



Beyond Punishment

RESTORATIVE PRACTICES AND ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION

MOVING FROM HARM TO HEALING

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Objectives

Understand limitations of punitive approaches

Explore restorative justice principles

Highlight successful initiatives

Discuss community advocacy and support



This session's purpose is to **move beyond punishment as the sole response to harm**, and encourage solutions that **heal individuals, strengthen communities and prevent future harm.**

What is Punishment?

A penalty imposed on someone who has violated a law, rule, or social norm.

Focus is on justice as ***deserved*** punishment, not on ***healing*** or ***rehabilitation***.

Philosophies Behind Punishment:

Retribution

- Giving people what they “deserve.”

Deterrence

- Discouraging crime through fear of consequences.

Rehabilitation

- Helping offenders change behavior.

Incapacitation

- Removing the ability to reoffend (e.g., prison).

Restoration

- Repairing harm caused to victims and communities.

Limitations of Punishment

High recidivism rates

- Turnover rates increases as there is most definitely seems less alternatives to “Punishment”.

Limited rehabilitation -

Trauma on families and children

- Feelings of abandonment or rejection now leads the youth/family to anxiety, depression, or behavioral challenges.

Disproportionate impact on marginalized communities

The Cycle of Incarceration

1.Arrest / Offense



2.Punishment (Jail / Fines / Suspension)



3.Barriers After Release

1. Hard to find work
2. Housing instability
3. Stigma



4.Unresolved Root Causes

1. Trauma
2. Addiction
3. Poverty



5.Reoffending



6.Re-incarceration

↳ back to step 1

Restorative Practices (RP)

Restorative practices are a set of approaches and tools used to **build relationships, repair harm, and strengthen community.**

Instead of focusing only on punishment when harm happens, restorative practices emphasize **accountability, healing, and learning** for everyone involved.

Key Elements of Restorative Practices

Dialogue and truth-telling

EVERYONE affected by harm has a voice!

Victim-centered healing

Addresses emotional, relational, and community needs beyond just the "***incident***"

Community involvement

Not just for conflict resolution-also proactively to create stronger, healthier communities.

Offender accountability and growth

Offenders taking responsibility for actions ***AND*** actively working to repair harm.

Successful Initiatives in Justice Systems

Youth restorative justice diversion programs

- Divert youth from formal court into restorative processes
- This improves community ties and reduces recidivism

Community-based reentry support

- Helps address root causes of criminal behavior
- This builds stronger family/community bonds overall

Example of Youth Restorative Justice Program (2015-Present)

Minneapolis Police Department Partnered with community groups to use restorative circles for juvenile offenses and neighborhood disputes.

Results:

- Lower recidivism among youth.
- Stronger community–police relationships.

Successful Initiatives in Schools

Restorative circles to address conflict

- Encourages open communication and empathy.
- This reduces suspensions and improves peer relationships

Peer Mediation Programs

- Trains students to mediate conflicts among fellow students and peers
 - Promotes student ownership of solutions and reduces repeat conflicts
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Example in schools Denver Public Schools

District-wide implementation of restorative practices in classrooms and discipline policies.

What they did:

- Peer mediation programs.
- Restorative circles for conflict resolution.

Results:

- Out-of-school suspensions cut nearly in half.
- Reduction in disproportionate discipline of students of color.
- Improved school climate and student sense of belonging.

How Punishment Fails to Prevent Reoffending

No skill-building or healing – Previously incarcerated youth/adults often lack resources, education, or employment opportunities, which increased likelihood of reoffending.

Isolation instead of community reintegration – Being punished, especially through incarceration can and does lead to social alienation and loss of community belonging.

Stigma creates barriers post-release



How Families are Affected

Emotional trauma on children

Financial instability

Disrupted family bonds

Intergenerational cycles of incarceration

How You Can Advocate Locally

Join local coalitions

Support organizations offering restorative programs

Educate policymakers

Volunteer or mentor

Support reentry programs

Advocate for school-based restorative approaches

Promote peer-led initiatives

Shift narrative from punishment to healing!

Resources

Books: *[“The Little Book of Restorative Justice”](#) by Howard Zehr*

Organizations: Restorative Justice Exchange, Center for Court Innovation

Local restorative justice or diversion programs

Always staying engaged with peers that have been incarcerated is a useful resource!

Referrals and Intake

<https://www.guidedpathways.org/intake/>

<https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/pGsdxsLRTYugCWMFcFQVYA#/registration>