Restorative Justice INSTITUTE

Our Approach to Restorative Facilitation

Interpersonal conflict can be incredibly challenging to navigate. However, with the right support, conflict can become an opportunity for growth and meaningful change. Restorative facilitation creates space for people to share their experiences, understand impacts, navigate differences, and collaboratively imagine a way forward. Our facilitators support a process grounded in dignity, choice, and shared responsibility. The goal is to open possibilities for forward motion.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. **Voluntary Participation & Self-Determination.** Restorative processes must be voluntary. Participants retain agency over their involvement, what they choose to share, and the agreements they make. Our facilitators support informed participation without coercion or pressure to reconcile, forgive, or reach a particular resolution.
2. **Inclusive Stakeholder Participation.** Whenever appropriate and possible, we encourage the participation of all stakeholders meaningfully affected by a conflict. Bringing different experiences and perspectives into the conversation can deepen understanding, reveal unmet needs, and support more collaborative and sustainable outcomes. Participation is guided by readiness, safety, and the needs of those involved.
3. **Trauma-Informed & Nervous System-Aware.** Conflict can activate stress responses that affect our ability to listen, communicate, and engage. We prioritize emotional and psychological safety, choice, and nervous system co-regulation, supporting the conditions for understanding and connection. Through trauma-informed practices, we help participants slow down, navigate the natural discomfort and strong emotions that can arise during these processes, and engage with difficult experiences while encouraging understanding, growth, and accountability.

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4. **Multipartiality & Equitable Voice.** Our facilitators practice multipartiality, actively supporting the dignity, perspectives, and participation of all stakeholders rather than taking sides. We remain attentive to power dynamics and work to ensure that every participant has a meaningful opportunity to be heard. Our role is to guide the process, not to investigate claims, determine fault, or make decisions on behalf of participants.
5. **Communication That Encourages Understanding.** We invite participants to move away from blaming, labeling, and language that may create shame. Instead, we encourage the use of "I" statements, principles of Nonviolent Communication, and honest sharing of experiences, feelings, needs, and impacts. These practices can foster empathy, reduce defensiveness, and create greater capacity for accountability and understanding.
6. **Moving from Anxious Imagination to Restorative Imagination.** In conflict, our imaginations can become focused on fear, assumptions, worst-case scenarios, and anticipated harm. We call this anxious imagination. Restorative facilitation invites a shift toward restorative imagination: the capacity to envision new possibilities for understanding, accountability, repair, and relationships. Rather than remaining confined to what has happened or what we fear might happen, we explore what could become possible.
7. **Shared Ownership & Investment.** For interpersonal conflicts, we generally recommend that participating stakeholders share the cost of facilitation whenever feasible and appropriate. Shared financial responsibility can reinforce mutual ownership of the process and reduce the perception that one party controls or directs the outcome. We recognize that circumstances and power dynamics vary, and financial arrangements should support fairness, accessibility, and meaningful participation.
8. **Open-Ended Outcomes & Collaborative Possibilities.** We do not enter restorative processes with predetermined solutions or expectations of reconciliation or relational repair. Instead, we support participants in exploring needs, responsibilities, and possibilities together. The process belongs to the participants, and our role is to create space for shared decision-making. Outcomes may include mutual understanding, agreements, changed behaviors, repaired relationships, respectful separation, or clearer boundaries.

GETTING STARTED: WHAT TO EXPECT

We begin with an intake conversation to understand the situation and assess whether restorative facilitation is the right fit. Participants are then invited into the process, with confidentiality agreements and clear boundaries. Once participants accept the invitation, preparation may include individual or small-group meetings to understand experiences and support readiness for dialogue. When the time is right and if appropriate, we bring stakeholders together for facilitated conversations that focus on understanding, accountability, and exploring possibilities for moving forward. Follow-up support is also available through coaching, training, and organizational culture work to strengthen relationships and build long-term capacity for navigating conflict.

Learn more: rjinstitute.org/facilitation