



# Restorative Approaches for Communities in Conflict:

Exploring Collective Harm, Building Resilience

March 2023

# Contents

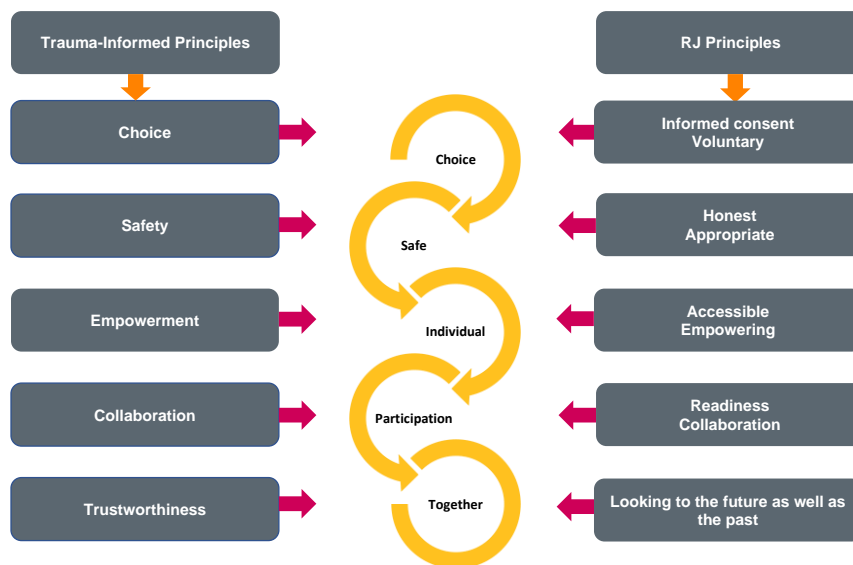
<b>1. Restorative Approaches</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>2. Restorative Conversations</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>3. Restorative Circles</b> .....	<b>5</b>
3.1 Restorative Circle Process .....	5
3.2 Types of Restorative Circles .....	7
3.2.1 Problem-Solving Circle.....	7
3.2.2 Transition or Reintegration Circle .....	7
<b>4. Place Standard Tool</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>5. The Connected Community</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>6. Restorative Approaches in Justice</b> .....	<b>10</b>

# 1. Restorative Approaches

Restorative approaches are a way of dealing with a harm and/or conflict which places the focus on reparation. It is person-centred, and cannot be achieved without input from those involved in the harm and/or conflict, particularly persons harmed. Each situation is different and requires facilitation from someone with appropriate training, which can recognise this.

In order to support a trauma-informed and person centred restorative approach, restorative services offer choice, safety, togetherness, participation and individuality as core principles in their practice. This acknowledges the ‘fusion’ between restorative and trauma-informed principles (Figure 1.1 below). Demonstrating these principles in action, and their impact, is an evidenced method of moving from a service being ‘trauma-informed’ to ‘trauma-responsive.’

**Figure 1.1**



Restorative justice development and delivery in Scotland is a workstream under the [Vision for Justice in Scotland](#) and the priority of ‘trauma informed and person centred.’ Activity is covered by the [Restorative Justice Action Plan](#).

While this work takes a focus on dialogue between a person who has caused harm and a person harmed, Community Justice Scotland (CJS) and stakeholders are also working to evidence learning in restorative approaches for the criminal and civil justice systems. This paper aims to set out what restorative circles and community engagement approaches are, their benefits and potential application in justice settings, for justice services and in the aftermath of harm caused and experienced.

## 2. Restorative Conversations

Restorative conversations use restorative language and open questions to support an individual to understand the impact of their behaviour and to find solutions in how to move on for that and, often, to make amends. While traditionally, this has been used across education in Scotland, the practice is easily applicable to a range of justice and community settings.

[Education Scotland](#) provide a number of open questions which might be used in a restorative conversation. These should be completed by individuals who have been trained in listening skills, empathy, the use of language including body language and understanding situations from another person's point of view.

- What happened?
- What were your thoughts at the time?
- What have been your thoughts since?
- Who has been affected by what happened?
- How have they been affected?
- What needs to happen now?

[Relate NI](#) also provide six steps for restorative conversations, which again can be applied in the approach with children, young people and adults.

- At the right time, open the lines of communication – let the person know you will listen and hear their perspective. No judgement.
- Allow them to explain the situation from their perspective – try to see the situation from their point of view.
- Identify what led up to the incident and any root causes – to gain a greater understanding of the situation.
- Identify the impact – help the person understand how their behaviour has impacted others around them, both directly and indirectly.
- Address needs and repair harm – help the person to resolve the problem in a way they feel good about, even if there is a consequence.
- Create an agreement – this can be verbal, written or a contract. Remember to follow through on your promises in this.

