

Restorative Justice Toolkit

Resources, tools, and definitions for
understanding restorative justice

Summer 2026



**American
Friends
Service
Committee**

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	1
Introduction	2
What Is Restorative Justice?	7
8 Principles of Restorative Justice.....	9
What Restorative Justice Is Not	11
Restorative Justice Across Cultures.....	13
Where Restorative Justice Happens	20
Modalities of Restorative Justice	21
California Restorative Justice Organizations and Community-Based Programs.....	24
What People Have to Say About Restorative Justice	25
Undoing Our Miseducation	29
Conclusion	35
End Notes	37

Acknowledgments

WRITTEN BY

Fatimeh Khan, Co-Director,
AFSC California Healing Justice Program

Arieana Castellanos

DESIGNED BY

Arco Banda

THANK YOU

Ruben Espinoza

Miguel Quezada

Lupe A

Marcel Woodruff

ABOUT AFSC

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) promotes a world free of violence, inequality, and oppression.

Guided by the Quaker belief in the divine light within each person, we nurture the seeds of change and the respect for human life to fundamentally transform our societies and institutions. We work with people and partners worldwide, of all faiths and backgrounds, to meet urgent community needs, challenge injustice, and build peace.

ABOUT AFSC'S CALIFORNIA HEALING JUSTICE PROGRAM

The California Healing Justice Program works to reduce reliance on incarceration and policing and replace them with restorative, healing practices. We concentrate on three areas: ending mass incarceration, demilitarizing police, and the promotion of healing alternatives.

Learn More

[AFSC.ORG/CAHJ](https://afsc.org/cahj)



Introduction

Harm does not happen in isolation.

It affects people, relationships, families, communities, and the conditions that shape how we live together. Every community needs honest ways to respond to harm without denying it, minimizing it, or allowing it to continue. The question is not only what happened, but how we choose to respond: with punishment and disconnection, or with truth, accountability, repair, and care.

Restorative justice asks us to respond to harm with accountability, repair, and care, not punishment alone. It invites us to slow down, name what happened, understand who was affected, and work together to determine what is needed to make things as right as possible. Rather than focusing only on the person who caused harm or the rule that was broken, restorative justice recognizes that harm affects people, relationships, and communities.

Restorative justice is not a single program, script, or quick fix. It is a values-based approach rooted in dignity, accountability, relationship, repair, and community care. It does not mean excusing harm, avoiding consequences, or forcing forgiveness. At its best, restorative justice creates conditions for truth-telling, meaningful accountability, healing, and changed behavior.

This toolkit is designed to support your understanding and practice of restorative justice. It introduces key principles, explains what restorative justice is and is not, explores examples from different contexts, and offers tools for applying restorative values in everyday life.

As we engage with restorative justice, it is important to remember that these values did not begin with modern institutions. Many restorative principles draw from long-standing Indigenous, spiritual, and community-based practices of accountability, repair, and restoring balance after harm. Engaging this work with integrity means honoring those roots, learning from histories of colonization and cultural extraction, and refusing to treat restorative practices as tools disconnected from the people and communities that have carried them.

Whether you are a student, educator, organizer, facilitator, or community member, this toolkit is meant to offer language, reflection, and practical tools for responding to harm in ways that are more honest, humane, and accountable.



Photo: Vitaly Gariev on “Unsplash”

“Healers and warriors are not opposites; they are complementarians.”

—FANIA DAVIS,
***THE LITTLE BOOK OF RACE
AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE***

INDIGENOUS AND COMMUNITY BASED ROOTS OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Although the modern restorative justice movement emerged in the 1970s, many of its core principles are much older. Indigenous peoples and community-based traditions across the globe have long practiced ways of responding to harm that focus on repairing relationships, restoring balance, and maintaining community life. Contemporary restorative justice has been influenced by these traditions, especially in Western contexts, but these practices should not be treated as tools to borrow without responsibility. They belong to living communities with their own histories, laws, languages, and worldviews (Zehr, 2015).

These traditions existed long before Western legal systems and continue to be practiced today. Across many Indigenous worldviews, people are understood to exist within webs of relationships that include family, community, ancestors, land, and the spiritual world. In this relational framework, harm is not simply a broken rule; it is a disruption of relationships, responsibilities, and balance. Justice, therefore, requires addressing harm directly and collectively rather than relying only on punishment or isolation (Braithwaite, 2002; Llewellyn & Howse, 1999).

Principles That Connect Indigenous Traditions and Restorative Justice

- relationship repair, rather than punishment alone
- collective involvement and responsibility
- dialogue, storytelling, and listening
- truth-telling and acknowledgment
- reintegration, rather than exclusion

These principles are reflected across multiple Indigenous and community-based traditions, including Māori concepts such as whanaungatanga and whakatika, Southern African understandings of Ubuntu, and Diné understandings of Hózhó. These traditions are not interchangeable, but each helps illuminate how justice can be understood through relationships, accountability, repair, and community responsibility.

Indigenous and Community-Based Frameworks

Whanaungatanga and Whakatika – Māori

In Māori worldviews, whanaungatanga refers to kinship, connection, and the obligations created through relationships. It reflects the understanding that identity is formed through belonging to networks of people and places (Mead, 2003).

Whakatika derives from the concept of tika, meaning what is right, just, or correct. In practice, whakatika refers to the process of making things right following harm: restoring balance, addressing wrongdoing, and repairing relationships.

Together, these concepts reflect a relational approach to justice in which:

- harm is understood as a disruption of relationships
- accountability involves acknowledgment and repair
- restoration and reintegration are the goal, rather than exclusion

Ubuntu – Southern African Philosophy

Ubuntu is a Southern African philosophy emphasizing the interconnectedness of human beings. It is often expressed as, “A person is a person through other persons.”

Ubuntu asserts that:

- humanity is shared and interdependent
- individual identity is formed through relationships
- ethical responsibility arises from mutual care and dignity

As Desmond Tutu explains, “My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together” (Tutu, 1999).

Within this framework, harm is not only an individual act but a rupture in the social fabric. Justice, therefore, requires restoring dignity, repairing relationships, and reaffirming shared humanity.

