

Restorative justice
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of **thinking** about and
responding to **crime**.
It **emphasizes** one
fundamental **fact**:
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communities and relationships.
If crime is about **harm**,
then the **justice** process
should emphasize **repairing**
the harm.



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Restorative Justice

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What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative justice is an alternative way of thinking about and responding to crime. It emphasizes one basic fact: crime damages people, communities and relationships. If crime is about harm, then the justice process should emphasize repairing the harm.

A justice process utilizing restorative justice practices encourages offenders to assume responsibility for their actions and to take action to repair the harm caused by the crime to the victim and victimized community. Crime victims and the community assist in setting the terms of accountability, monitoring and supporting completion of the offender's obligation. In the end, the offender is held accountable to the victim, community and state.

Role of Victims

Frequently, victims feel left out of the criminal justice process. With restorative justice practices, victims have a chance to express their feelings to the offender and to have the power restored to them which had been taken away by the criminal act. The opportunity for involvement for a victim can help in their personal recovery from crime.

Disclaimer

However, restorative justice programs and practices may not be helpful for everyone and every situation:

- ▶ Some restorative justice practices include contact between victim and offender
- ▶ The offender may never accept responsibility for his or her actions
- ▶ The offender may or may not say what the victim hopes to hear
- ▶ The offender may not follow through with his or her obligations
- ▶ The victim must have complete say over what they want to do and should start all restorative justice activities.

Also, restorative justice should not replace the traditional criminal justice system. Restorative justice practices are alternatives to parts of the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system can still provide traditional safeguards to hold the offender accountable with actions such as imprisonment.

Restorative Justice Practices Includes:

- ▶ Support and assistance to victims and their families from victim advocates and community volunteers
- ▶ Victim involvement in developing the offender's penalty
- ▶ Prioritizing restitution so that the victim is paid before the offender's other financial obligations are paid
- ▶ Victim-offender mediation (for those victims who voluntarily choose to participate)
- ▶ Restorative community work opportunities for offenders to help pay restitution to victims
- ▶ Treatment programs that emphasize an individual's responsibility to the community and include victim awareness education components
- ▶ Alternative methods of dispute resolution, such as family group conferencing, sentencing circles and victim community panels
- ▶ Community input to guide courts and corrections, including community/neighborhood impact statements
- ▶ Community support for offenders who are attempting to change life patterns.