share of conflicts. We would say our relationship has grown because of the way we have resolved the conflicts.

For example, when our sons were about five and seven, we decided we would set aside each Friday night for family fun night. But it was not long before we were spending a good portion of the evening arguing about what constituted “fun.” We finally had a family meeting to talk about it. What emerged was an agreement to take turns planning our fun evenings (an adult helping each child, when it was his turn, to help stay within the budget). We agreed to allow the person to decide where we would eat, what we would do, what music we would listen to as we drove, who would sit where in the car (except that they could not drive until they had legal permits), etc. At the end of the evening we would all compliment the planner on something we enjoyed during the evening. We would not complain or try to influence his or her decisions (this was a challenge for all of us). We decided to try it for eight weeks and then reevaluate. At the end of eight weeks we decided that we wanted to continue. We made adjustments as our sons grew up. Now that they have left home, the two of us still use this plan. What started with a conflict grew into something that was effective and life-giving, and it improved our relationships. We think every conflict has that potential.

Ron's major contributions to this book are the Flowchart, models, and strategies that embody the theory of restorative justice and the best practices of conflict resolution. Ron acknowledges many before him and his contemporaries who contributed to these fields and laid a solid foundation on which to build. Many of their works are listed in the bibliography.

Ron's unique entry into the fields of conflict resolution and restorative justice, from the background of studying (Master of Arts degree, 1968) and teaching mathematics (1968–1978), contributed to his diligent observation of patterns and his devotion to creating models and strategies. In 1982, after completing a Master of Divinity degree with an emphasis in counseling, Ron founded and directed the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP) in Fresno, California (the first in California). He also developed a private mediation practice. In 1990, Ron was invited to join the faculty at Fresno Pacific College (now University) as the cofounder and codirector of the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies. The Peacemaking Model, which emerged from observing victims and offenders reconcile, describes how people who are angry or upset due to experiences of violation can move to where things are okay or even good between them.

Having observed the criminal justice system, with its focus on violation of law and the use of punishment, and its contrast with the emerging ideas of restorative justice, Ron developed the DTR Principles to reflect how Roxanne was implementing restorative justice in her classroom. Later Ron developed a series of principles (initially for the local VORP, adopted by the UN Working Party on Restorative Justice, 1996; see [peace.fresno.edu/docs/rjprinc.html](http://peace.fresno.edu/docs/rjprinc.html)) that describe restorative justice as a way of working with violations that focuses justice on "making things as right as possible" rather than on punishment.

Ron also developed the Four Options Model to describe the basic ways people deal with conflict, defined as "power, rights, and interests" by Ury, Brett, and Goldberg of the Harvard Negotiation Project. In model form, it became the four, rather than three,

basic ways people deal with conflict. This model was the focus of Ron's doctoral dissertation completed in 2005. While these models have broad applications, this book applies them to the work of teachers and schools. Ron has been consulting with and training administrators and teachers for over twenty years.

After our two sons were well along in school and after helping start VORP (1982–1986), Roxanne completed her teaching credential (including an additional major in conflict and peacemaking) and began teaching at Raisin City School. Her teaching experience included first, fourth, fifth, sixth, and eighth (for the last eleven years) grades. When she started teaching, after having helped start the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program in Fresno, she was surprised to find that the way misbehavior is handled in schools is very similar to the way the criminal justice system handles it. The two of us began thinking together about how discipline in school could incorporate the skills and strategies that were emerging in the fields of conflict resolution/mediation and restorative justice—in particular, the models that Ron had been developing.

Roxanne noticed that while our schools have a well-developed academic curriculum, the social curriculum receives less attention in teacher training and at the school and state levels. Due to the underlying punishment paradigm, it seems to duplicate what teachers and administrators experienced when they were students. As Jane Nelsen points out, it assumes the myth that the best way to get students to act better is to punish them for misbehavior. This paradigm is rarely examined. In fact, punishment structures are so embedded in our way of thinking that they usually just happen without anyone giving them a great deal of thought and attention. Roxanne observed that our responses to conflict or misbehavior are part of the social curriculum and could be the occasion for

adults and students to connect constructively at the deepest levels. She observed that the approach used by adults at schools had tremendous influence on relationships. Some responses stigmatized or ostracized students and damaged teacher/student relationships, while others restored and reintegrated students and improved teacher/student relationships.

Roxanne completed her Master of Arts in Peacemaking and Conflict Studies in 2003. One of her projects was developed into *Making Things Right*, a thirty-two-lesson curriculum (see [disciplinethatrestores.org/](http://disciplinethatrestores.org/)) for training students to be constructive conflict resolvers and mediators. Her thesis reflected on her journey in the development of DTR and contributed to its ongoing progress. Roxanne has been working at implementing restorative justice/discipline principles in her classroom for the last seventeen years. She has taught at a variety of grade levels including first, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades (both departmentalized, and self-contained).