Hózhó (Diné/Navajo)

Hózhó is a central concept in Diné/Navajo philosophy, encompassing harmony, balance, beauty, and right relationship. It represents a state of being in alignment with self, others, the natural world, and the spiritual order (Witherspoon, 1977).

When harm occurs, it is understood as a disruption of this balance. Restorative responses grounded in Hózhó focus on:

- healing imbalance
- restoring relationships
- reintegrating individuals into the community

Navajo peacemaking practices reflect this philosophy by emphasizing dialogue, storytelling, consensus, and the restoration of harmony rather than punishment alone (Yazzie & Zion, 1996).

Shared Relevance to Restorative Justice

Although these traditions arise from distinct cultural contexts, they share foundational principles:

- identity is relational rather than purely individual
- harm disrupts relationships, not just rules
- justice requires restoration, accountability, and repair
- community plays a central role in healing and resolution

These shared understandings form a critical foundation for contemporary restorative justice theory and practice. They also remind us that restorative justice should be practiced with humility, respect, and responsibility toward the communities that have carried these traditions long before they were named within modern restorative justice work.

What Is Restorative Justice?

There is no single universal definition of restorative justice.

In this toolkit, restorative justice is understood as a community-centered approach to harm that focuses on accountability, healing, repair, and relationships. Rather than asking only what rule was broken or what punishment is deserved, restorative justice asks what happened, who was affected, what is needed, and what must be done to make things as right as possible.

Restorative justice is deeply connected to relationships: how we build them, how we maintain them, and how we repair them after harm. It is grounded in the understanding that people are interconnected and that our actions affect one another. Many of the values now associated with restorative justice—including accountability, relationship, repair, and community responsibility—are rooted in Indigenous and community-based ways of life. These values remind us that harm does not happen in a vacuum. It creates ripple effects that can touch individuals, families, communities, and the land.

In practice, restorative justice can take many forms. Restorative programs may create space for the person harmed to speak about the impact of the harm and name what they need. They may also create space for the person who caused harm to explain their choices, understand the impact of their actions, and take responsibility. Community members may be invited to support the process by helping create conditions for accountability, healing, safety, and repair.

A restorative approach centers different questions than punishment-based systems. Instead of focusing only on blame or consequences, restorative justice asks:

- Who was harmed?
- What do they need?
- Who has a responsibility to address the harm?
- What can be done to repair harm and rebuild trust where possible?
- What needs to change so the harm does not continue?

At its core, restorative justice is not only a program or process. It is a way of thinking, relating, and responding to harm that centers truth, accountability, repair, and community care.

“A process to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific offense, and to collectively identify and address harms, needs, and obligations in order to heal and put things as right as possible.”

—HOWARD ZEHR,
*THE LITTLE BOOK OF
RESTORATIVE JUSTICE*

8 PRINCIPLES OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is guided by a set of principles that shape how we respond to harm, conflict, and broken relationships. These key principles help us understand what makes a process truly restorative. They are not steps to follow in order, but values that should be present throughout the work.

1. Prioritize relationships.

- At the heart of restorative justice is the understanding that relationships matter. Harm is not only a rule violation; it is a disruption in relationships between people and within communities. Restorative justice focuses on tending to those relationships and repairing what was damaged whenever possible.

2. Support voluntary engagement.

- Restorative processes should be entered into freely. People cannot be forced into genuine accountability, healing, or dialogue. Participation works best when it is grounded in choice, respect, and a shared willingness to engage.

3. Repair harm rather than place blame.

- Restorative justice shifts the focus from blame and punishment to responsibility and repair. Instead of asking, “Who is at fault and what do they deserve?” restorative justice asks, “What harm was caused, and what needs to happen to make things as right as possible?”

4. Understand restorative justice as transformative.

- Restorative justice is not just about resolving one incident. It has the potential to transform people, relationships, communities, and systems. This work often comes with a steep learning curve. It challenges habits, assumptions, and ways of responding to conflict that many of us have been taught our whole lives.

5. Recognize that there is no return to the way things were.

- After harm or conflict, there is no true return to a “before” state. Restorative justice recognizes that something has changed. The goal is not to pretend the harm never happened, but to move forward in a way that is more honest, connected, and just than before.

6. Move beyond the status quo.

- Restorative justice asks us to move away from systems that rely on punishment, exclusion, and control. It offers a different path rooted in accountability, empathy, connection, and shared responsibility for one another.

7. Return to our authentic selves and to each other.

- At its core, restorative justice is about reconnection. It invites people to return to the parts of themselves that are capable of empathy, responsibility, honesty, and care. It also invites people to rebuild connection with others when repair is possible.

8. Remember our connection to all things.

- Restorative justice reflects a worldview in which people are not isolated individuals, but part of a larger web of relationships. When we respond to harm restoratively, we are not just addressing a single incident. We are tending to connections that hold communities, relationships, and in some cases, life itself, together.

“Reconciliation does not mean forgetting or trying to bury the pain of conflict; it means working together to correct the legacy of past injustice.”

—NELSON MANDELA

WHAT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IS NOT

As restorative justice becomes more widely used, it is also more widely misunderstood. The term is often applied to programs, policies, or practices that reflect only one small part of what restorative justice actually is. To understand the work more clearly, it helps to name what restorative justice is not.

IT IS NOT...



A SINGLE PROGRAM OR FIXED MODEL.

Restorative justice is not a curriculum, a script, or a step-by-step formula. There is no one correct model or universal process. Restorative practices look different across communities because they are shaped by culture, values, relationships, and local needs.



MEDIATION OR CONFLICT RESOLUTION BETWEEN EQUAL SIDES.

Restorative justice is not simply about helping two people “meet in the middle.” It begins by naming harm directly and recognizing how it affects people, relationships, and community. The focus is on acknowledging the harm, understanding what it changed, and responding to it in meaningful ways.



ABOUT FORCING FORGIVENESS OR RECONCILIATION.

Restorative justice does not require anyone to forgive, reconcile, or rebuild relationships. Those outcomes may happen, but they are not the goal and they are never required. The purpose of the process is to address harm and support accountability, not to produce a specific emotional result.

