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## **What is Restorative Justice?**

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### **What is Restorative Justice (RJ)?**

RJ is a justice approach<sup>1</sup> and a justice mechanism<sup>2</sup> to deal with conflict and crime. As a justice approach, RJ sees crime as harm done to people and communities rather than harm against the state or law<sup>3</sup>. Thus, it focuses on restoring the relationships that have been harmed by the wrongdoing<sup>4</sup>. To do so, the RJ approach seeks to address the needs of all stakeholders involved and impacted by an offense, following the principles of participation, accountability, reparation, and reintegration<sup>5</sup>.

### **RJ Principles, Processes, and Practices**

RJ can be effective in justice systems when its principles are translated into clear processes and practices to address the harm created by the crime. Thus, RJ processes refer to concrete interventions that are grounded in the RJ principles. These interventions are usually found within the four dominant RJ models: Circles, Panels, Conferencing, and Mediation.<sup>6,7</sup> Although RJ processes are mostly framed within these models, their design and implementation may be adapted to respond to local values and norms. We currently find different processes derived from these four primary RJ models both nationally and internationally. In Nebraska, for example, Victim-Youth Conferencing (VYC) is the most common RJ process implemented with youth who have offended.

The four primary RJ models are discussed on the next page. These are overarching descriptions of the models compiled from the most prominent research in the field.



# Four RJ Models

## Panels

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Used in the U.S. since 1920<sup>8</sup>, this type of RJ model consists of a meeting or multiple meetings where community members serve as proxies for the victim, and participants discuss the nature and consequences of an offense. Examples of panel-based processes are community/reparative panels and surrogate impact panels<sup>6,8</sup>.

## Conferencing

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Originally developed in New Zealand in 1989 and later adapted in Australia<sup>9</sup>, this type of RJ model involves the community of people most affected by the crime (family, friends, and key supporters of the victim(s) and the person(s) who caused harm) to discuss how they have been harmed by the offense and how the harm can be repaired.<sup>8</sup>

## Circles

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This model was derived from sanctioning and healing practices of aboriginal peoples in North America. The model consists of facilitated community meetings involving the community of people most affected by the crime and representatives of the justice system. Circles have been adapted for use in many different settings such as all levels of education, the workplace, and faith communities.

## Mediation

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Mediation was introduced in the criminal justice system for the first time in Canada in 1974, as Victim-Offender Reconciliation Programs (VORP) and later developed as Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM) in the U.S. and internationally. This model focuses on the interaction between the victim and offender and rarely includes family members or support persons.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tyler 2006

<sup>2</sup> Daly 2016

<sup>3</sup> Zehr, H. (2015)

<sup>4</sup> Llewellyn, J. (2013)

<sup>5</sup> Latimer et al., (2005)

<sup>6</sup> Bouffard et al., (2017)

<sup>7</sup> Bazemore & Umbreit, (2001)

<sup>8</sup> Van Ness & Strong, 2014

<sup>9</sup> Umbreit & Armour, 2011