Roxanne believes that almost any discipline program can work reasonably well for eighty to ninety percent of students in a classroom, since most students are respectful, cooperative, and rarely involved in the formal discipline structure. The particularly compelling thing about DTR is that it also works very well with students who arrive with a reputation, are the least cooperative, and give teachers problems over and over again. Roxanne has found that DTR works with students who are on the fringes of despair, deciding whether they want to be a part of the community or join a counter-community that is not connected with the academic world of the other students. Roxanne is not saying that this is easily accomplished. The teacher must be very committed to continuing to work with such students because the DTR plan does not give up on anyone. DTR

provides many levels of effective backup strategies for a student who is temporarily uncooperative. Roxanne finds this approach energizing and less stressful than the alternatives.

Students observe their teachers and learn not just from what they say, but also from what they do. Learning, especially for the social curriculum, is so much more than what teachers write down in the lesson plan books, even after careful consideration of each standard that the state has identified must be met. Roxanne observed that students are much more likely to pick up on what she does and how she acts than on what she says. If there is a discrepancy between what she is doing and what she is saying, students tend to believe what she is doing. For example, if she says that it is best to resolve conflict cooperatively but then she uses coercion to handle a conflict between her and the students, they know that what she really values is the ability to use coercion. The teacher wants to be sure she is doing what leads to responses of increased understanding and love. Noting that the word *disciple* and *discipline* are closely related, both stemming from the Latin word for student, Roxanne realized that in one sense, her students are her disciples. Accepting this tremendous responsibility, she has decided that she wants what they learn from being with her to be constructive, life-giving, and to contribute to improved relationships.

### **DTR Theory**

While this is primarily a "how-to" book, it is deeply rooted in theory and research. While a thorough discussion of the theory is beyond the scope of this book, the comments below provide an introduction.

The theory of restorative justice (Zehr, Pranis, Van Ness, Umbreit, Bazemore, McElrea, Wright, Claassen, and others) points the way to a new paradigm and the development of what could be done in a well-planned social curriculum in a school. Using the insights of restorative justice and conflict resolution theory, applying the skills and strategies developed by Ron, and reflecting constantly on the resulting impact has led to the development of the DTR Flowchart and the step-by-step plan that we present in this book. Roxanne's master's thesis describes the pedagogy (Gordon, Glasser, Freire, Ginott, Nelsen) needed to encourage better behavior and improved relationships while valuing individual responsibility and community accountability.

As Roxanne noticed when she started teaching, school discipline systems often look a lot like the criminal justice system. They focus on what rule was violated, who violated the rule, and what should be done to punish the wrongdoers (make them feel worse in hopes they will act better), just as the criminal justice system focuses on answering three basic questions: What law was violated? Who violated the law? And what is the appropriate punishment for the lawbreaker? All decisions are made by the responsible authorities. All of this is done in hopes that the offender will change behavior in the future due to the fear of or unpleasantness of the punishment. But this is only one way of viewing justice.

Restorative justice provides another paradigm focused on responsibility, accountability, and a goal of restoration for all impacted by the offense. Restorative justice asks a different set of questions: Who was harmed? What are the needs of the harmed? How can things be made as right as possible? and How can things be changed to create a better future? A restorative justice system prefers that the decisions are made in

a cooperative process by all of the impacted parties rather than just the authorities. If impacted people are not willing, or they try and can't find agreement, then the authorities seek ways to address the same questions. DTR is a restorative justice discipline system for schools, classrooms, and homes that parallels, contributes to, and draws from the emerging international restorative justice movement.

In 1996, Ron drafted a set of principles for restorative justice that were adopted by the United Nations NGO Working Party on Restorative Justice as their starting point in preparing for the 2000 UN Crime Congress (see [peace.fresno.edu/docs/rjprinc.html](http://peace.fresno.edu/docs/rjprinc.html)).

Ron based these Restorative Justice Principles on the DTR Principles he had written several years earlier. The DTR Principles were written initially to describe what Roxanne was doing in her classroom, which was based on combined knowledge and experience with VORP, our studies in peacemaking and conflict resolution, and our experience as teachers. The DTR Principles served as a guide, or a "rudder" for testing emerging ideas, strategies, and practices. Implementing the theory expressed in the DTR Principles eventually led to the creation of the DTR Flow Chart.

Below is an overview of the principles. If you are interested in seeing a fuller explanation of these principles, which provide the underlying theory behind this book, you can read an article at [disciplinethatrestores.org/IntroDTR.pdf](http://disciplinethatrestores.org/IntroDTR.pdf).

### **Overview of DTR Principles**

**Purpose:** The purpose of DTR is to guide teachers to respond to each conflict or misbehavior in ways that are life-giving and make things as right as possible. DTR uses each conflict and misbehavior to help students learn respect, critical thinking, and cooperative

negotiation skills. DTR responses recognize and respect individual freedom while improving relationships and building community life in the classroom.

