

Restorative Justice: What's it all about??

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Restorative Justice defines a way of responding to crime or harm. The philosophy of Restorative Justice provides guidance for our response at every level. Restorative Justice focuses on:

- putting things right when they have gone wrong
- meaningful accountability
- engaging moral authority because it is more powerful for influencing behavior than legal authority
- recognizing that moral authority depends upon relationships of caring and, consequently, communities and families have more moral authority than courts do
- restoring a proper balance of power and engaging healthy personal power for those harmed, those causing harm and those around them impacted by the harm

Accountability (for everyone) has the following elements:

- Recognizing/acknowledging that your behavior caused harm.
- Understanding from the person harmed exactly what the harm was.
- Acknowledging that you had choice in causing that harm.
- Taking steps to repair the harm or make amends – literal or symbolic.
- Taking steps to change lifestyle patterns that may have contributed to making the choice to cause harm.

Personal power is a fundamental human need. When an individual fulfills the elements of accountability, he/she gains healthy personal power reducing the need to take power in harmful ways.

The Community, in the Restorative Justice framework, plays a much more important role than in the conventional framework. Community responsibilities are as follows:

- Rally around the victim – independent of questions regarding the person who caused the harm.
- Participate in inclusive, collaborative processes to decide the obligations that flow from the harms.
- Support the person who caused harm in taking responsibility and making amends.
- Identify and address underlying causes that may have contributed to the harm.
- Establish and maintain community norms of behavior that attend to the well-being of every member of the community.

When communities fulfill these responsibilities they help to establish healthy personal power and a proper balance of power for all community members.

Juvenile Justice Professionals must ask themselves: *What steps can we take to support the elements of accountability above and engage the critical community responsibilities above?*

Restorative practices provide one way to achieve those goals. However, formal processes are not the only way to achieve restorative goals. If you see your job as about putting things right and promoting healing then each and every communication and decision you make is an opportunity to further that vision.

In a Restorative response to harm an overriding principle is: **DO NO FURTHER HARM** remembering that we are profoundly interconnected and **HARM TO ONE IS HARM TO ALL**.