

Learning To Move Forward

A Social-Emotional Curriculum for
Reflection, Responsibility and Repair

Restoring Trust

Teacher's Guide

Welcome to **Learning to Move Forward: Restoring Trust: A Social-Emotional Curriculum for Reflection, Responsibility, and Repair**. This curriculum isn't just about teaching—it's about rebuilding. Restoring Trust was created for young people who are learning how to take responsibility for their actions, repair damaged relationships, and understand how their behavior affects others—often for the very first time, and often in environments where they are finally beginning to feel safe enough to try.

We recognize that the students we serve are navigating more than behavior. Many carry the weight of trauma, disconnection, shame, or repeated failure. Restoring Trust meets students where they are—with compassion, structure, and dignity. Through relatable stories, structured reflection, and guided practice, this curriculum helps students rebuild what was broken—not just with others, but within themselves.

Progress isn't perfect, and growth takes time. This resource offers a roadmap forward—grounded in emotional safety, honest self-reflection, and the belief that trust can be taught, practiced, and restored.

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Charles Mathison, Ed.S., is a special educator and behavior intervention specialist who has spent over 25 years working with young people facing emotional and behavioral challenges. His experience spans clinical schools, residential treatment facilities, and specialized public school programs for students with emotional disabilities.

Throughout his career, Charles has focused on helping students move beyond punitive models and instead discover how reflection, language, and structure can lead to real emotional growth. *Learning to Move Forward* is the result of years of experimentation, student feedback, and research into what actually works — not just in theory, but in the day-to-day reality of working with kids who are often misunderstood or written off.

This curriculum reflects his belief that every young person deserves tools to understand themselves, take ownership of their choices, and build the kind of life they can be proud of.

Help Students Rebuild from the Inside Out

Restoring Trust tackles one of the most urgent and overlooked barriers to learning in special education: readiness. Many students enter school environments burdened by trauma, mistrust, and years of academic failure. Before learning can happen, trust must be restored.

This book provides that foundation—through engaging stories, reflective activities, and structured routines that guide students toward responsibility and emotional growth.

Why Educators and Therapists Choose This Book:

✓ Designed for Learning Readiness

Students can't learn when they don't feel emotionally safe. This book helps students recognize their behaviors, understand the impact on others, and practice rebuilding broken relationships—all critical steps in becoming ready to learn.

✓ Standards-Based Curriculum – Academic + SEL

Every activity aligns with both **Common Core ELA standards** and the **CASEL SEL competencies**, offering real academic and emotional skill-building. Standards addressed include:

- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.3 / 5.3** – Describe how characters in a story respond to challenges.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1 / 5.1** – Refer to details and examples in a text when drawing inferences.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1 / 5.1** – Write opinion pieces supporting a point of view with reasons.
- **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.4.1 / 5.1** – Engage effectively in collaborative discussions.

✓ Built for Special Education

With a gentle tone, predictable structure, and trauma-informed pacing, this book is ideal for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, autism, ADHD, and other learning differences. Activities meet students where they are—academically, emotionally, and socially.

✓ **Unique Features Inside:**

- Relatable short stories with social dilemmas
- Reflection questions and sentence starters
- Accountability routines
- Restorative letter templates
- Visuals and symbols to support non-readers and emergent writers
- Activities designed for one-on-one, small group, or classroom use

Who It's For:

Special education teachers, school counselors, social workers, behavior specialists, SEL leaders, and anyone supporting students in therapeutic or self-contained settings.

Flexible and Modular

Use across weeks or embed into daily check-ins, writing time, SEL blocks, or pull-out counseling.

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What This Curriculum Offers: Restoring Trust

Restoring Trust is more than a behavioral curriculum—it's a relationship repair framework. This module equips students with the emotional language and structured reflection they need to rebuild trust after it's been broken. Through a variety of tools and formats, students learn how to own mistakes, recognize the impact of their actions, and take meaningful steps toward repair.

This module includes:

- **Short stories** featuring consistent, relatable characters navigating trust-based dilemmas
- **Daily prompts with reflection questions** that gently guide students to explore cause, impact, and repair
- **Sentence starters and rewrite exercises** to scaffold writing and build communication skills
- **Redirection tools and modeled language** to teach healthy emotional expression and rebuilding
- **Structured reflection worksheets** for both group and one-on-one use
- **Accessible, trauma-informed materials** for special education, counseling, and Tier 2–3 behavior support settings

Philosophy Behind the Restoring Trust Module

This curriculum is built on the belief that:

