

Restorative Justice

“We believe, however, that there is another kind of justice—a restorative justice which is concerned not so much with punishment as with correcting imbalances, restoring broken relationships—with healing, harmony and reconciliation.” – Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Restorative Justice Defined

Restorative justice is both a way to think about crime and respond to it. In contrast to retributive justice, which focuses on punishment, restorative justice decenters the role of criminal law and law enforcement as problem solvers when wrong has been done to individuals and communities.

Core Principles and Values

- Repairing harm should be the goal of justice
 - This principle views crime as a producer of harm and focuses on remedying that harm.
- Identifying and taking steps to repair harm should center those affected
 - In order to move forward, the process must involve the voices of survivors, wrongdoers, and the community as a whole.
- Building peace and accountability is the role of all stakeholders
 - There is an obligation to address harm and repair community relations.

Importance

Restorative justice is important because it fosters communication and is not punishment focused. It is a belief that accountability can lie outside of the criminal legal system. It is an approach that acknowledges the harm done to victim/survivors of wrongdoing and provides support for healing. In other words, restorative justice is not punishment with a smile—its an approach that centers all parties impacted by conflict and envisions a way to move forward that doesn't label members of our community throwaways. Folks from marginalized populations have been subjected to very punitive responses via the criminal legal system, social service providers, etc. It is important to interrogate the use of punishment as a safety tool.

Organizations in DC that utilize restorative justice principles include:

- [Collaborative Solutions for Communities \(CSC\)](#)
- [Critical Exposure](#)
- [DC Alliance for Restorative Practices](#)
- [DC Peace Team](#)
- [The Peace Alliance](#)

principles that can be replicated in other spaces.

Connection to Harm Reduction

Harm reduction is an approach to reduce the negative consequences associated with certain activities, including drug use and sex work. Restorative justice and harm reduction go hand-in-hand. In order to “meet people where they are,” it is important that harm reduction services are low-barrier and non-coercive—this mean that clients are able to easily access services and are not forced to comply with excessive program requirements in order to receive the support they need.

When harm reduction service providers maintain drop-in spaces for clients, both staff and clients should be trained in conflict prevention and deescalation strategies. Applying a restorative justice framework can equip clients with tools to rebuild relationships with each other and the space by centralizing guiding

In a pilot restorative justice and harm reduction program in Ontario, clients were able to receive training and serve as “restorative justice facilitators.” Programs such as these are instrumental in challenging punitiveness in our society. A restorative justice approach does not compromise safety but rather builds the community's capacity to foster safety and accountability internally.



Reducing harm in the nation's capital since 1993

HIPS is a harm reduction service provider and advocacy organization providing support to persons impacted by sexual exchange and/or drug use in the District of Columbia. For more information about HIPS, visit www.hips.org.