

Restorative Practices and Offending Behaviour

Making the case for a practice that can benefit the person harmed by an offence, the person responsible and those residing in affected communities.

- As outlined in the National Youth Justice Practice Guidance (NYJPG) (Chapter 9 – Victims and Community Confidence), “*Restorative practices are a response to crime that considers the needs of victims, those who offend and cause harm, and the community (Zehr, 2002)*”. They are “*an attempt to put into practice a set of ethical ideas about how human beings should relate to each other, in particular those who present harm or trouble, while seeking to resolve and strengthen relations where possible*”.
- Sherman and Strang (2007) indicate that restorative justice works best for most persistent offenders, and for victims of violence rather than property crime. It works better with adults than young people and is least effective with minor offenders. In their more recent work they have also found restorative practices to reduce victims’ post-trauma stress symptoms (PTSS) markedly.
- As highlighted in the NYJPG (Chapter 6 – Early and Effective Intervention (EEI)), “*Caution should be exercised before using restorative justice as an EEI diversion for the following reasons:*
 - *There is a balance to be sought in terms of a young person taking responsibility for a crime against a victim and being labelled through the process as “a young offender”, when a minor offence **may** have been committed.*
 - *The formal restorative process may increase a negative identity and run the risk of net widening.*
 - *Further evidence about the risks associated with using restorative justice with the wrong children and young people can be found in [Dutton and Whyte \(2006\)](#)”.*
- Any practitioner involved in the delivery of restorative approaches or referring young people involved in offending to a restorative service must make sure that the work is undertaken with appropriate consideration of the values, skills and processes necessary to ensure that the person harmed and the person responsible are not re-traumatised/re-victimised.
- Restorative practices can take a variety of different forms: face-to-face conferencing; shuttle-diplomacy; letter-writing; and, meetings in which third party representatives for the person harmed are involved.
- Who benefits from restorative practices? Whyte (2003) notes that the three main qualities of effective restorative practices are: (i) those that place the victim at the centre of the process; (ii) those that focus on reparation to the community; and, (iii) those that attempt to re-integrate the young person back into the community.

All references and further information in relation to restorative practices are accessible here:

<http://www.cjsw.ac.uk/content/national-youth-justice-practice-guidance>

David Orr