## 3. Restorative Circles

The most common restorative approach taken to working with communities who have experienced harm and/or conflict are restorative circles. Circles provide a safe and equal platform for effective discussions, shared decision making and a sharing of power. They can include communities, families, children and young people.

Circles seek to achieve empathy through encouraging listening, respectful communication and a consideration of the impact of behaviours on others. They can be used as a process to check in, a form of shared healing, to identify solutions to a problem or to consider a transition or change. Outcomes sought and achieved from restorative circles include a voice for those affected, respectful communication, shared ownership of problem-solving and solutions, and the ability for services to act in a way which meets the needs of those affected.

The principles of circles (Pranis, Stewart, Wedge 2011) can be set out as follows.

- Circles call us to act on our personal values (need for self-reflection)
- Circles include all interests
- Circles are easily accessible to all
- Circles offer everyone an equal opportunity to participate
- Involvement in circles is voluntary
- In circles everyone participates directly as themselves
- Circles are guided by a shared vision
- Circles are designed by those who use them
- Circles are flexible in accommodating unique needs and interests
- Circles take a holistic approach
- Circles maintain a respect for all

Circles foster accountability to others and to the process.

### 3.1 Restorative Circle Process

A circle is best without barriers, and so a simple circle of chairs without tables is recommended. Choosing a safe, neutral space for the circle is also important and this should be discussed with participants in advance. It may also be appropriate to ensure refreshments are available and that there are suitable toilet facilities and disabled

access. The circle facilitator will decide who should attend and ensure all participants understand the approach and the role of the facilitator.

At the circle, the facilitator sets the tone and values in collaboration with those present. They will also take appropriate control of discussions to ensure everyone is heard and the circle keeps to the time available. The facilitator should ensure a safe and equal discussion can take place, but may also participate in the discussion as an equal where there is a positive contribution to make. At the outset, the facilitator should set guidelines and 'shared rules' for the circle with the participants, reminding them of these throughout if needed.

To allow equal contributions from all participants, the Facilitator will use a talking piece. This is a small object which can pass between participants, signifying their turn to talk. One participant will be asked to introduce themselves and begin the discussion, and from there the talking piece can pass left or right. There is no onus placed on any participant to speak. They may wish to take the talking piece and hold a silence, or pass this on to the next participant.

All circles should begin with a 'check in'. This might be a question posed to participants about their day, a piece of music or a quote. The discussion then moves to the questions posed, which should be shared in advance where possible, and the talking piece is moved around the group for their consideration to each question. The circle can also conclude with a 'check out'. Where the purpose of the circle was to identify solutions or action, these can be recapped by the Facilitator with clear next steps.

Possible questions for community circles of varying purpose may be as follows.

- How were you impacted by what you have experienced?
- What do you need to feel safe?
- What is most important to you in moving forward?
- What is needed in the community to support positive changes?
- What assets do you hold, and how might these benefit your community?
- What are your biggest challenges as an individual and a community right now?

It may be that participants and the facilitator wish a formal recording of the circle to be provided. This may be achieved using a recording, video footage, photographs or a written account or action plan based on discussions. Consent must be gained from all participants to do this, and agreement must be reached on the manner in which this

achieved and what will happen with everything recorded in the circle. It is important that participants own the circle, the discussion and all its outputs.

## **3.2 Types of Restorative Circles**

For the purposes of working with communities who have experienced harm and/or conflict, the following descriptions provide examples of the use of circles to address problems/conflict and to support communities facing or desiring change.

### **3.2.1 Problem-Solving Circle**

Facilitator states the 'problem' to be discussed by participants and each is invited to explain the situation as they see it, the impact this and what they need to move forward. The group will then try to agree solutions/a set of actions which reflect what they can all do to heal the harm.

The circle can be completed as a set of prompts from the facilitator prior to passing the talking stick: What happened; What was the impact; What should happen next?

### **3.2.2 Transition or Reintegration Circle**

Facilitator introduced the circle as one which aims to consider a change/transition from the perspective of each participant and the impact this has had or is likely to have. Participants can then consider what support they need to positively manage the change, and what support they may offer others.

The circle can be completed as a set of prompts from the facilitator prior to passing the talking stick: What are your thoughts and feelings about the up and coming change; How is the change impacting your life, your relationships and your family; What support do you need and what support can you offer?

See sections below on the Place Standard Tool and The Connected Community for further information on the potential to combine restorative and community-led engagement approaches to achieve co-designed and co-delivered outputs and action plans for communities.



