



What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative justice (RJ) is an approach to justice that encourages communication between victims, offenders and the community to address the harm caused by a crime. RJ is a safe and voluntary process that leads to healing in victims, meaningful accountability of offenders, and contributes to healthier, safer communities.

Although RJ can take on many forms, RJ processes have these common **values**:

Recognition of harm: RJ views crime as damage to individuals, their property, their relationships and their communities.

Inclusion: RJ engages all people affected by the crime. This often includes victims, the offender, support people (family, friends, others) and the community. RJ gives voice to those often excluded from the criminal justice process. Inclusion ensures accessibility, ownership of the process, and support to all involved.

Accountability: RJ allows offenders to take responsibility for the harms their actions created, directly to those harmed. This involves hearing all points of view and understanding the "truth" of what happened. Accountability means accepting responsibility for the crime and for addressing the harms and needs arising from it. Accountability applies to both the offender and the community

Safety: Safety is the need to restore a sense of security to those impacted by the crime. Safety also means creating processes for RJ that are safe (physically, emotionally, psychologically) for all participants and making sure their rights are respected.

Transformation: Outcomes of RJ interventions can include healing, personal growth, reparation of harms and restoration or creation of positive relationships. These goals are not always possible in all situations.

Voluntary: RJ emphasizes choice for participants. These include choosing to participate in the process, the design and limitations of the process, and timeframes. It is essential that the process reflect the needs, wants and desires of all participants.

Humanistic: Fairness and equality are essential to the RJ process. This means valuing respect, compassion, dignity, honesty, openness, growth, and culture.

Interaction: RJ usually requires communication, either direct or indirect, between all people impacted by the crime. Communication is facilitated and supported and can take on many forms.

Holistic: RJ values each participant and considers their physical, psychological, mental, emotional, spiritual and social context. For many participants, RJ also connects deeply to their belief systems.

What are the benefits of RJ processes?

Victims can tell their story and be certain the offender understands the impact of the offence; hold the offender accountable; find answers to questions left unanswered; and if possible, identify what can be done to repair the harm.

Offenders can tell their story; accept responsibility for and acknowledge the harm caused by the offence; and participate in determining how to repair the harm.

Communities can talk about and address their fears; contribute to an understanding of the wider impacts of crime; and be empowered to gain a better understanding of the root causes of crime.

How is RJ applied?

Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM)

VOM involves facilitated communication between victim(s) and offender(s) in a safe, structured and supportive environment. A trained and impartial mediator meets with participants to identify their needs and prepare them for a process designed to meet those needs. Communication can be through letters, video exchanges, online dialogue, shuttle mediation (mediator relays messages), surrogate VOM (victims and offenders linked by a type of offence) and/or face-to-face meetings.

Participants have an opportunity to be heard, ask and respond to questions previously left unanswered, address outstanding needs, and attempt to address and, where possible, repair the harm caused. In some cases, processes result in agreements between participants that may include safety parameters, restitution and/or reparation.

Restorative Conferencing

This model involves participants beyond simply the victim and offender. Participants may include support persons, community members affected by the offence and relevant community/criminal justice representatives. A trained and impartial facilitator guides participants through discussions and ensures that everyone has a voice in the process.

The goal is to address the harms and the impacts to all participants and come to a consensus on reparation. Restorative conferencing can also be used to address community safety, school safety, family safety as well as offender and victim reintegration.

Restorative Circles

Restorative circles are a form of community dialogue based on traditional Aboriginal peacemaking practices. Circles focus on the harm done to the community and the community's responsibility for supporting and holding its members accountable. Restorative circle meetings are attended by offenders, victims, friends, family, interested community members, and justice system representatives.

This model includes healing circles focused on healing the community and bringing the conflict to a close; community circles focused on addressing community issues; sentencing circles focused on sentence recommendations; and releasing circles focused on the conditional release of an offender. The facilitator is the "Keeper" of the circle. The Keeper establishes the rules of the circle, maintains order, summarizes what is shared for the benefit of the circle, and seeks consensus. Circles are structured so that each person is offered a chance to speak and be heard, often through the use of a "talking piece". The ultimate goal is to restore peace within the community.