IT IS NOT...	 A BEHAVIOR-MANAGEMENT STRATEGY. Restorative justice is sometimes used in diversion programs, school discipline systems, or organizational behavior systems. It is often measured by whether it reduces repeat harm or lowers suspensions, referrals, or recidivism. While those outcomes can matter, they are not the central purpose of the work. Restorative justice is about responding to harm in ways that center people, relationships, accountability, and repair – not just improving statistics or controlling behavior.
	 NEW. Although the term “restorative justice” is relatively recent, the values and practices behind it are not. Many restorative principles come from Indigenous cultures and traditional community practices that have existed for generations. What we call restorative justice today is often a return to ways of responding to harm that were never meant to be separated from community, culture, and relationship.
	 A CURE-ALL. Restorative justice is not a solution for every situation. It requires time, trust, preparation, and care. Like any approach, it has limits. It works best when practiced with integrity and supported by a community committed to its values.
	 THE ABSENCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY. Restorative justice is sometimes misunderstood as being soft or without consequences. In reality, it often asks more of people who have caused harm. It calls for honesty, responsibility, and active participation in repairing what was damaged. Accountability in restorative justice is not about punishment; it is about facing harm, taking responsibility, and making things as right as possible.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE ACROSS CULTURES

Restorative justice is not practiced in one single way. Across cultures, communities have developed different approaches to harm, accountability, repair, and restoring balance. These examples are not all restorative justice processes in the same sense; rather, they show how restorative values can appear across spiritual, cultural, community-based, and transitional justice contexts.

The sections below explore examples from Islam, Aotearoa New Zealand, South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and Rwanda's Gacaca courts. Together, they show that restorative justice is not a rigid model, but a set of values and practices shaped by context, history, community, and the people most affected by harm.

Restorative Justice Values in Islam

Restorative justice values such as repairing harm, restoring relationships, accountability, mercy, and transformation are deeply connected to Islamic ethical teachings. In Islam, wrongdoing is not only a legal issue; it is also a moral and social rupture that affects individuals, families, communities, and the broader social fabric of society. The Qur'an calls for justice, truthfulness, restraint, and mercy, while also affirming the possibility of repair and change. Accountability is not optional, but neither is mercy.

The Qur'an repeatedly commands believers to uphold justice, even when doing so is difficult or personally uncomfortable:

“...those who restrain anger and pardon people – and Allah loves those who do good.” (Qur'an 3:134)

“Indeed, Allah commands justice, excellence, and giving to relatives, and forbids immorality, wrongdoing, and oppression...” (Qur'an 16:90)

“O you who believe! Stand firmly for justice, as witnesses for Allah, even if it be against yourselves, your parents, or your relatives...” (Qur'an 4:135)

These verses reflect values that align with restorative justice: truth-telling, self-accountability, restraint, dignity, and the possibility of repair after harm. Justice is not reduced to punishment alone. It requires honesty about what happened, responsibility for harm caused, and a commitment to what is right, even when that truth is against oneself or one's own people.

The Qur’anic call to restrain anger disrupts cycles of retaliation, while the encouragement to pardon creates space for mercy when mercy supports repair. Forgiveness is honored in Islam, but it is not something that should be forced onto the person harmed. Mercy has meaning when it is connected to justice, truth, and sincere accountability.

Rather than focusing only on blame, an Islamic ethical framework asks what response will uphold justice, protect dignity, prevent further harm, and open the door to repair. The aim is not to ignore wrongdoing or excuse harm, but to respond in a way that restores balance, strengthens accountability, and keeps human beings connected to the possibility of transformation.

New Zealand

Restorative justice in Aotearoa New Zealand is closely connected to Māori practices that long predate European colonization. These practices are shaped by tikanga Māori, which refers to Māori systems of values, obligations, customs, and social order. They focus on acknowledging harm, taking responsibility, restoring relationships, and returning balance to the community. In Māori communities, responses to harm are shaped by relationships, collective responsibility, and the wellbeing of the wider community. They may take place in or be connected to the marae, a central gathering place for community life, ceremony, dialogue, and collective decision-making.

Colonization disrupted Māori systems of justice and imposed Western legal structures centered on punishment, removal, and state control. In the late twentieth century, Māori communities, advocates, and practitioners pushed for restorative approaches to gain recognition within the criminal legal system. This push was also shaped by the disproportionate impact of the criminal legal system on Māori, who remain significantly overrepresented at every stage of the system.

“Underlying this understanding of wrongdoing is an assumption about society: we are all interconnected.

In the Hebrew scriptures, this is embedded in the concept of shalom, the vision of living in a sense of ‘all-rightness’ with each other, the creator and the environment.”

—HOWARD ZEHR

By the late 1980s and 1990s, restorative approaches gained more formal recognition, especially in youth justice. Family Group Conferencing became a key practice, bringing together the person harmed, the person responsible, their families or support people, and relevant community members to discuss what happened, who was affected, and what needs to happen next. This model reflects restorative justice values by centering accountability, participation, repair, and collective responsibility.

Today, restorative justice practices in Aotearoa New Zealand operate both in community settings and within the criminal legal system. In adult criminal cases, eligible cases may be referred to restorative justice facilitators before sentencing. Facilitators then prepare the participants and, when appropriate, hold a restorative conference. These conferences may result in agreements related to apology, reparation, treatment, community work, or other forms of repair, and the court may consider those outcomes at sentencing.

New Zealand's model shows both the possibilities and the tensions of using restorative justice within the criminal legal system. It creates space for harm, accountability, participation, and repair to be considered in court proceedings. At the same time, the criminal legal system is not neutral or equally fair, especially for Māori communities who continue to be overrepresented within it. Restorative practices are not automatically transformative simply because courts recognize them. Their integrity depends on how they are practiced, who they remain accountable to, and whether they meaningfully support the people and communities most affected by harm.

Details about the legal system's implementation of restorative justice can be found on their website.

