

Principles of Restorative Practices

In Vermont, services embracing a restorative vision for addressing harm continue to evolve and expand. This dynamic landscape creates an important opportunity to establish a core set of shared principles by which the providers deliver services. Through actively applying these principles, we seek to ensure a consistent intent and observable standard for engaging those served and affected by our efforts. In the words of Howard Zehr, “Restorative Justice is a compass, not a map.”¹ As such, the following principles are meant to orient and guide us toward effectively supporting relationships rooted in justice and respect. The Community Justice, Balanced and Restorative Justice, Court Diversion, and Pre-Trial Services strive to operate based on these principles.

1. **Harmful actions are violations of people and relationships.**

- While harmful actions may or may not be violations of law, the primary concern is the physical, emotional, and social impact such acts have on people—those directly harmed, impacted or victimized, family members, community members, those who have committed the acts— and the relationships among them.

2. **Violations create obligations.**

- Each situation is complex and creates obligations to repair harm to the extent possible, as defined by all those affected.
- Those who have caused harm and victimization have a responsibility to gain insight concerning their actions, to make amends, and to learn ways to avoid causing future harm or victimization.
- Community and government, in partnership, have responsibilities to provide support and accountability to all its members when a violation has occurred.
- Community and government have responsibilities to address conditions that may contribute to crime and delinquency as well as encourage mutual respect and healthy communities.

3. **Restorative justice seeks to engage and support those who have been harmed or victimized.**

- People who have been victimized or harmed are in the best position to know what their needs are and what is important to them. They should be provided opportunities to participate, shape the process, make decisions and seek resolution.
- People who have been victimized or harmed may determine their level of participation through a meaningful invitation, an opportunity to share how the incident affected them, being deeply listened to and by identifying how their needs may best be met.

¹ Zehr, Howard. (2002, pg. 10). *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.