

What is Restorative Justice?

The Prison Fellowship International defines restorative justice as "the process whereby parties with a stake in a specific offence resolve collectively how to deal with the aftermath of the offence and its implications for the future." Essentially, restorative justice recognizes that our contemporary criminal justice system in the West deals with crime in a fragmented and impersonal manner. Currently many mainstream western criminal justice systems operate within a framework of retributive justice, based on punishment, profit, and bureaucracy. By contrast, restorative justice perspectives see it as crucial to involve victims and communities in a holistic process which includes all parties involved, and includes the principles of responsibility, resolution and reparations. Restorative justice seeks to be as systematic as our current judicial system, but places more emphasis on healing, involving all stakeholders and building morally responsible communities.

Victim offender mediation and community group conferencing are two unique aspects of restorative justice. Conferences are alternatives to court proceedings. In a normal conference, a professional conference mediator facilitates a conversation between victim, offender and other involved parties. The goals of conferences include permitting victims to meet their offenders on a voluntary basis, encouraging the offender to learn about the crime's impact and to take responsibility for the resulting harm. This can provide both victim and offender the opportunity to develop a plan that addresses the harm. This can also, especially in the case of youth offenders, engage the offenders' support system for making amends and help influence the offender's future behavior as s/he may gain a sense of how his/her behavior impacts others, as well as feeling more a part of the larger community.

You can read more about the details of restorative justice at www.restorativejustice.org.