

Maine Restorative Justice Coalition (MERJ)

Restorative / Transformative Justice Integrity Guide

(A Living Document)

A digital copy may be found on our website

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Preface

Restorative justice (RJ) and transformative justice (TJ) are rooted in the belief that we are all interconnected beings and that our actions affect others; therefore, when harm occurs, it happens within community and within relationships, and so it makes sense that harm needs to be addressed and repaired within community. At its core, RJ/TJ seeks to – through values, practices, and processes – strengthen and repair relationships, foster accountability, and explore pathways to healing for those who have been harmed, those who caused harm, and the greater community. RJ/TJ includes all of these people in the healing process because no one is disposable, all people have dignity and worth, and because causing harm and experiencing harm are not mutually exclusive – one who has caused harm has often experienced harm as well. An RJ/TJ process is grounded in the restorative values and principles of mutual care, empathy, and collective responsibility, with the goal of creating spaces for those involved to voice their experiences and work together toward mutual understanding and harm repair.

RJ/TJ cannot be defined or regulated in narrow, uniform terms. It is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Just as those who have experienced harm are not a monolith, RJ/TJ practices cannot be meaningfully implemented to their fullest capacity by a formulaic, top-down set of rules and procedures. It is vital for RJ/TJ to not be defined by any one entity, system, or power; it is essential to embrace the multiplicity of RJ/TJ and their definitions, approaches, and utilizations. Regulation of RJ/TJ through external structures or systems risks losing its heart, which lies in consensual and community-led, co-created, participatory processes. When RJ/TJ is stripped of its flexibility and cultural context and is reduced to a mechanical set of rules and procedures, it loses its essence and has the potential to mimic systems that perpetuate cycles of harm.

RJ/TJ's significance transcends mere legal frameworks; it is a philosophy and practice that challenges our understanding of justice itself. It insists that justice cannot be imposed from the outside—it must arise from the community, informed by its customs, values, and needs. When embraced in this way, RJ/TJ provides powerful avenues for transforming relationships, healing wounds, and building stronger, more resilient communities. It is a call to return to more holistic, human-centered ways of responding to harm—ways that acknowledge the complexity of human relationships and the potential for growth, reconciliation, and renewal.

Purpose

MERJ created this resource to affirm core values and principles of RJ/TJ, to create a unified, shared understanding of language and terminology, and to assert the importance of embracing the multiplicity of RJ/TJ in its many forms— with the goal of upholding RJ/TJ in its integrity and ensuring that it remains true to its foundational principles.

Interest in RJ/TJ continues to grow: more people seek to become RJ/TJ practitioners, current facilitators strive to strengthen their practice, and institutions in Maine want to use RJ/TJ to repair harm and improve outcomes. Though there is no one way to learn or practice RJ/TJ, MERJ recognizes the need for a resource that grounds and unifies facilitators in embodying and maintaining integrity throughout the process, while highlighting the need for authenticity and consistency, as well as creativity and adaptability. Furthermore, we hope for this resource to serve as a grounding framework and to help anchor us in and hold us accountable to the core principles that define RJ/TJ.

This resource affirms the value and integrity of RJ/TJ, ensuring that its core purpose is not diluted or co-opted by institutions, which may purposefully or inadvertently reshape or reduce its transformative potential. We also hope for it to be revisited over time by those who hold and facilitate RJ/TJ processes and who strive to embody restorative practices. RJ/TJ is not merely a tool, but a framework and a lifestyle— a way of living and a lens with which to view, navigate, and move through our world, experiences, and relationships.

About MERJ

The authors are a mix of independent RJ/TJ practitioners and practitioners affiliated with restorative justice organizations in the state of Maine, belonging to the Maine Restorative Justice Coalition (MERJ). MERJ is a coalition of people who self-identify as either independent community-based restorative practitioners or belong to community-based restorative practicing organizations.

This resource was predominantly written by MERJ members Kage Johnson, Esme Howland, Abdi “Lalee” Awad, Leslie Ross, and Sarah Dyer.

MERJ’s Mission: To collaboratively establish and sustain restorative practices and principles across Maine through building resources, advocating for legislation, promoting education, and fostering cooperation among restorative justice practitioners. To uphold the integrity of restorative justice and transformative justice by ensuring that these practices remain held in and by community, and are accessible to all.

MERJ’s Vision: MERJ stands as a collective of voices for healing, truth telling, and accountability, and is committed to building relationships and strengthening communities; MERJ seeks to transform Maine into a Restorative State where alternatives to punishment, carcerality, and isolation are widely practiced and accessible.

Land Acknowledgement

MERJ practices restorative justice in the state of Maine, the unceded homeland of the Wabanaki tribes, known as the Abenaki, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot – the People of the Dawnland. MERJ acknowledges that restorative practices are a way of living and being in community that are derived from various Indigenous traditions, globally. As advocates of restorative justice, MERJ recognizes and expresses gratitude to all Indigenous communities, past and present, who have stewarded these practices. MERJ honors its obligation to uphold the integrity of these traditional practices with fidelity to their spirit and history.

History of Restorative & Transformative Justice

RJ is deeply rooted in various Indigenous peoples' lifeways and practices across the globe. Though practices vary widely, many of these communities hold common values and principles like shared responsibility and interdependence with each other and the environment; circle-keeping is one practice that is rooted in these values. Many Indigenous communities, from the Māori of Aotearoa (New Zealand) to the First Nations of North America, to African tribes and the Aboriginal Peoples of Australia, have long used circle-keeping, a form of community-based dialogue as a means of being in community and addressing harm. These communities are not a monolith and the circle practices vary widely, reflecting the values and culture of the community. Yet, in many of these traditions, the circle represents a sacred space where all voices are valued and collective wisdom is harnessed to guide the process of healing. The use of circle-keeping to respond to harm or wrong-doing in these contexts is not about punishment, but about restoring balance and harmony to the community, ensuring that both the individual and the collective can move forward in a way that is just, compassionate, and whole.