**[JUSTICE.GOV.TZ/COURTS/CRIMINAL/CHARGED-WITH-A-CRIME/HOW-RESTORATIVE-
JUSTICE-WORKS/](https://www.justice.govt.nz/courts/criminal/charged-with-a-crime/how-restorative-justice-works/)**

South Africa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in 1995 to confront the systemic violence of apartheid. Rather than relying only on punishment, South Africa created a process shaped by its own political and social reality: one where the country was trying to expose the truth about past violence, acknowledge harm, and move through a fragile transition.

The TRC reflected some restorative justice principles, but it was not a restorative justice process in the usual sense. It was a national transitional justice process created after decades of state violence, racial oppression, and human rights abuses. Its legacy is important but contested. The TRC helped

establish a public record of apartheid-era abuses, but it did not provide full accountability, meaningful repair, or structural justice.

How the TRC Reflects Restorative Justice Principles

Truth-Telling as a Foundation

In a country where state violence had often been denied, hidden, or justified, the TRC made public truth-telling central. Thousands of survivors testified, ensuring that harm was named and could not be erased.

Accountability Through Disclosure

People responsible for apartheid-era violence could apply for amnesty, but only if they gave full and truthful accounts of their actions. This reflected a deliberate choice: prioritizing public truth and acknowledgment over silence, denial, or hidden impunity.

Centering Survivors and Harm

The process created space for survivors to speak, be heard, and have their suffering formally recognized. This shifted attention toward those directly affected by harm, even though recognition did not always lead to repair.

A Context-Specific Approach to Justice

The TRC was shaped by the scale of apartheid violence and the political conditions of South Africa's transition. It emphasized truth, acknowledgment, and the possibility of rebuilding a shared society. At the same time, the TRC also shows the limits of truth-telling when it is not paired with full accountability, material repair, and structural change.

While South Africa confronted systemic racial violence through national truth-telling, Rwanda faced the immediate aftermath of genocide—requiring a different, but similarly community-centered, approach to accountability and repair.

Rwanda: Gacaca Courts and Post-Genocide Justice

The 1994 genocide against the Tutsi left Rwanda with mass death, displacement, trauma, and an overwhelming number of people accused of participating in the violence. In many places, the violence was local and personal: survivors were left living near people who had harmed their families, witnessed the violence, or held information about what happened.

Rwanda could not respond to this level of violence through formal courts alone. In response, the country used a layered justice system that included the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, national courts, and Gacaca courts. Gacaca drew from a local tradition of community-based conflict

resolution, but the post-genocide version was adapted to respond to mass violence on a national scale.

Gacaca reflected restorative justice values by making truth-telling, accountability, and community participation central to the justice process. Survivors and community members could speak publicly about what happened, while people accused of participating in genocide-related violence were called to answer before the communities affected by the harm. In some cases, admitting responsibility and sharing information could affect the outcome of a case.

Gacaca also reminds us that community-based justice must be handled with care. A process can include restorative values and still fall short if survivors are not protected, participation is pressured, truth-seeking is unreliable, or repair is incomplete. For restorative justice to be meaningful, community participation must be paired with safeguards, survivor support, fair process, and material repair.

Read More Here

[UN.ORG/EN/PREVENTGENOCIDE/RWANDA/ASSETS/PDF/BACKGROUND%20JUSTICE%202014.PDF](https://un.org/en/preventgenocide/rwanda/assets/pdf/background%20justice%202014.pdf)

“Many cultures, however, have a word that represents this notion of the centrality of relationships: for the Maori, it is communicated by *whakappa*; for the Navajo, *hozho*; for many Africans, the Bantu word *ubuntu*.

Although the specific meanings of these words vary, they communicate a similar message: all things are connected to each other in a web of relationships.”

—HOWARD ZEHR

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IN CIVIL RIGHTS

In the years following *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, federally mandated school desegregation faced fierce resistance across the South. In Durham, North Carolina, that resistance remained deeply entrenched into the 1970s. After an electrical fire destroyed East End Elementary School, a Black school, Black families and organizers pushed for students to be allowed to attend nearby white schools rather than continue under unequal and segregated conditions. White segregationists, including members of the Ku Klux Klan, opposed integration, and the community was left in open conflict over how desegregation would move forward.

In response, Durham used a process known as a charrette. A charrette is an intensive, time-limited planning and dialogue process that brings people together to study a problem, hear different perspectives, and develop shared recommendations or decisions. In Durham, the charrette created a public structure for residents to confront the conflict over school desegregation directly, rather than leaving decisions only to courts, officials, or closed-door negotiations.

Facilitator and organizer Bill Riddick helped guide the process, which brought together people from different parts of the community to address school desegregation and racial conflict. Two opposing community leaders were asked to co-chair the process: Ann Atwater, a Black civil rights organizer, and C.P. Ellis, the local Ku Klux Klan leader. Their shared leadership helped prevent one side from controlling the process and brought the conflict into a public, accountable space.

The charrette reflected restorative justice values because it centered dialogue, accountability, community participation, and the real-life impact of



Ann Atwater, a Black civil rights organizer, and C.P. Ellis, a local Ku Klux Klan leader.

Photo: Durham Library

harm. Participants were not simply debating policy in the abstract; they were confronting how racism, segregation, and unequal schools affected children, families, and the broader community. The process included workshops, public meetings, committee discussions, and formal votes, creating a structure where people had to listen, respond, and work toward concrete decisions.

The final vote on school integration became a turning point. Ellis ultimately voted in favor of integration, publicly broke with the Klan, and later became a labor organizer. Atwater and Ellis later shared their story publicly, showing how structured dialogue and community accountability can create space for both personal transformation and collective change.

This process did not erase the violence of segregation or return the community to a state of harmony. It showed something more useful for restorative justice: transformation is possible when harm is named, relationships are taken seriously, and the people most affected are part of shaping the path forward. For a restorative process to matter, dialogue must be connected to power, accountability, and material change. Bissell (2019)



C.P. Ellis and Ann Atwater in 2016.

Photo: Osha Gray Davidson

“Restorative justice changed my life. Years after harm happened to me, I realized the traditional system wasn’t equipped to help me find healing.