- **Restoring trust is a teachable process**—students need guidance, not guilt, to take meaningful steps toward repair
- **Behavior is rooted in relationships**—we build self-regulation through reflection, connection, and safe structure
- **Students heal and grow when given multiple access points**—writing, drawing, speaking, and modeling all matter
- **Repair is stronger than punishment**—students who learn to repair trust become more confident, more accountable, and more available for academic and social success

For Use In:

-  Inclusive classrooms (as part of SEL block or behavior intervention)
-  Small group counseling and restorative circles
-  One-on-one therapy or mentoring
-  Morning check-ins and journal routines
-  Suspension return meetings or accountability conferences

How to Use This Curriculum

This curriculum is designed for use in:

- ✨ Morning check-ins
- 📖 Journal writing
- 🧠 Social-emotional literacy lessons
- 👥 Small group counseling or restorative circles
- 👤 One-on-one therapy or mentoring
- 📚 Behavior intervention classes
- 👩🏫 Inclusive classrooms and special education settings

Academic Instruction Benefits

Supports Common Core, SEL Benchmarks, and Trauma-Informed Teaching

Area	How the Curriculum Helps
Reading Comprehension	Students practice identifying main ideas, summarizing, and retelling through guided story discussions.
Text Evidence	Students cite specific actions, choices, and consequences from the stories to support their answers.
Character Analysis	Students explore internal motivations, decision-making, and emotional development of the story characters.
Perspective-Taking	Promotes empathy and critical thinking by asking students how they would feel or act in the same situation.
Written Expression	Students write journal entries, letters, reflections, and goal-setting responses tied to story themes.
Oral Language & Discussion	Provides structured opportunities for students to practice speaking clearly and respectfully in group settings.
Vocabulary Development	Introduces behavioral and emotional language (e.g., "accountability," "trigger," "response") in meaningful contexts.

**Cross-Curricular
Integration**

Supports ELA, health, and character education through real-world connections.

Critical Thinking

Encourages problem-solving, cause-and-effect reasoning, and moral reasoning through open-ended prompts.

Social-Emotional, Behavioral, and Therapeutic Benefits

Aligned with the CASEL SEL Framework + Trauma-Informed & Restorative Practices

Designed for Special Education, Counseling, Behavior Intervention, and Therapeutic Classrooms

Area	How the <i>Restoring Trust</i> Curriculum Helps
Self-Awareness	Through reflective writing prompts, short stories, and end-of-module questions, students explore how their actions, emotions, and choices have impacted others—and themselves.
Self-Management	The curriculum encourages students to process strong emotions like guilt, frustration, and fear of rejection through writing, discussion, and scenario rewrites, supporting emotional regulation and self-control.
Social Awareness	Students examine how others feel in the face of conflict or betrayal, using character-driven stories and discussion to develop empathy and recognize different perspectives.
Relationship Skills	Each story models communication breakdowns and repair moments. Students practice offering apologies, giving second chances, and making things right in both writing and discussion.
Responsible Decision-Making	Prompts and stories encourage students to analyze what went wrong, what they could have done differently, and how to choose better next time—connecting choices to impact.

Behavior Modification	By helping students identify broken trust patterns and explore alternative responses, the curriculum supports gradual behavior change through repetition, role-play, and self-reflection.
Restorative Practices	Every story and activity is built around repair—students explore the emotional work of apology, amends, and rebuilding trust through realistic, scaffolded exercises.
Trauma-Informed Care	Lessons avoid shame and instead emphasize dignity, safety, and choice. Reflection tools allow students to work privately, with a teacher, or in group dialogue, based on comfort.
Counseling Support	Perfect for therapists, social workers, and behavior specialists. The stories, journal prompts, and scenario rewrites can be used as part of a treatment plan, check-in tool, or IEP support.
Goal-Oriented Behavior	Students complete guided reflection exercises such as the End-of-Module Worksheets (Options A & B) and Short Scenario Rewrite prompts to track growth and plan next steps in trust repair.

Inclusion & Engagement Tips for Maximum Student Participation

Support every learner — emotionally, academically, and behaviorally.

This curriculum is designed to be flexible. Students may have different literacy levels, emotional capacities, communication styles, and behavioral challenges. The following tips help ensure that all students can participate meaningfully, whether one-on-one or in group settings.

If a student is unable or unwilling to write...

-  Offer drawing instead of writing: Let students sketch their response, such as a facial expression, a symbol, or a "comic version" of the story.
-  Use sentence starters: Provide prompts like “I felt ____ when ____” or “One way I can take responsibility is ____.”
-  Use stickers or stamps: Allow students to “vote” for how they felt or what they noticed using visual icons.
-  Scribe for them: An adult or peer can write what the student says aloud if fine motor or expressive language is a challenge.
-  Use audio journaling: Let students record their answers using a phone, tablet, or school-provided device.

