

Working Restoratively With People Who've Caused Harm: 5 Tips to Promote Success

By Carrie Landrum 2019 (adapted 2023)

1. Uphold dignity and respect

“Ultimately, however, it comes down to one basic value: *respect*. If I had to put restorative justice into one word, that would be it: respect for all, even those who are different than us, even for those who seem to be our enemies. Respect reminds of us of our interconnectedness but also our differences. Respect reminds us that we must balance concern for all parties.

If we pursue justice as respect, we will do justice restoratively. ... If we do not respect others and their rights and needs, we will not do justice restoratively, no matter how earnestly we adopt the principles. The value *respect* underlies restorative justice principles and must guide and shape their application.”

- Howard Zehr

Tip: Approach people who've caused harm as fallible, growing and maturing humans who need guidance and support to make things right. If we want people to act more respectfully to others, we must model it ourselves.

2. Consider: if you had just been accused of causing harm, how would you respond?

The stages of grief are commonly known as: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.² Those who've caused harm often show up with denial, anger, and/or defense first, and sometimes accompanied by bitterness. This response is often an unconscious way to try to protect oneself from shame. People may employ defense tactics in order to avoid feeling shame, to avoid confronting the possibility that they actually hurt another person, and in order to feel safe.

According to Nathanson's *Compass of Shame*, shame generally shows up in people in four different ways.³ Denial/avoidance, withdrawal, attacking oneself, and attacking the other. These can show up as attacking others, blaming the victim, turning the tables, lashing out, etc. Those who are approached about causing harm may engage in attacking the harmed party, the system, the facilitator, or others. To work effectively with people who may be feeling shame even unconsciously, allow people space to go through stages of grief and loss (privately) knowing that this can ultimately culminate in acceptance. Uphold their humanity as they do this, without condoning harmful words or actions.

Tip: Be patient while people act reactively; give them time and space to accept responsibility.

3. Create space for movement and learning by building trust and rapport

It is of utmost importance as a facilitator to ensure that people feel safe, respected, and supported. In order for someone to be willing to go on a journey with us, they must trust us, feel safe with us, and feel respected and heard by us. To establish trust we can build rapport, practice empathy, listen actively, honor silence, seek understanding, find commonality, and offer respect for a person's humanity. It helps to understand needs and fears, and to acknowledge and assuage them. Through the demonstration of respect we build the foundation of trust necessary to support growth and change.

Tip: Spend time getting to know people first and take time to really listen to what they have to say.

¹ Howard Zehr with Ali Gohar, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, Good Books, 2003 www.unicef.org/tdad/littlebookrijpakaf.pdf

² Elisabeth Kubler Ross & David Kessler, *Five Stages of Grief* <https://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief>

³ Ted Wachtel, *Defining Restorative*, International Institute of Restorative Practices, 2016 https://www.iirp.edu/images/pdf/Defining-Restorative_Nov-2016.pdf

“I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better.”

~ Maya Angelou

4. Meet people where they're at, come alongside them, and work with (not to) them

In restorative work we *meet people where they're at*; in the counseling method of motivational interviewing professionals *come alongside* a person to effectively support change behavior. A fundamental principle of restorative practices rests on the belief that human beings are more receptive and responsive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior, when those in positions of authority do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them.⁴ By harnessing the principles and skills of restorative practice and motivational interviewing we can support people to be more self-reflective, and give them space to grow and change.

More than just techniques, these approaches include *a way of being*. Restorative practices and motivational interviewing are both relational in their approach. The spirit of motivational interviewing is a relational methodology grounded in four primary approaches by the facilitator that are also inherent in restorative practices:

1. **Partnership and Collaboration:** Equitable engagement with all points of view and experiences.
2. **Autonomy with Responsibility:** The exploration of various pathways to change by upholding absolute worth, accurate empathy, affirmation, and the autonomy of others to engage in change.
3. **Evocation:** The drawing out of a person's inherent motivations for change and repair.
4. **Compassion:** The commitment to seek to understand others' experiences, values, and motivations without engaging in explicit or implicit judgment.⁵

Tip: Avoid the three Cs of trying to convince, cajole, or coerce someone into doing or saying something. Practice rolling with resistance and balancing equitable amounts of support and accountability.

5. Support growth by planting seeds

We won't usually be able to help someone move from denial and defense to empathy and repair in a single meeting. However, we can invite them on the journey. Once we've established trust and mutual respect, and we've met them where they're at, we are better able to help people understand other perspectives and experiences. Those who have caused harm usually need to feel safe, heard and affirmed first, before they can begin to perspective-shift or have empathy for others. To support this building of empathy we can lean into multipartiality⁶: being partial to individuals who were harmed as well as being equitably partial to the person who caused harm. We can plant seeds of understanding and empathy even when a person isn't quite ready to see or hold such things. If we nurture these seeds by coming alongside a person and supporting their autonomy and intrinsic motivation, we may be surprised at the change we witness. Remember that to cultivate growth, seeds need to be planted as well as repeatedly nourished before they ever bud or blossom.

Tip: Practice multipartiality, plant seeds of empathy and perspective-shifting, and water those seeds!

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Spirit of Motivational Interviewing https://pachiefprobationofficers.org/docs/MI_Workbook_Final.pdf and <https://ytp.uoregon.edu/content/spirit-motivational-interviewing>

⁶ I'm Not Neutral About Neutrality: I'm Partial to Multi-Partiality www.mediate.com/articles/assegued-multi-partiality.cfm