Restorative justice gave me what the system didn’t, a way to feel powerful again. It allowed me to be the one who got to make decisions about the harm that was done to me.”

—LUPE A, CALIFORNIA

Where Restorative Justice Happens

Restorative justice is not limited to courts, schools, or formal programs.

It can be practiced anywhere people are trying to respond to harm, conflict, or disconnection with honesty and care. In families, classrooms, workplaces, neighborhoods, faith communities, and community spaces, restorative practices can help people name harm, build accountability, repair relationships, and strengthen connection.



At a dance of universal peace
Photo: Jon Krieg

MODALITIES OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Circles

Kay Pranis, a prominent restorative justice advocate, calls **circle** a “form of participatory democracy that moves beyond simple majority rule.” Circles are a structured process where individuals come together in an inclusive space to discuss what took place, the impact, and how to repair the harm done. Circles emphasize healing, accountability, and relationship building through facilitated dialogue. Circles aim to strengthen community bonds through communication and mutual understanding. The facilitator leads the dialogue by supporting the creation of a safe space and ensuring everyone has a chance to speak. Many restorative justice circles often use a “talking piece” to manage who has the floor. In this process we can see the many ways Restorative Justice is inspired by Indigenous practices such as talking sticks. Circle process focuses on allowing people to express themselves, ask questions, and share the impact of the incident without fear of blame or punishment. It encourages the person who caused harm to take responsibility and work with the group to find a solution to repair.

Conferences

A **conference** is a facilitated meeting between a person who has caused harm, the person harmed, and sometimes their support people to discuss the impact of the incident and agree on how to repair the harm. Conferences are voluntary and aim to provide a safe space for participants to share their perspectives, ask questions, take responsibility, and work towards a mutually agreeable resolution. An Restorative Justice facilitator meets with all parties before conferences to ensure involved parties are ready and the meeting is safe and appropriate. Often the conference involves participants creating a plan to repair the harm, which can include an apology, community service, or other actions to make things right. Conferences can reduce the likelihood of reoffending and can divert cases from the formal court system.

Dialogues – VOD

A **Victim Offender Dialogue (VOD)** is a process where the harmed party and the responsible party meet in a safe, facilitated setting to discuss the impact of the harm. Guided by a facilitator, the dialogue allows the harmed party, often referred to as the victim, to ask questions and express their feelings, while the responsible party, often referred to as the offender, can hear about the consequences of their actions and take responsibility. VODs aim to help repair harm and promote healing. Often a victim-initiated process supplements, rather than replaces, the traditional justice system.

Blending

Zehr describes in the *Little Book of Restorative Justice* that these models are being **blended**. New forms with elements of these are being created all the time to suit the needs of involved parties. In this way, we see how Restorative Justice is culture bound and responsive as described previously. Sometimes more than one model may be used in a case such as VOD dialogues before sentencing circles. An example of new models and blends is Oakland YES! and their “jams” model.

JAMS

Oakland YES! ‘**Jams**’ is described as “incorporating facilitated dialogue, sharing circles, inspiring guest speakers, organized networking, ceremony, live music, artistic expression, games, movement, participant-led workshops, and free time for participants to enjoy each other and the beautiful environment surrounding them. The core of the work at a

Jam is to create a space where inspiring change-makers can build community and together forge bridges of solidarity and partnership towards the creation of a thriving, just, and regenerative world for all. Friendship is the root system of rapidly emerging movements for positive change.” They hold restorative justice jams as well to connect facilitators and strengthen the capacity to expand Restorative Justice.

Asset-based community needs approaches focus on a community’s inherent strengths, skills, and resources to drive responses to issues. Key parts of this approach include respecting local and ancestral knowledge, fostering relationships and connections, and shifting the focus from external “help” or “fixing” to internal empowerment, collaboration, and co-creation.

“Abolition is about abolishing the conditions under which prison became the solution to problems.”

—RUTH WILSON GILMORE

CALIFORNIA RESTORATIVE JUSTICE ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

**American Friends Service Committee
(AFSC) – California Healing Justice,**
California / statewide

[AFSC.ORG/CAHJ](https://afsc.org/cahj)

Alliance for Boys and Men of Color /
ABMoCCalifornia / statewide network

[ABMOC.ORG](https://abmoc.org)

**California Restorative Justice
Policy Coalition,** statewide

[CARJPC.ORG](https://carjpc.org)

Californians for Safety and Justice,
California / statewide

[SAFEANDJUST.ORG](https://safeandjust.org)

Centinela Youth Services,
Los Angeles County

[CYS-LA.ORG](https://cys-la.org)

Community Justice Center,
Fresno / Central Valley

[COMMUNITYJUSTICECENTER.COM](https://communityjusticecenter.com)

Community Works West, San Francisco /
Alameda County / Bay Area

[COMMUNITYWORKSWEST.ORG](https://communityworkswest.org)

Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice,
California / statewide chapters

[FACEBOOK.COM/CRIMESURVIVORSSPEAK](https://facebook.com/crimesurvivorsspeak)

**CURYJ – Communities United for
Restorative Youth Justice,**
Oakland / Bay Area

[FACEBOOK.COM/CRIMESURVIVORSSPEAK](https://facebook.com/crimesurvivorsspeak)

DeafHope, Richmond / Bay Area

[DEAF-HOPE.ORG](https://deaf-hope.org)

GRIP Training Institute, California prisons
/ Bay Area-rooted

[GRIP-TRAININGINSTITUTE.ORG](https://grip-traininginstitute.org)

Impact Justice,
Oakland / statewide / national

[IMPACTJUSTICE.ORG](https://impactjustice.org)

Insight Prison Project, California prisons /
Bay Area-rooted

[INSIGHTPRISONPROJECT.ORG](https://insightprisonproject.org)

Mend Collaborative, California / statewide

[MENDCOLLABORATIVE.ORG](https://mendcollaborative.org)

**Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth
(RJOY),** Oakland / Bay Area

[RJOYOAKLAND.ORG](https://rjoyoakland.org)

Restorative Partners, San Luis Obispo /
Central Coast

[RESTORATIVEPARTNERS.ORG](https://restorativepartners.org)

Restore Oakland, Oakland / Bay Area

[RESTOREOAKLAND.ORG](https://restoreoakland.org)

RYSE Youth Center, Richmond / Contra
Costa County

[RYSECENTER.ORG](https://rysecenter.org)

The Ahimsa Collective,
Bay Area / Santa Cruz / statewide

[AHIMSACOLLECTIVE.NET](https://ahimsacollective.net)

**The CHAT Project – Collective Healing
and Transformation,** Richmond / Contra
Costa County

[CHATPROJECT.ORG](https://chatproject.org)

What People Have to Say About Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is best understood through the people who have lived it, practiced it, and carried it into their communities.