If a student benefits from technology...

-  Use text-to-speech readers: Copy/paste the story or journal prompt into a text-to-speech tool like Natural Reader, Google Read&Write, or built-in iOS accessibility settings.
-  Voice typing: Use voice-to-text features in Google Docs or apps like Otter.ai to let students “speak” their journal.
-  Digital versions: Offer the story and questions in Google Slides or a fillable PDF to support students with visual processing challenges.

If a student prefers to work alone...

-  Give a choice board: Let them choose whether they want to write, draw, voice record, or use multiple choice for that day's response.
 -  Create a private reflection folder: Some students might feel safer reflecting when they know no one else will see their answers.
 -  Pre-record the story: For students who find reading aloud or group participation overwhelming, offer an audio version of the story in advance.
-

If a student is highly verbal but behaviorally reactive...

-  Use short timed responses: Give them 2 minutes to “vent-write” or respond freely, then a 1-minute pause before revisiting what they wrote.
-  Allow talking circles or pair-shares first: Let them speak before they write to help organize their thoughts and emotions.
-  Offer calming tools: Provide access to fidgets, movement breaks, or regulation tools during reflection time.

Additional Universal Design Strategies

-  Repeat directions in multiple formats (spoken, written, visual)
-  Post a visual tracker in the classroom for group progress (use initials only)
-  Model a response using your own example from the prompt to normalize vulnerability
-  Let students co-facilitate: Have students take turns leading the story discussion or choosing the next story
-  Make it multisensory: Add audio, visuals, or physical movement (e.g., stand on one side of the room if you agree with a character's choice, other side if not)

Sentence Starters for Student Writing (*Restoring Trust Focus*)

These can be used with journal prompts, story debriefs, or behavior reflection conversations. Adapt as needed for students who benefit from scaffolds in their writing and processing.

♦ **Sentence Starters:**

- I broke someone's trust when I...
- I didn't mean to hurt them, but I...
- I can tell someone doesn't trust me when...
- I understand why they feel...
- It's going to take time, but I want to...
- I want to earn back their trust by...
- I didn't keep my promise, and now...
- I feel bad because I know I...
- I didn't realize how important it was to...
- I want to show them I've changed by...
- I know saying sorry isn't enough, so I will...
- When someone loses trust in me, I feel...
- One way I can start to make things right is...
- I need to be more careful with...
- I want to be the kind of person who...
- I've been working on rebuilding trust by...
- I understand it's not easy to forgive, but...

- I know I can't rush it, but I'll keep...
- I used to think trust came easy, but now I know...
- I want people to believe that I...

Teacher Statements That Model *Restoring Trust*

These statements can be used during behavior processing, morning meetings, restorative conversations, or general classroom modeling. They help students hear the *language of repair* and understand what trust-building sounds like in action. These phrases model honesty, reflection, and relational repair.

♦ **Modeling Regret and Ownership**

- “I understand that what I did may have made you feel unsure about trusting me.”
- “I didn’t follow through the way I said I would, and I want to make that right.”
- “It wasn’t just about what I said—it was about how it made you feel.”
- “I take responsibility for breaking the agreement we made.”

♦ **Teaching How to Make Amends**

- “Sometimes, saying sorry isn’t enough. What do you think would help rebuild this?”
- “We can’t undo the past, but we can work together to make it better moving forward.”
- “Making things right starts with listening to how it affected someone else.”
- “Let’s think together: what does trust look like when it’s being rebuilt?”

♦ **Encouraging Reflection and Repair**

- “When we lose trust, it takes more than words to get it back. Let’s talk about actions.”
- “It’s okay if you’re not ready to trust yet. I’ll keep showing you I mean it.”
- “How do you think this changed the way someone sees you? What could help?”
- “Let’s take a moment to think about how this can be repaired, not just erased.”

◆ **Normalizing the Process of Rebuilding Trust**

- “Everyone breaks trust sometimes—what matters is what you do afterward.”
- “Trust doesn’t come back all at once. It grows when we act differently over time.”
- “You may not feel ready to fix this yet, but when you are, I’ll help you.”
- “This is a chance to show that you can take steps toward earning it back.”

