



Restorative Practice Values and Principles

Introduction

The Restorative Practices Ireland (RPI) Quality Assurance Framework 'Aspiring to High Quality Restorative Practices' was published in 2021 as a contribution to achieving RPI's key objective of supporting the growth, evolution and sustainability of restorative practice in Ireland. It is designed to provide clear, practical information and to encourage and support individuals and organisations to achieve high-quality restorative practice consistently. It draws on published international standards and the experience and insights of RPI members. It is a resource for individual practitioners, service managers, policymakers, funders and oversight bodies.

The complete Framework, including additional material on values, objectives and principles is available at <https://www.restorativepracticesireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CDI-RPI-QA-Framework-web-2-1.pdf>.

The QA Framework relates to restorative practice in all its guises and in all domains. RPI sees restorative practice as a continuum of practice that features use of restorative language (expressing feelings and needs) and one-to-one conversations at the more informal and universal end of the continuum and facilitated circles, meetings and conferences at the more formal and targeted end. Domains of application include criminal justice, schools, youth work, workplaces, communities and families and in both statutory and voluntary organisations. Restorative practices emerged from restorative justice but go beyond dealing with the aftermath of harmful behaviour to include proactive relationship building and conflict prevention.

The quality of restorative practice relates to the extent to which practice adheres to restorative values and principles and takes account of restorative objectives. This document focuses on values, principles and objectives set out in the QA Framework. Other documents in this series focus on Restorative Standards, Guidance for Practitioners and Quality Assurance Mechanisms. Checklists from the Framework are available on the RPI website as separate leaflets. The discussion here draws on a number of sources, references for which are provided at the end of the document.

Restorative Values

Commonly accepted restorative values in criminal justice settings include reparation, respect, voluntariness, inclusion, empowerment, safety, accountability and transformation (Department of Justice Canada, 2018), as well as justice, solidarity and responsibility, respect for human dignity, and truth (European Forum for Restorative Justice, 2018).

Restorative justice processes should also be honest, informed, accessible, appropriate, confidential, not about establishing guilt, proportionate, empowering and facilitating, and look to the future as well as the past (Scottish Government, 2017). In its restorative practices training, the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) refers also to values of fairness, personal accountability, collaboration and problem-solving.

Zehr (2002) emphasises three fundamental values: interconnectedness, particularity and respect. In Zehr's view, interconnectedness refers to the web of relationships between people that crime or harm disrupts; particularity recognises diversity and individuality and appreciates that context, culture and personality are important; and respect applies to all, including those who are different or perceived as enemies.

RPI believes that these values are relevant wherever harm has been caused and that most of the values are relevant to restorative practices that focus on preventing conflict and building and maintaining relationships.

Restorative principles

RPI summarises restorative principles under five headings and presents its standards under these headings:

- voluntary participation,
- inclusivity and engagement,
- empowerment and restoration,
- safety, and
- accountability and support.

The RPI principles draw on a number of sources that articulate restorative principles in different ways and stress different aspects. The Restorative Justice Council, for example lists six principles: restoration, voluntarism, impartiality, safety, accessibility and empowerment (2020: 8). The European Forum for Restorative Justice (2018:5) identifies seven principles:

- voluntary participation based on informed consent,
- direct and authentic communication,
- processes designed to fit the participants' needs, capabilities and culture,
- valuing each participant's needs and wishes equally,
- non-judgemental, 'multipartial' facilitation,
- the importance of dialogue, and
- rigorous implementation of agreed actions.

Restorative objectives

Quality assurance also needs to reflect restorative objectives in different settings. In a school setting, for example, objectives might include a positive, mutually supportive learning environment, a focus on making, maintaining and repairing relationships and developing social responsibility, and a reduction in anti-social or disruptive behaviour. Similar objectives could apply to youth work or residential care settings, along with promoting and enabling young people to take responsibility for their behaviour and for the atmosphere and social environment. In communities, families and workplaces, objectives might be improvement of relationships, reduction in conflict and strengthening of collaboration.

In criminal justice, and any setting where harm has been caused, objectives typically include:

- Supporting harmed persons, giving them a voice, listening to their story, encouraging them to express their needs and wishes, providing them with answers, enabling them to participate in the resolution process and offering them assistance;
- Repairing the relationships damaged by the harm, in part by arriving at a consensus on how best to respond to it;
- Reaffirming community values and denouncing harmful behaviour;
- Encouraging responsibility-taking by all concerned parties, particularly by those who caused the harm;
- Identifying restorative, forward-looking outcomes, and
- Preventing recurrence by encouraging change in individuals who caused harm and facilitating their (re)integration into the community (see United Nations, 2020:6-8).

The repair of harm is the primary aim of restorative justice processes, with harm understood in broad terms of harm to victims, communities, offenders and relationships (Restorative Justice Consortium, 2004). Key goals of restorative justice can be seen as putting key decisions in the hands of those most affected; making justice more healing and, ideally, more transformative; reducing the likelihood of future harm; ensuring that those harmed come out of the process satisfied, outcomes address the reasons for the harmful behaviour and, both the harmed person and harm-doer get a sense of 'closure' and are reintegrated (see Sharpe, 1998).

References

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