The reflections in this section come from survivors, practitioners, and community leaders who turned to restorative approaches when existing systems could not provide the answers, healing, accountability, or safety they needed. Their words show that restorative justice is not one single program or process; it can take the form of survivor-centered dialogue, violence interruption, circles, community healing, and work with people directly impacted by criminalization and incarceration. Across these experiences, one thing is clear: restorative justice creates space for people to be heard, to confront harm, and to imagine safety beyond punishment.

Quotes from a survivor
who participated in a
Victim Offender Dialogue
involving homicide.

*Names with asterisks are aliases to
protect participant privacy

Quotes from Marcel Woodruff.
Marcel has worked with
Advance Peace Fresno.

Advance Peace Fresno is a
community-based program
focused on reducing urban
gun violence through street
outreach and trauma-informed
programming. The program
provides support to people
directly involved in and
impacted by gun violence,
with the goal of reducing
retaliation and strengthening
community safety.

“The justice system pits survivors and offenders
against each other, breeding anger, fear, and
hate, but how can we learn from each other and
understand each other if we are afraid of each
other? Victim Offender Dialogues can bridge
that gap, create broader understanding between
survivors and offenders, and ultimately provide
a level of healing for both parties that can’t be
achieved any other way. That kind of resource
should be shouted from the rooftops, not buried,
only to be found by chance.”

—JODY*, CALIFORNIA

“For the past two decades, my work in restorative
justice has been devoted to creating spaces where
people can be fully seen, understood, and cared
for in the context of their lived experiences.
Whether in schools, community settings, or
carceral environments, I have centered healing
as the foundation for accountability and repair.
Restorative justice, at its best, refuses to treat
harm as an isolated incident; instead, it considers
the histories, conditions, and unmet needs that
shape human behavior. My practice has focused
on building inclusive circles rooted in dignity and
mutual recognition, where individuals—especially
those most impacted by systemic inequities—can
speak their truth, confront harm without fear, and
participate in collective processes that honor both
justice and humanity.

“Across these twenty years, I have seen restorative
justice become a transformative force not only for
individuals but for the systems and institutions
tasked with serving them. Its value lies in how it
challenges society to move beyond punishment
as the default response to conflict and harm.
By shifting attention toward relationships,
structural conditions, and collective responsibility,
restorative justice offers a framework capable
of reshaping schools, courts, community
organizations, and public systems. It invites society
to imagine models of accountability grounded in
connection rather than coercion, and in doing so,
it expands what we believe is possible for safety,
belonging, and shared liberation.”

“Community Justice Center’s Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) program specifically helps adults and now youth who are re-integrating into their communities after incarceration to support their growth and healing and become accountable for their impact.

During my time I have seen how the connection to compassionate mentors with lived experiences similar to the youth have been effective at helping them reflect on their actions, the circumstances that led up to them, and how to use that information to make new better decisions. From what I have seen, when we give youth a chance to grow and heal in a restorative way they tend to become accountable in a healthy way.”

—RUBEN E., FRESNO, CA

INTERVIEW WITH A PARTICIPANT

Lupe A, a survivor of violent crime, shares her experience with a restorative process.

What drew you to an restorative justice process for yourself?

Restorative justice drew me in because it centered my healing in a way nothing else had. After years of moving through the judicial system, I wanted a process that allowed me to reclaim my voice and my power.

Why restorative justice over something else?

I chose restorative justice because years after I was harmed, I still had questions/feelings that the judicial system could not answer.

How did you know how to ask for restorative justice?

I didn’t know I had the right to ask for restorative justice; it had never been mentioned to me.

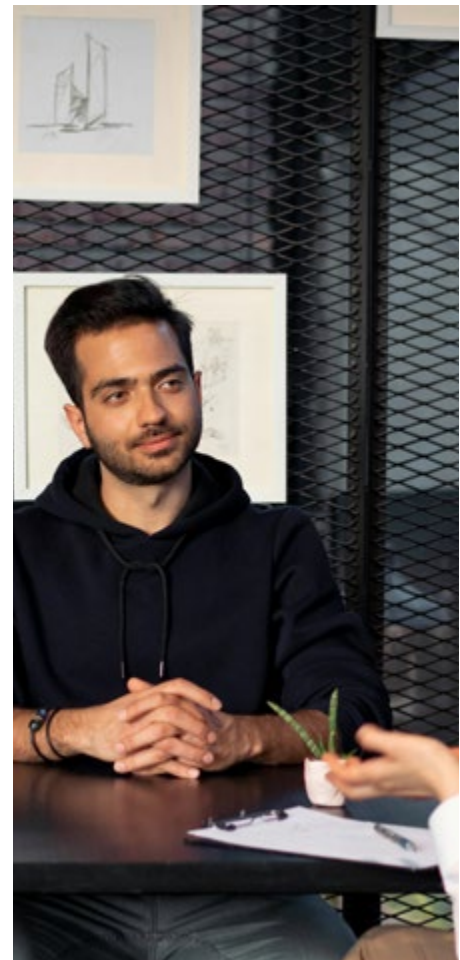


Photo: Mina Rad on “Unsplash”

Where did you learn about restorative justice?

I learned about it through community spaces, other survivors, and restorative practitioners who showed me that healing could look different.

What did a restorative process give you or do for you that the current structures did not provide or would not allow for?

The restorative process allowed me the chance to ask the questions only the person who harmed me could answer and to shape the process around my needs.

What type of reflection was necessary, or where did you need to be mentally to participate in a restorative justice process?