**Problem:** DTR recognizes that rules are written to create and protect safety and fairness. DTR also recognizes that when a rule is violated, it points to the real problem. The real problem is not the rule violation but the violation of a person and/or the damage to their property.

**People:** DTR prefers that the response to the conflict or misbehavior be between the ones who were impacted by the offense. This means that DTR would prefer that when a student is disrespectful with a teacher, the student and teacher should be the primary parties involved in deciding what should be done to make things as right as possible.

**Process:** DTR prefers that the process used to determine how to make things right include recognizing the violation/conflict, searching for agreements to restore equity and to clarify the future, and following up on the agreements. DTR recognizes that trust grows when agreements are made and kept. That is why it is so important for the primary parties between whom the violation/conflict occurred be involved in the process of making agreements to make things as right as possible.

**Power:** DTR prefers "power with" to "power over." "Power with" is the kind of power where the teacher and student agree only to those ways of making things right that are life-giving, effective, and improve relationships. This does not mean that the teacher does not ever use "power over," but it does mean that the teacher uses "power over" only in ways that are reasonable, respectful, restorative and intended to reintegrate the misbehaving student, and only when the student is not willing to cooperate.

## Overview of the Chapters

Each chapter in the book is focused on what we are calling a "stop" on the DTR Flowchart. You will note that each chapter begins with a copy of the DTR Flowchart and an arrow from the chapter title to the stop on the Flowchart. We also sometimes refer to the Flowchart as a map. Each chapter includes the purpose of the stop on the Flowchart, the skill needed to implement it, a brief reference to the theory behind it, and an example or story to illustrate the stop. The detail, at most stops, includes some possible language or script a teacher might use to implement it.

It is common to describe a class by dividing it into three parts: 80% who are generally cooperative and on task; 15% who need some additional training and support to be cooperative and on task; and 5% who are very difficult and need a lot of training and support to be cooperative and on task. (See this Web page, which describes the research for positive behavioral support: [www.coe.missouri.edu/~rpd/~/howPBSworks.html](http://www.coe.missouri.edu/~rpd/~/howPBSworks.html).)

Using these categories, all of the students benefit from Chapter 1: Teacher Preparation; Chapter 2: Understanding Student/Teacher Conflict; Chapter 3: Usual Constructive Reminders; and Chapter 4: Respect Agreement. The models, skills, and strategies in these chapters address almost all of the issues in the 80% category and many in the 15% and 5% categories. Chapter 5: Active Listening and/or I-Messages (active listening and I-message skills are used at all stops and specifically at this stop) and Chapter 6: Four Options Model are useful with all students but are more frequently needed with the 15% and the 5%. Chapter 7: Student/Teacher Meeting, Chapter 8: Follow-up Meeting(s), and Chapter 9: Thinkery are rarely used with the 80%, less frequently utilized with the 15%, and most often used with the 5%. Chapter 10: Family

Conference is utilized almost exclusively with the 5%, and Chapter 11: School Authority Structure is utilized with the 5% if needed at all. There are many academic years when Roxanne does not need the School Authority Structure at all.

The two of us have collaborated on the entire book but as you will note, Roxanne has taken the lead on some of the chapters and Ron on others. Roxanne's contribution is primarily on the implementation in the classroom and Ron's in the construction of the Flowchart and models and the development of skills and strategies. Please note along the way that there are a number of references to Website addresses that contain articles written by Roxanne or Ron that further describe some ideas that we decided were beyond the scope of this book.

Students have the resources within them to meet many of the needs that are created when students have conflicts with each other. Student/student mediation programs provide the structure they need to help each other. These programs have proven to improve school climate and safety. We think that these mediation programs for students are very important, but we have chosen not to address them in this book. Also, we think that staff members should have respect agreements and plans to address conflicts. This also is important, but we have decided to leave that to some other book or articles. Finally, while we include a brief chapter on the School Authority Structure in the context of it being a backup for the teacher's discipline system, we are leaving a more thorough development of it to another book or article.

Ron was actively involved in the development of the Restorative Discipline Policy at Fresno Pacific University. Since the time the structure was changed to allow all cases to have a Community Justice Conference (a type of mediation or circle, depending

on the situation), only one case each year has needed the School Authority Structure for a final decision. All others were resolved in the context of the Community Justice Conference and the follow-up meetings. One of our resident directors who was most reluctant when the new policy was introduced now says that in addition to addressing each issue that comes up at a deeper and more lasting level, his relationship with the student always improves, which is in sharp contrast to when he was responsible for carrying out the punitive model. The Policy Document can be found at [www.fresno.edu/sharedmedia/studentlife/restoratediscipline.pdf](http://www.fresno.edu/sharedmedia/studentlife/restoratediscipline.pdf), and an article describing the development and early implementation of the policy can be found at <http://DisciplineThatRestores.org/>