

*“Restorative justice provides a framework to think about harms in new ways...ways that allow community members, including those who have harmed and those who have been affected by harm, to have a say in what solutions should look like. These solutions need to take into account all the factors that led to the harm as well as consider consequences and needs of the participants.*

*We recognize that our current system of justice, at most levels, is not working.*

*Restorative justice provides us with concrete responses to the question, “what can we do about it?”*

Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz, Director  
Mennonite Central Committee,  
Office on Crime and Justice

*“During the past quarter century, restorative justice has demonstrated that it can address victims’ needs while holding offenders accountable for the harm they have caused. Just as importantly, it has shown great promise as a way to empower and re-energize local communities.”*

Howard Zehr  
Professor of Sociology and Restorative  
Justice

*“Restorative justice begins with a recognition that it is persons not governments, who are hurt by criminal activity, and that justice requires addressing that personal violation. Yet crime is more than an interpersonal conflict. Crime also brings harm to the community, and is a responsibility of the community.”*

Susan Sharpe  
Mediation and Restorative Justice Center  
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

# Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice is a community-based approach to dealing with crime, the effects of crime, and the prevention of crime.

Most people who move through the current system of criminal justice do not find it a healing or satisfying experience. Victims often feel re-victimized and their need for justice unmet. People who offend and their families leave more broken and damaged.

A restorative justice process operates from a belief that the path to justice lies in problem solving and healing rather than punitive isolation.

Principles of restorative justice say that when a person commits a crime:

- This is, first and foremost, an act against people and relationships; second, an act against the community and third, an act against the law.
- By committing the crime, the person creates an obligation to the victim, the community, and the state.
- When the person offending meets that obligation, they are taking responsibility for their actions, and begin to understand and value their relationship with other people, the community, and the law.

The beliefs of restorative justice are that justice should to the greatest degree possible, do five things:

- Invite full participation of all parties affected by a crime and allowing each voice to be heard.
- Focus on harms done, not on laws broken.
- Seek full and direct accountability from those who caused the harm, help victims recover in concrete and meaningful ways what was lost and repair what was damaged.
- After reparation and restitution reintegrate the parties back into the community.
- Strengthen the community to own its responsibility for causes that lead to crime, thereby preventing future harm.

The goals of restorative justice practices require that:

- The person victimized is involved in the process and comes out of it satisfied.
- The person who offended understands how their action has affected other people and takes responsibility for those effects.
- A plan of action helps to repair the harms done and address the reasons for the offense; specific plans are tailored to the person victimized and the person who offended.
- Both the victim and the person who offended gain a sense of closure, and both are reintegrated into the community.

Three recognized practices of restorative justice:

- 1** Victim-Offender Mediation:  
The victim and person offending meet face-to-face. A trained mediator helps the parties decide together what will best repair the harms done, and begins the process of putting the incident to rest in order to move on.
- 2** Family Group Conferencing:  
A Family Group Conference (FGC), also called a Restorative Conference (RC), is a meeting for the youth who offended, their family, and the victim with their support. They meet to decide how the young person can be held accountable for his or her behavior and take responsibility to repair the harm. The focus is on putting things right, not punishment. The youth and their family, with the victim and community input, are empowered to come up with a plan to address the harm and set things right.
- 3** Community Peacemaking Circles:  
People sit in a circle; participants share equal responsibility for the process and its outcome. Outcomes are decided by consensus among all parties. Circles assume the responsibility for dealing with crime lies with the larger community, not just the persons and families directly affected by it. Circles also feel that the process of dealing with crime does more than solve isolated criminal problems; it is a vehicle for building community.

Restorative justice practices throughout the world:

- There are over 300 restorative justice programs in the U.S.
- There are over 900 programs established in Europe.
- There are restorative justice programs in New Zealand, Australia, Jordan, Israel, Canada, Africa, Japan, Korea, Belgium, England, Ireland, India, East Timor and Scotland.

Benefits and results of restorative justice practices:

- Reduced offending and re-offending in youth justice
- Reduced growth of gangs
- High victim satisfaction
- Reduced costs thereby making more money available for other community needs
- Addresses factors leading to crime and criminal behavior through prevention
- Build community

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PO Box 879 Sebastopol, CA 95473

(707) 823-8080

[www.restorativeresources.org](http://www.restorativeresources.org)