To participate, I had to be in a grounded mental space where I was clear about my intentions and boundaries. I wasn't seeking reconciliation or forgiveness, but seeking truth, clarity, and my own healing. It required reflection, support, and readiness, but ultimately, restorative justice allowed me to reclaim my power, feel in control, and heal.

“When I talk about the work Mend does in prisons, a lot of people refer to it as a prison program.

But the people we support are part of the community whether they're in a cell or not. Restorative programs are community programs.”

—MIGUEL,
BAY AREA, CALIFORNIA

Undoing Our Miseducation

Learning restorative
justice requires more than
memorizing definitions.

It asks us to unlearn the ideas we have inherited about punishment, blame, justice, conflict, accountability, and repair. This section offers children's books, films, video clips, stories, and other resources that invite deeper reflection and support deeper learning. Together, these materials help show what restorative justice can look like in practice.



Photo: Suad Kamardeen on “Unsplash”

CHILDREN’S BOOKS

Wally and Freya, Lindsey Pointer

Manji Moves A Mountain, Nancy Churnin

Louise Loves Art, Kelly Light

Little Robot, Ben Hatke

Desmon and the Very Mean Word,
Desmond Tutu and Douglas Carlton
Abrams

The Rabbit Listened, Cori Doerrdeld

Shirley and Jamila Save Their Summer,
Gillian Goerz

Doodleville, Chad Sell

Timo the Adventurer

FICTION

It Wasn’t Me Dana, Alison Levy (Youth
Adult)

A Prayer for the Crown Shy, Becky
Chambers

NON-FICTION

The Little Book of Restorative Justice,
Howard Zehr

Race and Restorative Justice, Fania Davis

Circles, Kay Pranis

*The Little Book of Victim Offender
Conferencing*, Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz

*The Little Book of Family Group
Conferences*, Allan MacRae

*The Little Book of Restorative Justice in
Education*, Katherine Evans

Fumbling Towards Repair, Mariame Kaba

*The Best of Enemies: Race and
Redemption in the New South*, Osha
Gray Davidson

Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paolo Friere

Theater of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal

*The Charrette Process: A Tool in Urban
Planning*, Bill Riddick

Healing Justice Lineages, Cara Page &
Erica Woodland

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE ON STAGE

Theater:

Punch on Broadway
[newyorktheatreguide.com/
show/43919-punch-on-broadway](https://newyorktheatreguide.com/show/43919-punch-on-broadway)

Films:

Native American Rights Fund
(narf.org) - 13 minutes
[youtube.com/
watch?v=mEtwhvtDwWQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=mEtwhvtDwWQ)

One Million Experiments (2024) -
28 minutes
millionexperiments.com/documentary

Circle Up (2017)
First VOD encounter in Massachusetts
newday.com/films/circle-up

Burning Bridges (2005)
A short documentary about a
conferencing circle involving young
men charged with arson and their
community. 34 minutes
[cultureunplugged.com/documentary/
watch-online/play/51886/burning-
bridges](https://cultureunplugged.com/documentary/watch-online/play/51886/burning-bridges)

Healing Justice,
A film by Shakti Butler (2019)
One-hour documentary explores
restorative justice - an alternative that
dignifies offenders with meaningful
accountability and truly meets the
needs of victims.
world-trust.org/films-purchase

The Final Gift (2012)

Documents a victim's sister who
meets her brother's killer in prison
for a dialogue, a poignant story of
grief, resilience, and the complexity
of forgiveness. 84 minutes South
Carolina based.

vimeo.com/ondemand/finalgift

Films Featuring Restorative Encounters:

The Best of Enemies (2019)
Historical Drama based on Charrettes in
1971 during desegregation. Encounters
and town halls over the course of two
weeks with white folks, Black folks, the
KKK, and Black organizers.
[athome.fandango.com/content/browse/
details/The-Best-of-Enemies/1095485](https://athome.fandango.com/content/browse/details/The-Best-of-Enemies/1095485)

International Films:

The Worst Thing
(To Germany, With Love) (2019)
Follows Kathleen Pequeño as she
engages in surrogate dialogues with
former members of a violent political
group responsible for her brother's
murder, showcasing restorative
justice in practice related to domestic
terrorism. *English audio and German
audio with English subtitles.* 84 min.
[watch.plex.tv/watch/movie/the-worst-
thing](https://watch.plex.tv/watch/movie/the-worst-thing)

Circles (1997)

This video focuses on the use of circle sentencing in Native communities in the Yukon territories of Canada, the first North American jurisdiction to use sentencing circles in combination with the formal justice system. Trigger Warning: Native American violence, residential schools, domestic violence, child abuse, alcoholism.

kanopy.com/en/product/circles-0

Je Verrai Toujours Vos Visages
(*All Your Faces*) (2023)

A French film that explores a restorative justice program, bringing together victims and offenders for dialogue and repair. 118 minutes. Trigger

Warning: Sibling Sexual assault, child sexual abuse and self-harm. Original

Audio: French, dubbed in Spanish (Spain dialect); subtitles Spanish (Spain), English

youtube.com/watch?v=nLW7YVHQRMk

PODCASTS

Restorative Justice on the Rise
restorativejusticeontherise.org

One Million Experiments
millionexperiments.com/podcast/season-3
(not solely about Restorative Justice but heavily focuses on ways to provide healing in the face of carceral systems as well as alternatives to harm as a whole)

Episodes Featuring Restorative Justice:

This is Actually Happening: A World Beyond Revenge
Season 14 Ep 351-355 (plus 2 bonus episodes: one after 351 and one after 352)
wonderly.com/shows/this-is-actually-happening/episode/5675-the-framework-of-restorative-justice-a-conversation-with-yoana-tchoukleva

*F*ck Him, But F*ck Jail: The Power of Restorative Justice* 2022
Single Episode
open.spotify.com/episode/1xcNAB1hFRhzSFV2qvrsFs

The Bell's Miseducation
podcast episode June 2025
bellvoices.org/season1/2025/6/18/how-can-we-improve-restorative-justice-in-nyc-schools

