



Overview of Restorative Justice: Basic Principles

Zehr (2002). *Little Book of Restorative Justice*. Good Books, Inc.

Definitions:

- Restorative Justice is a process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible. (Source: Zehr, 2002, p. 37)
- Restorative justice is not simply a way of reforming the criminal justice system, it is a way of transforming the entire legal system, our family lives, our conduct in the workplace, our practice of politics. It is a vision of holistic change in the way we do justice in the world. (Source: Braithwaite, 2002 as quoted by Umbreit and Armour, 2010, p. 9)

Goals:

- Restorative justice practices aim to:
 - Put decisions into the hands of those most affected by crime;
 - Make justice more healing, and ideally more transformative; and,
 - Reduce the likelihood of future offenses.

Requirements:

- Achieving these goals requires that:
 - Victims are involved in the process and come out of it satisfied with a sense of healing;
 - Offenders understand how their actions have affected other people and take responsibility for those actions;
 - Outcomes help to repair the harms done and address the reasons for the offense (specific plans are tailored to the specific needs of both victims and offenders);
 - Victims and offenders both gain a sense of "closure" and both are reintegrated into the community.

Guiding Questions:

- Who has been hurt?
- What are their needs?
- Whose obligations are these?
- Who has a stake in this situation?
- What is the appropriate process to involve stakeholders in an effort to put things right?

- What is needed to repair the harms and address underlying needs of victim?
- What is needed to address the needs of offenders to prevent future offending?
- What is the role of the larger community in repairing harms and addressing needs which promote safer communities?

Principles:

- Victim-centered (not offender-centered) processes;
- Focus on the harms of crime rather than the rules or laws that have been broken;
- Show equal concern and commitment to victims and offenders, involving both in the process of justice;
- Work toward the restoration of victims, empowering them, and responding to their needs *as they see them*;
- Support offenders, while encouraging them to understand, accept and carry out their obligations to right the wrongs they have caused;
- Recognize that while obligations for repair may be difficult for offenders, those obligations should not be used as harms (i.e., punishments), and their obligations must be achievable;
- Provide opportunities for dialogue, direct or indirect, between victim and offender as appropriate.
- Find meaningful ways to involve the community and respond to the community bases of crime;
- Encourage collaboration and reintegration of both victims and offenders, rather than coercion and isolation;
- Show respect for all parties - victims, offenders, justice officials and other stakeholders;
- Give attention to the unintended consequences of the restorative practices used.