Outline for Facilitating a Restorative Conference (6 to 12 people)

The following outline is a sample outline that can be used when facilitating a joint-meeting conference model for resolving a harm-based situation. A similar outline can be used for resolving a dispute-based situation (where two parties are in conflict), but it will necessitate some additional steps and skill-sets beyond a basic restorative healing-and-accountability process.

A. Pre-Conference Steps:
   1. Letters and phone calls to all primary parties
   2. Preparation meetings with victim and offender parties, or parties in dispute
   3. Scheduling the conference and checking in with support people
   4. Setting up the physical location for the conference to meet everyone’s needs

   Facilitators meet before parties arrive

B. Conference Meeting Outline:
   1. Welcome and Introduction Time
   2. Review of Conference Guidelines and Groundrules
   3. Storytelling Time
   4. Identification of Impacts and/or Interests
   5. Resolution Discussion Time
   6. Writing the Agreement (if applicable)
   7. Closing Time

   Facilitators debrief the meeting

C. Post-Conference Steps:
   1. Monitoring the Agreement
   2. Checking in with Parties
   3. Determining Case Closure
   4. Evaluating the Process
Outline for a Restorative Mediation Meeting (2 to 6 people)

The above outline for conferencing can all apply to a mediation model. In general, conferencing follows similar structures but tends to include more people in the process, reflecting the communal nature of conflict and conflict resolution. Mediations are suited for smaller numbers.

At the most basic level, restorative mediation meetings that assist parties with clear identities as victims or offenders (those harmed and those responsible for harming) will follow an outline that progresses this way:

1. Introduction Time
2. What Happened?
3. Who Was Affected?
4. What Repairs Can Be Made?
5. Closing Time

The middle three coincide with the building blocks of restorative justice dialogue (Ownership, Empathy, and Reparation), and also reflect the progression from Past, Present, to Future. (The middle three correspond with 3, 4, 5 above for the Conference Outline.)

Outline for Structuring a Restorative Circle (6 to 24 people)

There are many different kinds of circles within a restorative dialogue framework, but all of them tend to progress in similar ways. For example, they all tend to use physical talking pieces to designate who is talking, and they all pass the talking piece in a clockwise manner. Two general categories of circles fall into:

- Community Building Circles (addressing topics)
- Community Repairing Circles (addressing incidents)

Some key differences from conferencing is that in circle meetings the Keeper is more of a participant with everyone else, and has less of a role to guide things. It is the shared responsibility of the whole circle to keep things in line. The listening dynamics are also heightened and suggest that everyone present is on the same level.
A common outline for a circle process would be as follows:

For **Community Building Circles**:

- Getting acquainted
- Building relationships
- Addressing Issues
- Taking action

For **Community Repairing Circles**:

- What do we have in common?
- How were you involved?
- How were you affected?
- What can be done to mend things?

For circle processes that are more complex or dealing with more emotional issues, it is helpful for the group, toward the beginning, to consensually agree on a set of values or ground rules that the whole circle will keep. By naming these Value-Guides at the beginning of the meeting, anyone can refer back to them as a way to keep the process safe and constructive within the agreed upon elements. This exercise also gives a group with tense emotion a sense of being able to accomplish successful agreement before addressing the deeper issues at hand.

**The Circle Keeper**

Circle Keepers are responsible for setting a tone of respect that shows an equal support to all who are present. They also model the behaviors that they want others to imitate. One example of this is that they set a slow, thoughtful pace by taking time to be silent, while holding the talking piece before passing it on. This itself can set a reverent mood. Another use of waiting and silence comes when a Keeper prepares everyone to answer a question. The talking piece is not passed on until everyone has had the same “thinking-space” for what they want to say. This allows for better listening as the talking piece rotates around.

At the beginning of a circle, a Keeper can also say these introductory remarks:

- What is said here stays here – an invitation for confidentiality and ongoing respect
- Speak from the heart – an invitation for each person to be real and genuine
• Listen from the heart – an invitation for each person to seek new understanding from others and about others
• What values are important to you? – an invitation to name positive values that keep the circle process respectful

Sometimes a Keeper will need to rein things in by speaking out of turn, but this should be rare. Most often a Keeper will wait for the talking piece to come full circle and then redirect things as needed. When necessary, a circle process can have a Recorder if it is important to write down ideas, agreements or solutions that are best preserved in writing.

Examples of Situations Well-Suited for Circle Processes
Discussion Circle -- for a group to discuss prevention measures for healthy community
Peacemaking Circle -- for a group with two sides to build new bridgework between them
Grieving Circle -- for a group to support itself through a time of loss or tragedy
Sentencing Circle -- for a group to help an offending party determine a restorative outcome
Support Circle -- for a group to show care and concern to a victimized party
Brainstorming Circle -- for a group to surface new ideas for problem solving
Reintegration Circle -- for a group to welcome back an offending party with a new plan

Bringing Victims and Offenders Together for Conversation.

In general, circles have strengths for handling problems that involve whole groups or communities, including harm-based situations. But when it is desired for victims and offenders to have empowered, heart-to-heart conversation with each other, the Conference and Mediation models of restorative dialogue may be better suited for that. As a rule, the higher the impact level, the greater the preparation should be by facilitators prior to joint-meeting conversation. When circles are used for resolving harm-based situations and both the offender and victim parties are included in the circle process, it is very important that the Circle Keeper has the knowledge and skills of the other restorative dialogue models so that they can hybrid aspects of these other models in when necessary. This may be as simple as recognizing more stages for resolution, where the whole group reconvenes two weeks later while a smaller group with the circle meets for facilitated dialogue.