

Restorative Practices

What are Restorative Practices?

Restorative practices are based in a restorative framework and are the set of *actionables* taken. In short, restorative-based services have been found to be better and more successful for healing and redirection than their counterparts.

Restorative practices use a restorative framework as an approach to building and maintaining relationships, communication, empathy, and wrongdoing or ‘harm.’ Restorative practices consist of tools used to both build trust and safety as well as to repair relationships and to begin dialogue between individuals, families, and communities in order to address behaviors and actions that have harmed, negatively impacted, and damaged relationships. Restorative practices are used to open, re-open, and maintain lines of communication, and are where true healing, respect, and understanding begins.

With so much present-day divisiveness, we can ask ourselves, *how was caring unlearned?* Peace isn’t simply the absence of hostilities. True peace often requires a change of heart and attitude. A restorative framework asks of us to be open to understanding the life, context, experiences, and suffering of one another, and to demonstrate a willingness to see the humanity in others’ situations and experiences. Empathy and compassion are the natural states of humans. Compassion cannot exist without an empathetic orientation and lens.

What is a Restorative Framework?

In this context, a *framework* refers to the attitudes and values with which one engages in relationships, communication, and conflict. It is important to understand the definitions of both a restorative and a dominant framework.

A restorative framework is a methodology, a set of tools, an attitude, and a practice. It is a foundational set of values that yields positive peace between individuals and within families and communities when behaviors and actions have harmed and damaged relationships. It allows for people to open, re-open, and maintain lines of communication and is vital for true healing, respect, and understanding begins.

Although retribution and/or consequences can still be used for wrongdoings, the focus of a restorative framework shifts us from *what rules are broken and what punishment is deserved* to *what harm was done and who/what needs to be done to repair that harm*. A restorative framework explores impact not blame.

A restorative framework encompasses an attitude and language of connection (vs. disconnection) even when there is disagreement. It explores and stands for moving from a blaming and “either/or” “right/wrong” framework as it relates to issues of empathy, understanding, responsibility, harm, and repair. Both/all parties can both give and receive empathy and understanding while maintaining their own opinions, values, and viewpoints. This framework humanizes and involves responsibility from all parties.

The questions to ask ourselves: *How can we shift from punishing or shaming people with whom we don't agree or whom offended us, to tuning into the feelings and needs of others and speaking to our own feelings and needs. How can we help to dismantle a culture of blame and hurt while still acknowledging the hurt we each experience? Why does it seem that it is a contest for who has been hurt the most? Why does it seem that there isn't room for everyone's pain, hurt, and/or being misunderstood and only some people's? What are the roots of this? What blocks understanding? Why are people often threatened by differing points of view? What actually is empathy (and what is it not) and how can we respond with it even when we disagree?*

What is a Dominant Framework?

The opposite of a restorative framework is a *dominant framework*. This is a framework built on system of oppression and colonization. It is based in an individualistic value system (vs. collectivist), it is blame and shame based. The values guiding this framework imply that someone else is responsible for your feelings. When harm or hurt occurs, in the dominant framework, only one person gets empathy, a voice, understanding, gets to be the most wounded.....therefore the other "side" must be guilty and "at fault." It sends the message that only certain people/one person is worthy of understanding and empathy because in order for things to work, someone MUST be at fault.

A dominant (blaming) framework can create resistance. In the same way that when we lift weights, we are adding resistance. That resistance serves to strengthen the muscle, not weaken it (unless the amount of weight is. Essentially, the resisting protest serves to strengthen the domination structure. Blame doesn't inspire people to be kind, to listen, or to change.

What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative justice uses a restorative framework. The questions asked in this form of justice are:

- Who was impacted?
- What are their needs?
- Whose obligations are these?

Restorative justice is used between individuals and within families and communities in order address behaviors and actions that have harmed and damaged relationships. It is used to open, re-open, and maintain lines of communication, and is where true healing, respect, and understanding begins. Although retribution and/or consequences can still be used for wrongdoings, the focus shifts from 'what rules are broken and what punishment is deserved' to 'what harm was done and who/what needs to be done to repair that harm.' Often, restorative justice involves both the victim, the offender, and the community (or members of it.)

What is Restorative-Based Dialogue?

The purpose of the restorative-based dialogue:

- To talk about what needs to be talked about. No one in particular decides what needs to be talked about – everyone has a voice and equal power.
- To recognize that everyone has a ‘side’ to tell; all ‘sides’ get to be shared.
- To talk about how each person has been negatively impacted, to share honestly what each person’s intentions were, and to repair any harm/prepare for the future.
- The focus is to clear the path vs. solve the problem.

You can tell communication is restorative if.....:

- Everyone is heard; everyone has a chance to tell his or her ‘side.’
- People speak ‘from the heart.’
- The communication is not shame or blame based.
- People’s feelings aren’t dismissed.
- People are able to hear in what ways they have had a negative impact on others.
- Rules and punishment are not the dominant mindset.
- Respect - how you show it is not necessarily how the other person needs it. If others feel disrespected, it is your responsibility to adapt your style.
- Taking responsibility is valued over focusing on the mistake that was made/wrongdoing that was done.