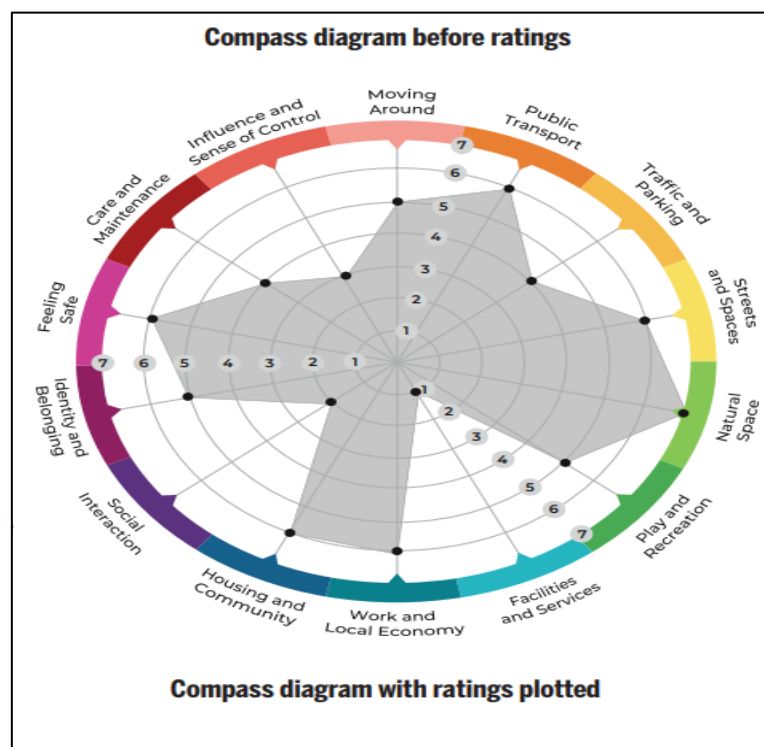
## 4. Place Standard Tool

[The Place Standard Tool](#) provides a simple framework which can be used with a community group to begin conversations about the physical and social aspects of a place known to them.

Participants score each element on the compass diagram (figure 3.1 below) while considering what is good about the place now, and what needs to change for the future. Scores are reviewed and next steps developed which support collaborative ownership of change between communities and services.

Restorative approaches can support a positive use of the Place Standard Tool with community groups through ensuring this is a trauma responsive approach, engages all participants equally and achieves a shared and agreed approach to how best to move forward.

Figure 3.1



## 5. The Connected Community

*'There is no battle cry or crusade here, simply a persistent and genuine invitation.'*

Russell and McKnight (2022) ['The Connected Community'](#) proposes a method to move neighbourhoods away from being disconnected and the promotion of individual survival, and towards collective, community wellbeing. This is a connected community which realises its own, internal value and assets, supporting one another towards a good life. This is achieved through the following stages:

- Shifting mindsets towards first seeking local solutions to problems (what you already have) over external options, outside of the community.
- Shifting from a deficit-based approach to an asset-based map which involves working with communities to identify what is already strong before then exploring the gaps.
- Locally sourcing what is needed to improve wellbeing, instead of reliance on costly, remote assets. This may include community members, groups, local organisations, elements of the built and natural environment and stories/local heritage.
- Moving away from an over reliance on leadership and towards community ownership of the problem and thus the delivery of its solution, using their own assets and leadership potential.
- Supporting the community to realise the practical methods they can use to exert their power and assets and achieved their desired outcomes. This includes working with external supports who also champion this approach.

In a similar manner to the Place Standard Tool, restorative circles and the use of restorative techniques and a trauma-informed, values-based approach can support the completion of this exercise, ensuring all voices are heard, assets explored, and an agreement reached which supports communities to use their own assets to achieve community enhancement and improved wellbeing.

## 6. Restorative Approaches in Justice

Where communities experience high levels of crime, harm or any event which results in conflict, restorative circles can be used in the aftermath of this to hear the voices of those impacted, find solutions, connect communities and begin to rebuild from harm. Restorative approaches can also be used by justice services to connect with communities and improve relationships through their use of open language, values and shared culture.

Justice organisations, often working in partnership with other public and third sector services, may find the approaches provided in this paper useful in the following ways. This has the potential to reduce further crime and offending, improve wellbeing, increase community resilience, and give greater community confidence in justice services and the justice system.

- Training for front-line responders in restorative values, principles and practices.
- Restorative conversations within police custody suites, as part of arrest referral approaches.
- Restorative approaches to addressing offending behaviour as part of unpaid work and supervision requirements managed by local authority and third sector staff.
- Restorative circles for children and young people on the fringes of/involved in causing harm to identify needs and circumstances that require change from their perspective.
- Circles for communities following a crime or incident, to voice impact, develop connection and mutual supports.
- Circles with communities to support police, fire and local authorities to identify shared community justice and safety priorities.
- Restorative conversations and circles within prison to support improved relationships, address conflict and find shared solutions to thematic, place-based issues.

The ways in which restorative practice can benefit the justice system, improve job satisfaction and satisfaction in the system for those who experience harm are internationally documented. There is also the potential to reduce further offending and the impact of harm when communities are more resilient and connected.

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