YOUTUBE CHANNELS

National Center on Restorative Justice
youtube.com/@nationalcenteronrj

ARTICLES/REPORTS

Graduates get second chance at Restorative Justice Community Court in Chicago's south suburbs
by Lauren Victory (8/29/25)
cbsnews.com/chicago/news/graduates-restorative-justice-community-court-chicago-south-suburbs

Restorative justice for schools: Virginia lawmakers aim to reform discipline
by Nathaniel Cline (1/23/25)
viriniamercury.com/2025/01/23/restorative-justice-for-schools-virginia-lawmakers-aim-to-reform-discipline

Evaluating advance peace in Fresno, California: An interrupted times series analysis of a community-based gun violence intervention
Xing Gao, Juan R. Cabrera, David Padilla, Mahasin S. Mujahid, Jason Corburn (8/27/2025)
journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0328780

OPINIONS/COMMENTARY

Restorative justice is offered too rarely, says actress Julie Hesmondhalgh on ITV's This Morning (10/6/25)
insidetime.org/newsround/restorative-justice-is-offered-too-rarely-says-actress-julie-hesmondhalgh

Minnesota Bill supporters say confidentiality critical to success of restorative justice programs by Tim Walker (3/18/25)
house.mn.gov/sessiondaily/Story/18614

Teacher Commentary: Let's fully fund restorative justice – because it works by Thomas Courtney (3/24/25)
edsource.org/2025/lets-fully-fund-restorative-justice-because-it-works/729030

Arts in Restorative Justice Programs by Tierra Porter (11/18/24)
edtrust.org/blog/arts-in-restorative-justice-programs

Veterans program at Suffolk canceled over use of 'restorative justice' term
Juliet Schulman-Hall (10/3/2025)
bizjournals.com/boston/news/2025/10/03/suffolk-university-vets-program.html

COMMUNITY EDUCATION RESOURCES

Living Justice Press (LJP)
livingjusticepress.org

LJP: Seven Core Assumptions
livingjusticepress.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/SevenCoreAssumptions_BW.pdf

LJP: Circle Process Graphics
and Handouts (Free Resource)
livingjusticepress.org/free-stuff

Creative Interventions Toolkit
and Workbooks
creative-interventions.org/toolkit

National Association of Community
and Restorative Justice
nacri.org

Wally and Frey Coloring Kids Activity
restorativeteachingtools.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Wally-and-Freya-Coloring-Page.pdf

Conclusion

Restorative justice is not something we learn once and set aside.

It asks something of us. It asks us to notice how we respond to harm, how quickly we reach for blame or avoidance, and whether our responses actually make repair possible. It asks us to practice accountability before crisis, build relationships before they are tested, and take seriously the conditions that allow harm to continue.

We need restorative justice because punishment alone does not heal harm, rebuild trust, or teach us how to be accountable to one another. Too often, systems respond to harm by isolating people, removing them, or reducing accountability to consequences without repair. Restorative justice offers a different path: one that centers truth, dignity, responsibility, and the possibility of change.

This toolkit does not offer a perfect formula. It offers a foundation for continued learning, reflection, and practice. The histories, examples, principles, and tools included here are meant to help you understand restorative justice as both a response to harm and a commitment to how we live with one another.

The work requires honesty, care, and humility. It requires respect for the Indigenous, spiritual, and community-based traditions that carried these values long before they were named within modern restorative justice. It also requires responsibility toward the people most affected by harm, and patience with the reality that repair is not always simple, quick, or complete.

As you move forward, carry these questions with you: How do I build trust? How do I take responsibility? How do I respond when harm has been done? How do I support repair without forcing it? How do I help create communities where accountability is possible?

Restorative justice becomes real through practice: in the conversations we are willing to have, the harm we are willing to name, the responsibility we are willing to take, and the relationships we are willing to tend.



Photo: Meredith Spencer on "Unsplash."

NEXT STEPS

If you are interested in learning more about or supporting our restorative justice work, please let us know. We want to keep track of all the amazing conversations you're having, education you're providing, advocacy you're building, and activism in which you're engaging. Email: CAHealingJustice@afsc.org

End Notes

- Braithwaite, J. (2002). *Restorative Justice and Responsive Regulation*. Oxford University Press.
- Bissell, R. (Director). (2019). *The Best of Enemies* [Film]. STX Films.
- Facing History & Ourselves, C.P. Ellis and Ann Atwater: Breaking Isolation, facinghistory.org/resource-library/breaking-isolation. last updated August 2, 2016
- Cunneen, C., & Tauri, J. (2016). *Indigenous Criminology*. Policy Press.
- Durham County Library Art Wall “And Justice for All: “ Ann G. Atwater & Claiborne P. Ellis, School Integration Charette
- andjusticeforall.dconc.gov/gallery_images/ann-g-atwater-claiborne-p-ellis-school-integration-charette-leaders/
- Gao X, Cabrera JR, Padilla D, Mujahid MS, Corburn J (2025) Evaluating advance peace in Fresno, California: An interrupted times series analysis of a community-based gun violence intervention. *PLoS One* 20(8): e0328780. doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0328780
- Jantzi V. E. -- Restorative Justice in New Zealand: Current Practise, Future Possibilities, August 2001 emu.edu/cjp/docs/rj-in-newzealand.pdf
- Llewellyn, J. J., & Howse, R. (1999). *Restorative Justice—A Conceptual Framework*. Law Commission of Canada.
- Mead, H. M. (2003). *Tikanga Māori: Living by Māori Values*. Huia Publishers.
- Pfander, Sarah Mikva (2020) Evaluating New Zealand’s restorative promise: the impact of legislative design on the practice of restorative justice, *Kōtuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online*, 15:1, 170–185, DOI: 10.1080/1177083X.2019.1678492
- Tutu, D. (1999). *No Future Without Forgiveness*. Doubleday.
- Witherspoon, G. (1977). *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe*. University of Michigan Press.
- Yazzie, R., & Zion, J. (1996). “Navajo Restorative Justice: The Law of Equality and Justice.”
- Zehr, H. (2015). *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*. Good Books.

Summer 2026



**American
Friends
Service
Committee**