



Center for Restorative Justice & Peacemaking

An International Resource Center in Support of Restorative Justice Dialogue, Research, and Training

What is Restorative Justice?

Mark Umbreit

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Restorative justice is a victim-centered response to crime that provides opportunities for those most directly affected by crime - the victim, the offender, their families, and representatives of the community - to be directly involved in responding to the harm caused by the crime. Restorative justice is based upon values which emphasize the importance of providing opportunities for more active involvement in the process of: offering support and assistance to crime victims; holding offenders directly accountable to the people and communities they have violated; restoring the emotional and material losses of victims (to the degree possible); providing a range of opportunities for dialogue and problem solving among interested crime victims, offenders, families, and other support persons; offering offenders opportunities for competency development and reintegration into productive community life; and strengthening public safety through community building.

Restorative justice policies and programs are known to be developing in more than 45 states, including a growing number of state and county justice systems that are undergoing major systemic change. Restorative justice is also developing in many other parts of the world, including numerous European countries, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. The principles of restorative justice draw upon the wisdom of many indigenous cultures from throughout the world, most notably Native American culture within the United States and Aboriginal/First Nation culture in Canada.

Specific examples of restorative justice include: crime repair crews, victim intervention programs, family group conferencing, victim offender mediation and dialogue, peacemaking circles, victim panels that speak to offenders, sentencing circles, community reparative boards before which offenders appear, offender competency development programs, victim empathy classes for offenders, victim directed and citizen involved community service by the offender, community-based support groups for crime victims, and, community-based support groups for offenders. As the oldest and most widely developed expression of restorative justice, with more than 25 years of experience and numerous studies in North America and Europe, victim offender mediation and dialogue programs currently work with thousands of cases annually through more than 300 programs throughout the United States and more than 900 in Europe.

Research has found restorative justice programs to have high levels of victim and offender satisfaction with the process and outcome, greater likelihood of successful restitution completion by the offender, reduced fear among victims, and reduced frequency and severity of further criminal behavior

Restorative Justice Signposts

We are working toward restorative justice when we

- I. ...focus on the harms of wrongdoing more than the rules that have been broken,
- II. ...show equal concern and commitment to victims and offenders, involving both in the process of justice,
- III. ...work toward the restoration of victims, empowering them and responding to their needs as they see them,
- IV. ...support offenders while encouraging them to understand, accept and carry out their obligations,
- V. ...recognize that while obligations may be difficult for offenders, they should not be intended as harms and they must be achievable,
- VI. ...provide opportunities for dialogue, direct Or indirect, between victims and offenders as appropriate,
- VII. ...involve and empower the affected community through the justice process, and increase their capacity to recognize and respond to community bases of crime.
- VIII. ...encourage collaboration and reintegration rather than coercion and isolation
- IX. ...give attention to the unintended consequences of our actions and programs,
- X. ...show respect to all parties including victims, offenders, justice colleagues.

Crime wounds...Justice heals

Harry Mika and Howard Zehr 5/8/97