

# Help Starts Here.

## Information on Restorative Justice Approaches for Victims of Crime

When an act of crime or violence has been committed, those harmed may feel varying degrees of confusion, loss, fear, anxiety, and even guilt. Victims may have questions such as, “*What kind of person would do this?*”, “*Why did this happen to me?*”, or “*How can I prevent this from happening to somebody else?*” The court system may not be able to help alleviate these feelings or answer these questions for victims, therefore some victims of crime may be interested in learning more about the support options available to them, including a restorative justice process.

### What is restorative justice?

Restorative justice seeks to repair the harm caused by crime and violence by facilitating a process that addresses victims’ needs and holds offenders meaningfully accountable for their actions. To achieve this, offenders must first accept responsibility for their role in an offence and the harm they have caused. Victims must also voluntarily choose to participate. In this approach, crime is understood not only as breaking the law, but as a violation of people and relationships and a disruption of the peace in a community.

### What does a restorative justice process look like and who is involved?

In a restorative justice process, everyone affected by a particular offence is invited to participate in a discussion of the circumstances surrounding the offence. Often this means that victims and their supporters, and offenders and their supporters, are guided by a restorative justice facilitator (or in some cases an elder) through a structured dialogue. This dialogue allows participants to share how the offence happened, how they were affected, and what needs to happen to make things right. The number of people involved will vary depending on the type of offence and the comfort-level of participants.

### Why would I participate in a restorative justice process? What about court?

There are a number of reasons that a person who has experienced a crime will participate in a restorative justice process. You may have questions for the offender, or want the offender to understand the impact their actions have had on you, your family members, and others. You may want restitution or compensation directly from the offender. Or you may feel that a direct discussion with the offender will allow you to have closure and to move on from the effects of the offence. These kinds of interactions may not be available in the court process.

Some victims feel that a restorative justice approach is more effective than the court system in ensuring that the offender does not repeat harmful behaviour. Others would prefer that the court handle the matter, and do not want any involvement in a restorative justice process. The decision to participate or not to participate in a restorative justice process are both valid choices.



### What do people say about restorative justice?

Most victims who participate in a restorative justice process are very satisfied with the experience and results. Participants express that the benefits include feeling listened to and acknowledged, receiving answers to their questions, experiencing an increased sense of safety, and, in some cases, receiving financial restitution. In addition, victims often appreciate the opportunity to give input into the outcome of the offender's agreement.

In rare instances participants have expressed dissatisfaction with the offender's level of remorse, disbelief that the offender is telling the truth, worry that the offender will not live up to their commitments, and concern about possibly forfeiting the opportunity to see the offender prosecuted in the criminal justice system. You can speak with a restorative justice facilitator to discuss your concerns and to help consider your options.

### How does the offender benefit and why would they want to participate?

Offenders have an opportunity to express their perspective and to fulfill their obligations to the victim and the community in ways that are often more meaningful than through a criminal justice process. Depending on the source of the referral, an offender may or may not be able to avoid a criminal record or a court process by participating in a restorative justice process.

### For which types of crimes is restorative justice used?

In B.C., restorative justice is most commonly used for less serious offences such as mischief, assault, and theft. However, a restorative justice process can potentially

be used for any crime in which harm has occurred, and where the victim would like an opportunity to be heard, to have questions answered, or to seek restitution.

### What can I expect?

A restorative justice facilitator can explain the process, and answer your questions about participation. You can also seek the support of a victim service worker.

### Where is more information available?

#### Victim Services and Crime Prevention

- Phone: 604 660-5199
- Email: [victimservices@gov.bc.ca](mailto:victimservices@gov.bc.ca)
- [www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/crimeprevention/justice](http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/crimeprevention/justice)

Restorative justice is not offered in every community. Please contact the number above and ask to speak with the Restorative Justice Coordinator to find out if there is an agency offering this service near you.

#### VictimLink BC

- VictimLink BC is a toll-free, multilingual, confidential telephone service available across B.C. and Yukon 24 hours a day, 7 days a week that provides information and referral services to all victims of crime and immediate crisis support to victims of family and sexual violence.
- Contact VictimLink BC at 1-800-563-0808 (toll-free in B.C. and Yukon). Call TTY at 604 875-0885; to call collect, please call Telus Relay Service at 711.
- Text to 604 836-6381. Email [VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca](mailto:VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca)
- [www.victimlinkbc.ca](http://www.victimlinkbc.ca)

**Please note:** *This document provides general information only. It is not intended to provide legal advice.*