In the 1970s, the Māori of Aotearoa (New Zealand) advocated for a more victim-centered approach to justice in response to the destructive impact that the legal system had on their youth and communities. These efforts sparked the Western conception of RJ in North America which followed. The approach they developed emphasizes dialogue between those who have caused harm, those who have experienced harm, and the wider community to understand the impact of harm and to work together to find a resolution. Over the years, RJ has gained recognition as an alternative to punitive responses, and it has been applied in various contexts, from criminal legal systems to schools and workplaces.

TJ emerged in response to the limitations and harms of traditional punitive legal systems, particularly within BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and LGBTQIA2S+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit, and more) communities. Rooted in the activism of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, it grew out of the collective experiences of marginalized groups who sought to create safer and more restorative practices in response to political violence, harm, and injustice. Legal systems often failed to address the needs and realities of these communities, either perpetuating systemic racism, homophobia, and transphobia, or failing to provide equitable support for those who had been harmed. Drawing from Indigenous practices, community accountability models, and feminist thought— TJ centers healing, reconciliation, and the dismantling of oppressive systems. TJ is community-led, focusing on addressing the root causes of harm and fostering collective well-being. Over time, TJ has been embraced by activists and communities as a community-based framework for healing and building resilience without relying on the criminal legal system, incarceration, or retribution.

Benefits of Restorative & Transformative Justice

RJ/TJ are pathways to justice, offering a process that centers healing, dignity, and agency for all involved, especially for those who have been harmed.

Empowerment

When operating within the current criminal legal system, those who have been harmed often have little to no say in how the harm they experienced is addressed. This may leave those who have been harmed feeling disenfranchised and silenced, their needs and experiences ignored. In contrast, RJ/TJ processes seek to empower those who have experienced harm by inviting their choice in how the harm is addressed and to what extent they would like to engage in a process, encouraging them to play an active role in shaping a process and resolution. The ability for those who have experienced harm to make decisions about their own healing path can be a vital part of regaining agency over their lives after experiencing harm.

Dignity

RJ/TJ processes focus on upholding dignity for all participants, and is built on principles of respect, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. These processes are consensual and tailored to meet people where they are, ensuring that everyone involved is treated with empathy and care. Participants can engage in an RJ/TJ process at a pace that is sustainable for them, with the ongoing support of facilitators and community, providing a space where their voices are heard.

Accountability

RJ/TJ processes offer those who have experienced harm the opportunity to receive genuine acknowledgement of the harm they have experienced and its impact. In the criminal legal system, which is adversarial by design, those who have caused harm are incentivized to deny their actions to avoid legal consequences, leaving the experience of those who have been harmed unvalidated. RJ/TJ focuses on addressing the harm itself and is not concerned with the letter of the law. Those who have caused harm are encouraged to fully acknowledge their actions and the impact on those who have been harmed, fostering genuine accountability and providing them a pathway to understand the impact of their actions and take responsibility for harm they've caused. By engaging in dialogue with those affected, facilitators, and community, they can gain deeper insights into the consequences of their behavior, express genuine remorse, and actively contribute to repairing the harm, based on the stated needs of those they harmed. This can lead to personal growth and transformation, a sense of empowerment, the chance to rebuild and repair relationships, thus building safer communities.

Healing

RJ/TJ processes can lead to profound healing for those who have experienced harm, as they are able to express their pain and the impacts of the harm that they experienced, whether through direct in-person dialogues/circles, letters, voice recordings, surrogates, or other indirect communication. This opportunity for acknowledgment of the harm experienced can help those who have been harmed to reclaim their voice, an experience often denied in the criminal legal system.

Shifting away from a culture that centers punishment as response to harm, RJ/TJ places healing and accountability at the center of its processes providing a crucial opportunity for healing for everyone involved. Those who have been harmed and those who have caused harm are both supported in their respective journeys toward empathy, understanding, accountability, repair, growth, and transformation. By encouraging direct or indirect dialogue between those who caused harm and those harmed, these processes foster understanding and promote healing. By reflecting on their actions and working together with the community, all parties can better understand the root causes of the harm and contribute to preventing its recurrence. RJ/TJ processes create a space for community learning and accountability, offering the possibility of both individual and collective healing. Those who have been harmed see these processes as essential because they offer not only an opportunity for personal closure or resolution, but also for a collective effort to repair the harm and ensure that the harm that they experienced does not continue, and that others are not harmed in the same way.

Safe & Resilient Communities

RJ/TJ is an essential pathway toward justice, healing, and a future where harm is prevented, and accountability is genuinely pursued and practiced in community. RJ/TJ and restorative practices serve as proactive violence prevention by focusing on healing, accountability, and relationship-building versus solely responding to harm. This proactive, healing-centered approach not only responds to harm but also helps to build a more resilient and interconnected society. The practice of community-building circles, for instance, provides a space where individuals can openly share their experiences, listen to others, and collaboratively address issues before they escalate into violence. By emphasizing empathy, dialogue, and mutual respect, these practices create a foundation of trust and cooperation, making it less likely that violence or harm will emerge in the first place. RJ/TJ work builds resilience and social cohesion, empowering communities to handle conflict in non-violent, generative ways.

Terminology

Restorative practices are meant to be fluid and responsive to the context and to the needs of the community and the individuals who are present. Therefore, there are not steadfast rules, but must be consistently grounded in restorative principles. The following terms are defined to develop and foster shared understanding of language commonly used in restorative practices.

Abolition: The action or an act of getting rid of a system, practice, or institution. For example, many people advocating to abolish prisons in the U.S. want to replace the current prison system with RJ/TJ-based approaches to harm.

Abuse: Mistreatment of or harm inflicted on a person, often in a repeated or ongoing manner or pattern. Abuse is an ongoing form of violence, involving a pattern of power and control.

Accessibility: The quality of being easy to obtain or use; accessibility to restorative processes can be limited by barriers that may be cultural, financial, physical, or institutional (among others). Practitioners and community partners can work to overcome these barriers so that more people can use restorative processes to address harm and needs.

Accountability: A quality or state of being responsible or taking responsibility for one's action and for the repair of any harm.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): ACE's are traumatic experiences that, when experienced in childhood, can have lifelong effects on mental, physical, and socioemotional health. They include: child abuse, sexual abuse, family violence, community violence, and social violence. There is significant research that correlates Adverse Childhood Experiences and future experiences of violence, victimization, and perpetration.

Cancel culture: A societal practice or cultural phenomena, often serving as an attempt at social or community accountability, where individuals or groups are publicly shamed, boycotted, or socially excluded, often through social media, after being accused of harmful behavior, without a process that allows for accountability, repair, or transformation. Those attempting to respond to harm through actions rooted in cancel culture seek to respond to harm, real or perceived, by rapidly withdrawing support from the accused individual, group, or institution, often without due process, dialogue, or opportunities for repair. This approach tends to emphasize punishment and social exclusion over engagement, healing, and structural change. While responses rooted in cancel culture often arise from legitimate calls for justice and safety, cancel culture lacks a practical framework, in contrast to RJ/TJ, for accountability and justice that is sustainable, compassionate, and rooted in long-term healing and liberation.

Circles: A global Indigenous method or traditional practice of bringing people together for many reasons, such as to celebrate, make decisions, share stories, or repair harm. Circles are used in restorative practices to bring people together to establish values, share experiences, build community relationships,

and collaboratively work toward accountability. Co-created process where facilitator and participants establish shared values and norms. Participants sit in a circle. A talking piece and/or centerpiece may be used to guide the dialogue. Typically include intentional or ceremonial openings and closings of the gathering.

Circles of care: A process used in and by various communities as a means of offering mutual support. For example, there are circles of care for survivors of violence, led by survivors of violence, or circles of care for caretakers, led by caretakers.

Circle-keeping or facilitating: The act of convening and tending to the well-being of participants in a given circle process. Circle-keeping involves clearly stating the circle's purpose and giving attention to upholding shared values and guidelines of the group. A circle keeper can use their turn in the circle to speak from their own experience, raise up cogent contributions or to summarize for the sake of moving the group through a process towards fulfillment of the stated circle purpose.

Co-facilitator: When more than one person is involved with facilitating a process they work together as a team. They work collaboratively throughout the process and share responsibilities; one person may be designated lead-facilitator and assumes more of the responsibilities.

Community agreements: Guidelines or shared commitments established by participants to create a safe, respectful, and supportive environment for open dialogue and sharing. These agreements are collaboratively developed at the beginning of the process, are revisited throughout the process as needed, and are designed to foster trust, accountability, and mutual respect. They help to ensure that all participants feel heard, valued, and empowered to engage in meaningful conversations, especially when discussing sensitive or challenging topics. The agreements may include principles such as: confidentiality, active listening, values, speaking from the "I" perspective, and maintaining non-judgmental attitudes, etc.

Conference: A formal structured facilitated harm repair process first introduced in Canada and New Zealand in the 70's and formalized in the 90's by Howard Zehr and by Ted Wachtel and Terry O'Connell. Facilitators closely adhere to a structure which outlines specific questions, order of questions, specific order of speakers, and to a specifically structured path to creating a repair agreement. At completion facilitators conclude with a specifically structured closing.

Consensus: Referred to as an agreement collectively agreed upon by a group of people, or as a process of decision-making which is carried out by a group hearing every participant's input and opinions in service of working toward reaching a collective agreement. While individuals might not fully agree on every aspect of a decision, consensus is often reached by a measure of whether or not the participants involved in making the decision can live with the decision being made and with collective agreement that the decision being made is not likely to cause harm. A couple examples of models for practicing consensus-based decision making are 'integrative consent' and 'fist to five.'

Consent: Permission or agreement, which is clear, voluntary, and can be withdrawn at any time. Consent is sought or given under circumstances in which all parties are provided information and are given opportunities to ask questions in order to make an informed decision; this is otherwise known as practicing informed consent.

Deflection: When a law enforcement officer refers an individual directly to a community based process after an incident, therefore avoiding entering someone into a law enforcement database; increasingly, deflection is used in instances of responding to concerns about individuals with low level offenses where the root cause is substance use and/or mental health .

Diversion: Interventions that redirect people away from formal processing in the criminal legal system and provide alternative pathways to accountability .

Empowerment: The process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights.

Facilitator: The person, often with a co-facilitator, who organizes and guides a restorative process. The facilitator acts as a guide and collaborator with the participants, striving for neutrality, and is responsible for: ensuring voluntary participation, maintaining a trauma-informed process, directing participants to outside resources (e.g. counseling), asking questions, and ensuring the process is grounded in RJ/TJ values and principles. In a restorative circle, the facilitator sets up the space, guides the participants through each round, and asks questions. The facilitator may "own" the creation of the shape of the process and the participants "own" the outcomes.

Harm: A negative impact on an individual(s) or community; the impact may be physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, etc. Harm can be caused intentionally or unintentionally.

Harm repair circle: Community members come together, including community members who experienced harm (if they choose) and those who caused harm, for a facilitated dialogue to work towards gaining a common understanding of what happened and who was affected and how, and to articulate a plan to repair the harm itself and the relationships affected by the harm. Harm repair circles aim to create space for healing and accountability within the community, often leading to the co-creation of a reparative agreement.

Harm repair process: A restorative process which engages two or more individuals in a process of striving to make things 'as right as possible' and to prevent something similar from occurring again in the future.

Healing: The process of making or becoming sound or healthy again. Healing is deeply personal, nonlinear, and experienced differently by everyone; there are aspects of healing which are experienced as very individual and aspects which are experienced or made possible in community.

Justice-Impacted: a term that implies a person is affected by the criminal legal system. This umbrella term includes people who are formerly or currently incarcerated and their family members. Sometimes used interchangeably with 'system-impacted.'

Mass Incarceration: A term used to emphasize the extremely high incarceration rate in the U.S. for adults and juveniles.

Neutrality: To not support one side in a conflict. For RJ/TJ practitioners, this is a theoretical idea, rather than an achievable objective, because we acknowledge that it is not possible to fully separate ourselves from our subjectivity. RJ/TJ practitioners must examine their bias and strive to understand how it may affect their role. Neutrality does not entail that RJ/TJ practitioners be neutral in response to power dynamics rooted in oppression or hate, such as racism, homophobia, etc. It is the role of the RJ/TJ practitioner to be non-judgemental and supportive of all participants and their learning journey in an RJ/TJ process; it is also within the RJ/TJ practitioner's responsibility to uphold RJ/TJ values and principles, including inclusivity, understanding of power dynamics, and cultural sensitivity, by naming or acknowledging power dynamics that may exist or be perpetuated during an RJ/TJ process.

Person who has been harmed: This term is used in place of victim or survivor and puts emphasis on the action of harm experienced, rather than the identity of the person; it underscores that the harm that they have experienced does not define their identity.

Person who has caused harm: This term is used in place of frequently used and widely adopted terms such as offender, perpetrator, or harm-doer and puts emphasis on the action of harm done, rather than on the identity of the person; it underscores that the harm that they have caused does not define their identity.

**This is not a binary: those who have caused harm have often also experienced harm, and those who experience harm may have also caused harm.*

Principles: Basic truths, standards, beliefs, or assumptions. Restorative & Transformative Justice principles are informed by RJ/TJ based values.

Power Dynamics: The complex balance of power – influence, control, authority, resources – between two or more people, which changes depending on social location and cultural context. Depending on the roles and identities present, there can be a power dynamic where some people have more power than others.

Restorative / Transformative Justice Practitioner: Someone who embodies and practices the underlying values and principles of RJ/TJ and who facilitates RJ/TJ processes.

Restorative Dialogue: This term is interpreted in multiple ways- one is a broader definition of how it is embedded in everyday life, and the other how it specifies a particular process within harm repair responses. Restorative dialogue is a key component of the holistic healing of whole systems; as

communities, we can't bring about restorative change without an effective process, a mindfulness-based approach for resolving conflict and building relationships, involving both the individual(s) who have caused harm and the individual(s) who have experienced harm. Within harm repair processes, Restorative Dialogues may occur when there are only a couple of people involved, or in larger group processes when smaller conversations are needed.

Restorative Practices: Originates from Indigenous world-views and have been central in a variety of Indigenous communities around the world from the beginning of time. These practices are diverse, yet are rooted in common values like: honesty, openness, understanding, acceptance, patience, and listening. Recognizing that everything—our communities, environments, families, and systems—are inextricably interconnected, restorative practices emphasize how we depend on each other for survival. If relationships are essential to our existence, restorative practices provide ways to maintain and honor these relationships by building communal spaces of planning, celebration, mourning, and repairing harm.

Repair Agreement: A collectively created agreement or plan that formalizes steps to repair the harm caused, often developed in harm repair circles and processes to support follow through and accountability.

Referral: When someone brings a case of harm to a restorative practitioner or restorative organization, either through word of mouth or through a formal process (often explained on the practitioner or organization's website). Referrals may come from those who were harmed, those who caused harm, community or family members who were affected, or State agents like members of law enforcement, court representatives, prosecutors, employees of the Department of Corrections (DOC), or schools.

Resolution: The outcome of a restorative process that aims to find a solution to resolve conflict after two or more parties experience harm through agreed steps to reach a space of healing and accountability for the parties involved. These steps should be specific, measurable, achievable, and honor the needs of those directly affected, their family and friends, the wider community, and the person(s) who caused harm.

Restorative Justice: Restorative Justice is a process that promotes repairing harm and rebuilding relationships between those who have experienced harm and those responsible for it. This voluntary process emphasizes responsibility, transparency, and accountability to address the consequences of wrongdoing, foster restoration, and identify participants' unmet needs. RJ applies the same principles and values of restorative practices when responding to incidents of harm. RJ predates the existence of Western law and has its roots in Indigenous practices that span the globe and is centered on interpersonal relationships, interconnectedness, and well-being.

Restorative Process: An umbrella term that includes harm repair, harm repair circles, community building, circles of care, re-entry circles, and more. Restorative processes may be responding to harm, but they can also be focused on community and relationship building so that communities are better equipped to address harm when it occurs. These processes are ways of practicing restorative justice.

Right relationship: An Indigenous term which refers to a holistic, reciprocal, and respectful way of being interconnected with all aspects of the world—humans, non-humans, land, and spirit. Right relationship is grounded in the understanding that all beings are relatives with inherent rights and responsibilities, and that harmony arises from balanced, ethical interactions.

Root Cause: The underlying reasons behind a problem or issue. To address the root cause of an issue means that we are identifying and remedying the core factors, rather than treating the symptoms, and thus can prevent the recurrence of issues.

Safety: The state of being protected from, or being unlikely to experience, risk, danger, or harm. To be unsafe means that you are in real danger and need to protect yourself. Feeling uncomfortable, on the other hand, is a sign that you are perhaps feeling challenged and are stepping outside of your comfort zone, which can be a catalyst for growth. Being unsafe is not to be equated with feeling uncomfortable.

Surrogate or proxy: A surrogate or proxy is someone who represents someone in a restorative process so that their voice can be heard without them being present. The use of surrogates or proxies is a trauma-informed practice, and is often used when those who have been harmed do not want to interact directly with the person(s) who harmed them.

Structural Violence: Social forces that harm certain groups of people, producing and perpetuating inequality in health and well-being. It includes social, economic, and political processes that manifest in both material and symbolic means of social exclusion.

Survivor: A person who has lived through harm and identifies as a survivor. This term often refers to survivors of experiences in which others have died by the experience, such as sexual violence, gun violence, cancer, etc.

Survivor-Focused: Centering the needs, experiences, and agency of the person who was harmed, while still recognizing the humanity, dignity, and needs of all parties involved—including those who caused harm and the broader community. A survivor-focused process utilizes a trauma-informed approach and prioritizes the survivor's voice and autonomy, ensuring that they have meaningful choice in how the process unfolds and what outcomes feel just or healing to them. To be survivor-focused does not imply a hierarchy of needs, but rather a commitment to ensuring that the person who was harmed is not marginalized, silenced, or retraumatized, while still holding space for everyone involved to be heard, to voice their needs, to take responsibility, and to heal.

System-Impacted: Refers to people affected by policing, legal, and corrections systems, as well as the foster care system. The term encompasses family members of those who are directly system-impacted.

Systemic Racism: Policies and practices that exist throughout a whole society or an organization that result in and support a continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others based on race.

Transformative Justice: TJ builds on RJ's principles of healing, relationship-building, and harm repair by going further, asking participants to consider what systems must be acknowledged, changed or dismantled for a more just community. TJ challenges us to not only repair harm when it happens, but to eliminate the conditions under which harm was possible. Often, this means engaging in healing work in community and outside of systems.

Trauma: A deeply distressing or disturbing experience(s) that may have been witnessed, experienced, or imagined and may have long-term psychological impacts, including depression, anxiety and panic attacks. Those who experience trauma may experience unpredictable emotions and exhibit aggressive or avoidant behaviors relating to their experience of harm. Flashbacks, trust issues, strained relationships, as well as memory and focus issues can be symptoms of trauma. Trauma may also manifest itself in physical symptoms like headaches, insomnia, or nausea. Trauma may be induced by interpersonal, historical, natural/environmental, systemic, and/or intergenerational events.

Truth Telling: Telling the truth about our history not only to bring colonial conflict and dispossession to light but to acknowledge the strength and resilience of oppressed peoples. Truth telling is part of a process of reparation, reconciliation, renewal, and growth.

Values: Fundamental principles, beliefs, or standards that guide the actions, behaviors, and decisions of individuals and communities. Values, which are generally shared in the beginning of and throughout an RJ/TJ process, reflect what participants consider to be important in their lives and relationships, such as respect, empathy, accountability, justice, etc. By sharing values, participants collectively create a foundation of mutual understanding and trust, which fosters a safe and supportive environment for addressing harm, restoring relationships, and transforming systems of justice. Shared values help to shape dialogue and can be referred back to, as needed, when conflicts of values may arise in conversation, regrounding the group in established shared values.

Violence: The act of causing harm. Violence can be physical and non-physical. There are many forms of violence, including physical, psychological/emotional, sexual, domestic, economic, symbolic, gender-based, institutional, workplace, media, cultural, and structural. Violence can be self-directed, collective, or interpersonal. Violence has many root causes including social conditioning of harmful ideologies such as white supremacy, colonialism, and imperialism, individuals' basic needs not being met, and lack of knowledge and practice of healthy emotional processing.

Voluntarism: the principle or system of doing something by or relying on voluntary action and informed consent; RJ/TJ processes rely on the voluntarism of participants who consent to engaging in process.

Values & Principles

Though RJ/TJ processes are flexible and adaptive to the needs of the participants and the cultural context in which they are practiced, they are rooted in common values and principles. Restorative and transformative work must be grounded in these values and principles, and otherwise may reproduce the status-quo. Often, institutions and systems – like schools or courts – seek to adopt restorative practices hoping for improved outcomes or better behaviors, but they fail to examine or change the values that underpin their organization. If the institution is based on values and principles which are antithetical to RJ/TJ – for example, retribution, hierarchy, discipline, racism, colonialism or order – their processes will be restorative only in name, and will likely look and feel just like punishment to those participating. The goals of restorative or transformative processes – like healing and understanding – cannot be achieved unless they are guided by the principles listed below.

These values and principles are not unique to restorative practices and the Indigenous communities that hold them, and can also be found in Western political, cultural, and religious communities or traditions. Among others these include: intentional communities, mutual aid groups, worker self-directed communities and cooperatives, collective movements steeped in non-violence, and affinity groups centering non-hierarchical collective decision-making, etc...

Furthermore, anyone, practitioners and non-practitioners alike, may strive to live through these values and principles in their day-to-day lives and cultivate a restorative mindset, finding healing and wholeness by tending to their personal relationships with restorative practices.

Restorative / Transformative Values: honesty, solidarity, accountability, integrity, dignity, empathy, compassion, justice, grace, curiosity, inclusivity, diversity, cultural sensitivity, connection, respect, relationships, recognition, reflection, reintegration, patience, openness, safety, vulnerability, community, accessibility, voluntarism, attention to power dynamics, understanding, growth, evolution, transformation

Restorative / Transformative Principles (values put into action):

- All people have fundamental worth; no one is disposable.
- All people have a right to dignity and respect.
- Healing, growth and change are possible and best supported in community.
- It is possible to repair harm and build stronger, more compassionate communities if we engage in honest and transparent dialogue that inspires collective action and active accountability.
- We must identify and understand the harm caused, its impacts, and the needs of those harmed and the unmet needs which led to the behavior that caused harm.
- Consent is essential, voluntary, informed, and ongoing.
- Safe space is space where we can struggle and stay connected in the struggle; it is not being in a space without feeling challenged by different perspectives or disagreements.

- Staying curious, asking questions, and seeking to understand allows for open communication, as opposed to making assumptions, projecting, and forming judgements.
- Carceral and punitive responses to harm cause more harm.
- Every person has their own lived experience and perspectives.
- Every RJ/TJ process is unique; processes are shaped by participants and their needs.
- Repair is approached collectively with collaboration and creativity.
- Everyone deserves access RJ/TJ processes.

Overarching Objectives of Restorative / Transformative Justice:

- Respond to harm without causing further harm by addressing harm non-punitively and in community with care.
- Foster healing for everyone- the person(s) harmed, the person(s) who caused harm, and the wider community.
- Reduce incarceration, probation, and other punitive conditions under the legal system.
- End mass incarceration, its harmful effects, and the violent behavior that leads to it.
- Work to challenge and transform underlying systems of oppression as root causes of structural violence.
- Strengthen and empower communities as a whole.
- Increase collective capacity to navigate conflict and harm restoratively.
- Promote growth, transformation, and positive connections while unlearning harmful behaviors.
- Prevent and decrease the likelihood of future harm recurring.

Objectives of a Restorative / Transformative Process:

- Engage those who have experienced harm, those who have caused harm, and the community to encourage healing, restoration, and transformation.
- Create safe space and conditions necessary for survivors of harm to be able to share about their experience and how they have been impacted by the harm.
- Promote the use of thoughtful language that encourages those who have caused harm to take meaningful accountability while centering the experiences and healing of those who experienced the harm.
- Apply and embrace restorative justice values and practices that integrate and support everyone impacted by harm (the individual(s) who experienced the harm, the individual(s) who caused the harm, and the broader community)
- Decrease legal system involvement, systems-imposed conditions, and systems-impact on individuals by supporting healing and rehabilitation through deeper understanding and personal/community responsibility
- Reduce incarceration, probation, and other conditions under the legal system by supporting healing and rehabilitation through deeper understanding and personal/community responsibility.
- Support successful reintegration of returning individuals back to their communities safely.

- Elevate the voice of the survivor of harm and their community
- Keep people supported and in community
- Foster healing in the wake of harm
- Models Restorative Practice/Justice as lifestyle and living society restoratively
- Cultivate restoration
- Develop resilience
- Reduce the risk of harm caused by individuals
- Reduce the risk of harm recurring while also reducing the overall likelihood of harm occurring in a community
- Reduce harm caused by systems
- Reduce and find alternatives to the use of punishment
- Increase access to Restorative Practices/Justice and Reintegration programs.
- Increase community accountability and a culture that supports restorative, transformative, trauma-informed justice

Process & Procedure

RJ/TJ processes are driven by values and shaped by the people participating in them; therefore, processes can look different each time. The RJ/TJ process is different depending on: the style of the facilitator, the context of the community, the nature and sincerity of the harm, the nature and closeness of relationships, and the stories and values that each person brings with them. Even so, there are some features of a restorative process that are essential and which facilitators include to ensure integrity and safety for all participants.

Typical process flow:

Incident/harm → Inquiry/Referral/beginning of process → Intake/initial meeting(s) to meet parties individually (confidentiality, consent) → Preparation → Circle/conference/meeting with consenting parties → Resolution/agreements/commitments → Repair phase with check-ins and follow-up → Closing Circle/Celebration/healing/restoration

*Consent and preparation are ongoing throughout the entire process.

Essential components of a restorative process:

- **Voluntary participation:** All parties consent to participate and can choose to end their participation in the process at any time. There are a spectrum of ways in which participants may choose to participate or engage in a process, including indirect communication like through a surrogate or written/recorded messages.

Participation may be incentivized, beyond the possibility for repair; for example, those who caused harm may be able to stay within community / return to community more quickly (like a youth returning to school sooner or someone having charges dismissed or reduced).

- **Confidentiality:** Facilitators and participants agree to keep specifics shared during the process confidential to foster trust and freedom of self-expression. Some facilitators may be mandatory reporters to the State and must share if they think someone is at risk of physical harm or causing physical harm to themselves or others. Participants should be made aware of this requirement and the limits to confidentiality.
- **Preparation:** Facilitators must spend time with individuals building trust, getting to know each other, and understanding the histories and needs of all participants, checking for voluntariness, and recruiting participants' thinking on what repair is needed and possible.
- **Community Agreements:** Participants create and agree to guiding principles and values. These commitments allow participants to collectively decide how they will engage in the process. These agreements build safety, trust and security in the process by ensuring that behaviors are

respectful, non-violent, and meet everyone's needs as they arise.

- **Purpose:** Though it may vary, from community building and celebration to repairing harm, there is always a stated purpose or intention for coming together in a restorative way.
- **Collective ownership:** Everyone has power in the circle. The facilitator is not in charge of the process; rather, the facilitator is a guide and collaborator. In other words, the facilitator may "own" the creation of the shape of the process and the participants "own" the outcomes.
- **Resolution:** The outcome of a restorative process looks different for each process, depending on the needs of its participants, but can include co-creation of commitments, a shared understanding, and/or repair.

Different depending on the facilitator and needs of participants:

- **Timeline:** There is no prescribed timeline for a restorative process. Some restorative practitioners or organizations have a minimum number of meetings that are required. Even so, some processes may require longer preparation stages or may require longer resolution building stages or multiple circles.
- **Type of circle, restorative encounter, dialogue, meeting, or conference:** Circles are often associated with restorative processes, but circles are one of many kinds of restorative processes which intend to reach a resolution with participants. For some participants, meetings with facilitators or family conferences may be a more appropriate way to find resolution. The participants might engage in a repair circle to create agreements and then spend most of their time working with practitioners or their support systems working toward fulfilling those agreements. Various types of restorative processes are commonly known as but are not limited to: restorative circles of accountability, support, or care; restorative circles; harm repair circles; victim-offender conferences; family group conferences; community group conferences; solution circles; peace circles; restorative mediation; and more.
- **Physical set-up:** If the participants choose to hold a circle, everyone sits in a circle around a centerpiece or empty space. The circle represents the shared power and expertise that each participant holds, but it also helps to create a flow for sharing, as the facilitator ensures each participant has a chance to share and listen. Oftentimes, a circle includes an object of some sort that serves as a talking piece, which is passed around the circle and whoever holds it is given the opportunity to speak, and the rest of the circle is invited to listen. Talking sticks are used in many Indigenous communities, in particular by people in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S.

To make the space as safe as possible for all participants, it is important to structure the space in a trauma-informed way. For example, participants may express needs about the objects in the

room, a choice in where they sit, or who sits beside them.

- **Who participates:** Participants always include the facilitator/co-facilitator(s) and may include the person(s) who caused harm, the person(s) who experienced harm, supportive people, family members and/or impacted community members. The process is not always direct harm repair between two parties: those who experience harm may not want to participate directly with those who hurt them and can connect through a surrogate, a proxy, communicate through the facilitator, or may choose to not participate at all. Likewise, the person who caused harm may not be willing to participate. In either case, a restorative process can take place with any number of participating parties, ranging from one individual to many, and focuses on increasing support, repairing harm, resourcing, learning, and healing.

Supporting Bibliography & Resource List

[Freedom & Captivity curriculum](https://www.freedom-captivity.org/fc-curriculum-project): <https://www.freedom-captivity.org/fc-curriculum-project> [Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing at the University of Minnesota](#):

<https://csh.umn.edu/academics/whole-systems-healing/restorative-dialogue>

[Decolonizing transformations through 'right relations'](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-021-00960-9): <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-021-00960-9>

Gram-Hanssen, I., Schafenacker, N. & Bentz, J. Decolonizing transformations through 'right relations'.

Sustain Sci 17, 673–685 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-021-00960-9>

[US Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)

Support local efforts by our Indigenous neighbors here in the Dawnland: the Wabanaki tribes, known as the Abenaki, Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot – the People of the Dawnland:

[Wabanaki Alliance](https://www.wabanakialliance.com/): <https://www.wabanakialliance.com/>

Wabanaki Alliance Legislative Bill Tracker: <https://www.wabanakialliance.com/legislative-bill-tracker/>

Join the Wabanaki Alliance Coalition: <https://www.wabanakialliance.com/coalition/>

[Wabanaki Reach](https://www.wabanakireach.org/): <https://www.wabanakireach.org/>

'Dawnland' documentary: <https://dawnland.org/>

Maine-based organizations offering community-based self referrals for restorative justice processes include:

Downeast Restorative Justice: <https://downeastrestorativejustice.org/>

Healing First!: <https://healingfirstcollective.org/>

Restorative Justice Institute of Maine: <https://www.rjimaine.org/>

Restorative Justice Project Maine: <https://rjpmaine.org/>

Youth-Led Justice: <http://www.youthledjustice.org/>

Essential resources on abolition and restorative & transformative justice:

Abolition X Podcast, <https://open.spotify.com/show/2XHbGCYwELws1tRqfWlqSq?si=b8cd6d5bccdb4ed4>

Abolitionist futures reading list, <https://abolitionistfutures.com/reading-lists>

American Prison Newspapers: 1800's to present–Voices from the Inside,

<https://about.jstor.org/revealdigital/american-prison-newspapers/>

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<https://healingfirst.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/a60ba-inittogether.pdf>
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<https://plsn-nyc.tumblr.com/>
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Resources on RJ/TJ & Sexual Harm + Interpersonal Violence/Domestic Violence

This is a list of organizations, conferences, and other resources that focus on sexual harm, assault, and IPV/DV, who are aligned with restorative and transformative justice work.

[A Call for Change helpline!](#) A Call For Change is a free, anonymous, and confidential intimate partner abuse prevention helpline.

CHAT Project (Collective Healing and Transformation) is a community-based, non-law enforcement restorative justice project addressing domestic and sexual violence. CHAT helps families and communities connect with each other and to learn (or relearn) practices for moving through conflict, reducing violence, and strengthening connections. Published: [Non-Law Enforcement Restorative Justice](#)

[Addressing Domestic and Sexual Violence: Evaluation Results from The CHAT Project Pilot.](#)

New York Coalition Against Sexual Violence put on a conference called [Ending Violence Without Violence](#) that was co-created/sponsored by [Interrupting Criminalization](#) and [Seven Dancers Coalition](#).

[The National Sexual Assault Conference](#), August 26-28th 2025

[Just Beginnings](#) current activist in residence is [Shannon Perez- Darby](#) who is from [Mandatory Reporting is Not Neutral](#)– a project that works to end mandatory reporting and founding member of [Accountable Communities Consortium](#).

[Moment of Truth](#) is a statement that was written and signed onto by over a dozen coalitions to end sexual assault and domestic violence, seeking to end carceral solutions, and calls for community-based solutions.

[Transform Harm](#) has a section where there are a number of articles that speak to concerns about working with people who cause harm.

[Api Chaya](#) is an example of a project that operates using transformative justice as a part of their sexual violence and domestic violence work.

[Interrupting Criminalization](#) is a movement resource hub offering information, cross-movement networks, learning, and practice for organizers, practitioners, and advocates on the cutting edge of efforts to build a world free of criminalization, policing, punishment, and violence. Also home of the free [Transformational Help Desk](#).

Workbooks and Toolkits

Specific to community accountability and transformative justice:

[Generation Five](#)

Creative Interventions- here is a [link to the online](#) version but I strongly recommend getting the physical copies of [both the toolkit and the workbook here](#).

[Fumbling Towards Repair: A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators](#)

[Safety Planning and Intimate Partner Violence](#) by Survived and Punished (their site has more curriculum and toolkits too)

[Support New York](#) (curriculum to work with people who have caused harm (sexual violence and IPV)

[Transform HARM](#) which is a resource hub for ending violence

Organizations (All are queer, trans and BIPOC survivor led):

[Just Practice](https://just-practice.org/about-just-practice) : <https://just-practice.org/about-just-practice>

[Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective](https://batjc.wordpress.com/): <https://batjc.wordpress.com/>

[Ahimsa](https://www.ahimsacollective.net/): <https://www.ahimsacollective.net/>

[Mirror Memoirs](https://mirrormemoirs.com/): <https://mirrormemoirs.com/>

[CUAV](https://www.cuav.org/): <https://www.cuav.org/>

[Heal 2 End](https://heal2end.org/): <https://heal2end.org/>

[Fireweed Collective](https://fireweedcollective.org/): <https://fireweedcollective.org/>

[Survived and Punished](https://survivedandpunished.org/): <https://survivedandpunished.org/>

[Trans Latina Coalition](https://www.translatinacoalition.org/): <https://www.translatinacoalition.org/>

[Trans LifeLine](https://translifeline.org/): <https://translifeline.org/> (national but was Cali based)

[Strong Hearts Native Helpline](https://strongheartshelpline.org/) (national hotline): <https://strongheartshelpline.org/>

[Philly Stands Up!](http://phillystandsup.wordpress.com/about/): <http://phillystandsup.wordpress.com/about/>

[Northwest Network](#) (does training on QTBIPOC survivorship):

<http://phillystandsup.wordpress.com/about/>
[API Chaya](https://www.apichaya.org/) (Seattle): <https://www.apichaya.org/>
[Growing a New Heart](https://growinganewheart.org/) (does training on SH and IPV): <https://growinganewheart.org/>
[A Time to Spring Up](https://www.timetospringup.org/): <https://www.timetospringup.org/>
[CHAT](https://chatproject.org/): <https://chatproject.org/>

Books:

[Feminist Accountability](#) Disrupting Violence and Transforming Power, Ann Russo
[Beyond Survival Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement](#), Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha
[Love with Accountability](#) Digging up the Roots of Childhood Sexual Harm, Aishah Shahidah Simmons (book and project)
[The Color of Violence Incite! Anthology](#) edited by [INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence](#)
[Revolution Starts at Home](#) Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities Ching-In Chen (Editor); Jai Dulani (Editor); Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (Editor)
[Liberated to the Bone](#) Histories. Bodies. Futures. Susan Raffo
[Healing Justice Lineages](#); Dreaming at the Crossroads of Liberation, Collective Care, and Safety, Cara Page and Erica Woodland
[Saving Our Own Lives; A Liberatory Practice of Harm Reduction](#), Shira Hassan
[The Feminist and the Sex Offender; Confronting Sexual Harm, Ending State Violence](#), Erica Meiners and Judith Levine
[Insurgent Love: Abolition and Domestic Homicide](#), [Ardath Whynacht](#)

Film:

[Hollow Water](#): directed Bonnie Dickie This documentary profiles the tiny Ojibway community of Hollow Water on the shores of Lake Winnipeg as they deal with an epidemic of sexual abuse in their midst. The Manitoba justice system was unsuccessful in ending the cycle of abuse, so the community of Hollow Water took matters into their own hands. https://www.nfb.ca/film/hollow_water/

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