

Restorative Justice Basics

Current ***Criminal Justice System*** asks three basic questions when a crime is committed:
What law was broken? Who did it? What punishment do they deserve?

Restorative Justice asks these questions;
Who was harmed by the crime? What are their needs? Whose obligation is it to meet those needs? (Howard Zehr)

Restorative Justice can be described generically as: “Nonviolent responses to injustice, violation and/or violence in which victims and offenders (as well as their communities and other stakeholders) can identify harms, needs and responsibilities so that they can determine how to make things as right as possible, which can include covenants of accountability, restitution, reparations and even reconciliation.”



Some needs of crime victims

- Safety (physical & emotional)
- Supportive relationships
- Empowerment
- Information/Answers/ Meaning
 - What happened? Why did it happen to me? What has happened since?*
 - Why did I act the way I did at the time? Why have I acted as I have since the crime? What if it happens again?*
 - Where are my belongings?*
 - What does this mean for me & for my outlook (my faith, my vision of the world, my future)?*
- Compensation for losses
- Their story heard and vindicated
- An opportunity to express their feelings
- Remorse from offender/ will not repeat offense
- Transcending/surviving

Some needs of crime victims families

- All of the above victim needs
- Relief from taking care of victim's trauma

Some needs of offenders

- Safety (physical & emotional) in prison/ from retaliation
- Supportive relationships
- Information (legal proceedings, options, including RJ)
- Accountability
 - Admit one's choice to commit the crime
 - Understand human consequences of the crime
 - Address resulting harms
 - Encourage empathy - face up to what one has done and to whom
- Storytelling (past & present)

- Understand needs/ why one committed the crime
 - Healing for past harms
 - Opportunities for treatment of addictions
 - Opportunities to improve work skills, personal competencies
- Opportunity to make things right/ take responsibility
- Support/ empowerment to integrate into community
- Transformed identity
- Grace

Some needs of offender families

- Safety (physical & emotional)
 - For themselves and for their loved one in prison
- Supportive relationships
- Grace
- Opportunity to make amends on loved ones behalf
- Information
- Family services (loss of income)
- Support groups
- Transportation & visitation services
- Transition help when offender comes home

Some needs of community (church, neighborhood, school, etc.)

- Decrease recidivism & crime
- Decrease fear of crime
- Community service
- Recognize human aspect of crime
- Opportunities to build a sense of community and mutual accountability
- Encouragement to take on their obligations for the welfare of community members (both victim and offender)
- Safety
- Education
- Reintegrating people back into community

Some needs of Criminal Justice System

- Reduced case load and prison population
- Adequate resources
- Accountability to community
- Flexibility & multiple alternatives
- Education/training in RJ

For further reading see Elaine Enns & Ched Myers, *Ambassadors of Reconciliation* (Orbis 2009). And Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*

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