

What is a Community Conference?

A community conference is a formal part of the Restorative Practices approach to behaviour management implemented at Villanova. It is a facilitated meeting of the people affected by an incident which has caused harm to people or relationships within the school. The conference provides a safe and supportive forum in which those whose behaviour caused the harm, those who have been affected, and their respective supporters can seek ways to repair the damage caused by the incident or situation, and minimise further harm.

A conference gives those whose behaviour resulted in the harm an opportunity to understand the impact their actions have had on other people, themselves and the wider community in the school and beyond. It gives them a chance to begin to repair the harm. A conference gives those who have been affected by the incident the opportunity to explain how they have been affected and to become involved in negotiating how to repair the harm.

Who attends a community conference?

- A conference usually involves the following people:
- the person(s) whose behaviour resulted in the harm done, and their supporters
 - the person(s) most affected by the incident, and their supporters
 - the conference facilitator (an experienced and trained person)
 - the school staff member who investigated the incident

It may also include other school and/or community personnel if appropriate.

What happens during a community conference?

Participants follow a set process, led by the facilitator, to listen to the stories of what happened so they have a clear understanding of the impact of the behaviour on everyone present. They then, as a group, decide what needs to be done to repair the damage and minimise further harm. An agreement is reached which is recorded and signed by key people present. These people are given a copy of the agreement. Follow-up occurs at an agreed time.

The conference is an opportunity for all those involved in or affected by conflict or wrongdoing to explain how they have been affected and to have a say in how to repair the harm.

What are the outcomes of a conference?

The main outcome of a conference is the written agreement described above. The terms of the agreement are limited only by the group's imagination and its ability to ensure compliance with the terms of the agreement.

The process is designed to achieve maximum satisfaction for all those who participate.

How long does a community conference take?

This will depend on the circumstances and complexity of the situation and the number of people involved and willing to participate. The time taken to prepare for the conference is totally dependent on these factors, with the conference itself taking, on average, one and a half to two hours.

What are the advantages of this approach?

- Those affected by the incident get the opportunity to have their say in a safe forum, both about how they were affected and what they want to see happen to repair the harm.
- Those whose behaviour resulted in the harm are enabled to see how their behaviour has affected others, including their own families, and to have a say in how they will act to repair the harm done.
- Family members and other supporters, of both those affected and those responsible, also get to talk about what has happened to them as a result of the incident, and they can all take part in deciding what needs to be done.

I have been 'invited.' Do I have to attend?

Participation in a Community Conference at Villanova is *entirely voluntary for all participants*. Participants are also free to leave the conference at any time.

For those students whose behaviour has resulted in the harm done, the conference provides a mechanism for acting responsibly to repair the harm and that would *finalise the matter as far as the College was concerned*, as long as the terms of the agreement reached were then honoured. Declining to take part in the conference, or subsequently failing to meet the terms of the agreement reached, would result in the matter having to be dealt with through the College's formal disciplinary processes.

For more information or advice, please contact the facilitator for this conference:

Name:
Phone:
Email: