

## Restorative Justice Definitions

*These definitions are from varied restorative justice leaders, organizations and collaborations that reflects a range of ideas and experiences.*

### Howard Zehr

“Restorative justice emerged in the 1970s as an effort to correct some of the weaknesses of the western legal system while building on its strengths. An area of special concern has been the neglect of victims and their needs; legal justice is largely about what to do with offenders. It has also been driven by a desire to hold offenders truly accountable. Recognizing that punishment is often ineffective, restorative justice aims at helping offenders to recognize the harm they have caused and encouraging them to repair the harm, to the extent it is possible. Rather than obsessing about whether offenders get what they deserve, restorative justice focuses on repairing the harm of crime and engaging individuals and community members in the process.

It is basically common sense – the kind of lessons our parents and foreparents taught – and that has led some to call it a way of life. When a wrong has been done, it needs to be named and acknowledged. Those who have been harmed need to be able to grieve their losses, to be able to tell their stories, to have their questions answered – that is, to have the harms and needs caused by the offense addressed. They – and we – need to have those who have done wrong accept their responsibility and take steps to repair the harm to the extent it is possible.

As you might imagine with so many Google references, the usage of the term varies widely. Sometimes it is used in ways that are rather far removed from what those in the field have intended. So when you see the term, you might ask yourself these questions: Are the wrongs being acknowledged? Are the needs of those who were harmed being addressed? Is the one who committed the harm being encouraged to understand the damage and accept his or her obligation to make right the wrong? Are those involved in or affected by this being invited to be part of the “solution?” Is concern being shown for everyone involved? If the answers to these questions are “no,” then even though it may have restorative elements, it isn’t restorative justice.” (<http://www.emu.edu/cjp/restorative-justice/what-is-ri/>) [link]

### Kay Pranis

“Restorative justice is not a particular program or a fixed set of practices. It is a framework for guiding our actions in large and small ways in every part of the justice system. Additionally, restorative justice places a high value on: 1) empowering those closest to the problem (including the offender) to design a specific solution tailored to the problem and 2) viewing every problem as an opportunity to learn. Consequently, fluid, flexible approaches are essential to maintain the spirit of restorative justice – to leave key decisions to the stakeholders and to continually incorporate new learnings. So, in many ways restorative justice is a journey, more than it is a destination. If the journey is guided by the principles and values of restorative justice, the destination may be one that no one anticipated, but it will be one

that serves all the stakeholders.” ~Kay Pranis “[Restorative Justice in Minnesota and the USA: Implementation and Outcomes](#)”) [linked]

### **Carolyn Boyes-Watson**

“According to Dr. Carolyn Boyes-Watson (2014), restorative justice is a broad term which encompasses a growing social movement to institutionalize peaceful approaches to harm, problem-solving and violations of legal and human rights. These range from international peacemaking tribunals such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa to innovations within our criminal justice system, schools, social services and communities.

Rather than privileging the law, professionals and the state, restorative resolutions engage those who are harmed, wrongdoers and their affected communities in search of solutions that promote repair, reconciliation and the rebuilding of relationships. Restorative justice seeks to build partnerships to re-establish mutual responsibility for constructive responses to wrongdoing within our communities. Restorative approaches seek a balanced approach to the needs of the victim, wrongdoer and community through processes that preserve the safety and dignity of all. (Boyes-Watson, C. (2014). Suffolk University, College of Arts & Sciences, Center for Restorative Justice)”  
(<https://www.suffolk.edu/college/centers/15970.php>) [Link]

### **International Institute for Restorative Practices (“IIRP”)**

“The fundamental premise of restorative practices is that people are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes when those in authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them. The IIRP distinguishes between the terms *restorative practices* and *restorative justice*. We view restorative justice practices as a subset of restorative practices. Restorative justice practices are *reactive*, consisting of formal or informal responses to crime and other wrongdoing after it occurs. The IIRP's definition of restorative practices also includes the use of informal and formal processes that precede wrongdoing, those that proactively build relationships and a sense of community to prevent conflict and wrongdoing.” (<http://www.iirp.edu/what-is-restorative-practices.php>) [Link]

### **Mark Umbreit**

Restorative justice emphasizes the importance of elevating the role of crime victims and community members through more active involvement in the justice process, holding offenders directly accountable to the people and communities they have violated, restoring the emotional and material losses of victims, and providing a range of opportunities for dialogue, negotiation, and problem solving, whenever possible, which can lead to a greater sense of community safety, social harmony, and peace for all involved. (Mark Umbreit, U. of Minnesota)

### **Wikipedia**

“Restorative justice is an approach to justice that focuses on the needs of the victims and the offenders, as well as the involved community, instead of satisfying abstract legal principles or punishing the offender. Victims take an active role in the process, while offenders are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions, "to repair the harm they've done”

National Institute of Justice [link] provided the following definitions:

Authentic restorative justice is a continuum that includes underlying principles, basic tenets, general public policies, and specific practices, programs and procedures. It is a sound, comprehensive understanding of the relationships affected by crime that recognized that the criminal justice system must focus on the full circle of injuries, needs and responsibilities of crime victims, offenders, the community, and the government. (Restorative Justice Institute)

"The concept of restorative justice is..a new paradigm for doing justice that starts at the grassroots with ordinary members of the community as well as victims and offenders.inclusive of all whose lives are affected by wrongdoing." (Ottawa, Ontario Church Council on Justice and Corrections)

Restorative justice: apology and forgiveness, including participation in culture based cleansing ceremonies, traditional counseling and advisement, etc. (Ada Melton, author and development consultant in Navajo country)

.. A way of dealing with victims and offenders by focusing on the settlement of conflicts arising from crime and resolving the underlying problems which cause it. It is also, more widely, a way of dealing with crime generally in rational problem solving way. Central to RJ is the recognition of the community, rather than criminal justice agencies, as the prime site of crime control.. (Tony Marshall, author and researcher from Great Britain)

restorative justice; noun, an alternative concept in corrections according to which only violent career criminals would be imprisoned, while non-violent offenders would work in closely monitored community projects, earning money with which to make financial restitution to their victims and their victims' families, to repay court and corrections costs, and to support their own families: "With RJ, we hold offenders accountable and make the victim the center of the criminal justice process" - Joe Lehman, Maine's corrections commissioner - (as cited in Atlantic Monthly)

"Restorative justice is a theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused or revealed by criminal behavior. It is best accomplished through cooperative processes that include all stakeholders."Restorative Justice Online (restorativejustice.org) [link]