Getting Started Prompts



20 Daily Prompts with Reflection Questions (Student-Friendly)

1. **Have you ever felt let down by someone?**
 - What happened?
 - How did it make you feel?
 - Did you tell them?
 - What did you do next?
2. **Have you ever said you would do something and forgot?**
 - What did you forget to do?
 - Did someone count on you?
 - How did you try to fix it?
 - What would you do differently next time?
3. **What does it mean to trust someone?**
 - Who do you trust?
 - What makes you trust someone?
 - What makes you lose trust?
4. **How do you feel when someone says "I promise" but doesn't do it?**
 - Has this happened to you?
 - How did it feel?
 - Did you talk to them about it?
5. **What do you do when someone says sorry?**
 - Do you believe them?
 - What helps you believe someone really means it?
6. **How do you say sorry when you mess up?**
 - What words do you use?
 - What actions do you take?
 - Do you try to make it better?
7. **Can you forgive someone who hurt you?**
 - What would help you forgive them?
 - How long does it take to trust again?

Restoring Trust — Prompts with Reflection Questions

Daily Prompts

Guidance: The teacher or trusted adult can modify these prompts to meet the student's needs. Prompts can be used to reflect on past or current events. Model aloud first to build trust and emotional safety.

1. A time I broke someone's trust was when I...

- How did they react?
- What do I wish I had done instead?

2. Someone lost trust in me because I...

- What would I need to do to earn their trust back?
- What would I want them to say or do if roles were reversed?

3. I said I would do something, but I didn't follow through.

- Why didn't I do it?
- How did it affect the other person?

4. Someone trusted me with something important, and I let them down.

- What could I do to make it right?
- How could I show I've changed?

Stories to Think About

The short stories in *Learning to Move Forward: Restoring Trust* are intentionally designed as gentle, emotionally safe entry points for students who may shut down when faced with direct confrontation, traditional behavior talks, or personal reflection.

Each narrative features familiar characters like Jayden, Talia, and Zuri as they work through trust-related situations—miscommunication, blame, dishonesty, and the hard work of repair. These stories allow students to explore sensitive topics through someone else's experience first, creating enough emotional distance to feel safe while still encouraging meaningful reflection.

Why Use Stories to Teach Trust?

- They lower defenses by focusing on characters, not students
- They give students practice with reflection before turning inward
- They model relatable situations that show what trust repair looks and sounds like
- They build emotional vocabulary for feelings, choices, and making amends

Tips for Using the Debrief Questions

- Start with a read-aloud or let students read silently—offer both options
- Allow discussion before writing—talking it out can unlock deeper thinking
- Use the questions flexibly: choose 2–3 that best match your students' needs
- Accept a variety of responses: writing, drawing, verbal responses, or pointing
- Model a sample response first—use a fictional story, a past mistake, or even a classroom moment

Story 1: “The Group Project”

Unit Theme: Restoring Trust

Featured Themes from Daily Prompts: Responsibility, broken trust, repairing the damage, earning second chances

Talia had always been the go-to partner for group projects—organized, dependable, and straight to the point. But this time, things were different. She had been paired with Zuri, the new student, and Jayden. Zuri was quiet and guarded, barely looking up during their first meeting. Jayden cracked jokes to lighten the mood, but Zuri stayed stiff. “I’ll just do my part and email it,” she muttered. Talia rolled her eyes. “This is a *group* project.”

By the end of the week, nothing from Zuri had arrived. The night before the presentation, Talia and Jayden had to fill in the gaps themselves. The next day, when they presented, Zuri stood off to the side and barely spoke. After class, Talia snapped, “You didn’t even try. Why’d you sign up if you weren’t going to do anything?” Zuri didn’t answer. Later that day, Mr. Ramos pulled all three into his office. “Zuri,” he asked, “what happened?” Zuri looked down. “I’ve had people say they’d have my back before. And they never did. I didn’t think anyone actually wanted me in the group. So I just... stayed out.”

There was silence. Then Talia spoke. “You should’ve said something.” But even as she said it, she felt a sting of guilt. She hadn’t made Zuri feel included. She and Jayden had done most of the work without checking in. Mr. Ramos leaned forward. “Restoring trust doesn’t mean pretending the hurt didn’t happen. It means owning the parts we played—and rebuilding from there.” Talia sighed. “Okay. Next project—we do it right. Together. If you’re in.” Zuri looked up for the first time and nodded. “I’m in.”

-
- This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Story 2: “The Locker Key”

Unit Theme: Restoring Trust

Featured Themes from Prompts: Keeping your word, breaking promises, fixing friendships, showing you're serious through actions

It started as a small favor. Jayden had forgotten his gym clothes again, and Zuri offered to let him borrow her extra set from her locker. “The key is in my bag,” she said. “But just bring it back by the end of lunch. I need it for practice.” Jayden thanked her, took the key, and headed off.

But at lunch, Jayden got caught up in a game of basketball outside and completely forgot. When the bell rang for 6th period, Zuri was at her locker—waiting. No key. No clothes. No Jayden. She missed practice that day. Later, she found Jayden by the vending machines. “You said you’d give it back,” she said. “I needed that.” Jayden winced. “I’m sorry. I just forgot.” Zuri didn’t say anything. She walked away.

The next day, Jayden waited by Zuri’s locker. When she arrived, he handed her a folded-up apology note with a granola bar taped to it—her favorite. “I didn’t mean to let you down. I’m not asking you to trust me again right away. But I’ll work to earn it back,” he said. Zuri took the note and read it slowly. “Thanks,” she said. “Just... don’t make promises you’re not ready to keep.” Jayden nodded. “I won’t.”

- [illegible]

Short Scenario Rewrite Exercises

Guidance for Teachers, Therapists, and Support Staff

Using the Short Scenario Rewrite Exercises

The *Short Scenario Rewrite Exercises* are a flexible, trauma-informed tool to help students move beyond impulsive or defensive behavior and begin **rethinking their choices** through story, reflection, and imagination.

These exercises support emotional growth by allowing students to:

- Revisit familiar situations in a safe, non-punitive way
 - Imagine new outcomes without fear of judgment
 - Practice taking ownership and exploring cause and effect
 - Develop empathy, communication, and problem-solving skills
-

How to Use These Exercises

You can use these activities:

- **After a behavior incident** as part of a reflection or restorative process
- **In group settings** where students discuss common challenges together
- **In counseling sessions** for deeper emotional processing
- **As a writing activity** during SEL, advisory, or life skills classes

They are also ideal for students who:

- Struggle to talk directly about their own actions
- Benefit from working with fictional but relatable situations
- Need structure to process emotions and consequences

Tips for Implementation

- **Let students read the original story first** if they haven't already. This builds connection with the characters and gives them context.
 - **Use sentence starters or model a sample answer** if the student is unsure how to begin.
 - **Emphasize that this is not about “fixing” the story**, but imagining how things could go differently. It's a rehearsal for growth.
 - **Encourage multiple formats:** writing, drawing, speaking aloud, or role-play.
 - **Validate effort, not perfection.** If a student struggles to rewrite the story in a “better” way, focus on what they noticed and what they would try next time.
 - **Revisit the rewritten story later** and ask: “Do you still agree with how you rewrote this?” This supports accountability as an ongoing process.
-

Sample Discussion Prompts to Pair With the Rewrites

- “What would be the hardest part about making that choice in real life?”
 - “What might change if someone responded the way you rewrote it?”
 - “Have you ever done something similar to the new version? How did it go?”
 - “What’s one sentence you could use in real life when you’re in a situation like this?”
-

Optional Modifications

- Use visuals or comic-strip templates for students who prefer drawing
- Allow audio recordings for students with writing barriers
- Let students act out the “rewrite” in a calm, private setting
- For higher-level students, ask them to rewrite the scenario from a *different character’s point of view* (e.g., the teacher, peer, or bystander)

Story 1: *The Group Project*

What happened: Talia and Jayden didn't check in with Zuri and assumed she wasn't participating. Zuri felt excluded and chose not to engage.

Rewrite Prompt:

Rewrite this story so Talia includes Zuri from the beginning. What could she say or do differently to build trust early on?

Sample Response:

At the first meeting, Talia said, "Zuri, I know you're new, but we want you in this. What part of the project do you want to handle?" Zuri looked up, surprised, and said, "I could work on the visuals." Talia smiled. "Cool—just send us a draft by Thursday?" Zuri nodded. They started off as a real team.

Story 2: *The Locker Key*

What happened: Jayden forgot to return Zuri's key, breaking a promise.

Rewrite Prompt:

Rewrite this story so Jayden remembers the promise and keeps his word. How might that have helped maintain trust?

Sample Response:

After basketball, Jayden checked the time and ran to find Zuri. "Here's your key," he said, handing it back. "Thanks again—I almost forgot, but I promised." Zuri smiled. "No problem. Glad you remembered." Trust stayed strong because he followed through.

Story 3: *Did You Say That?*

What happened: Talia accused Zuri based on what Jayden said. Jayden realized he wasn't sure and admitted his mistake later.

Rewrite Prompt:

Rewrite this story so Jayden double-checks before speaking. How does that change the outcome?

Sample Response:

In gym class, when someone made the comment, Jayden paused. "Wait—who said that?" he asked, but no one answered. Later, when Talia asked, Jayden said, "I heard something, but I don't know who said it. I don't want to assume." Talia frowned but said, "Thanks for being honest." The drama never started.