

The Restorative Conferencing Method

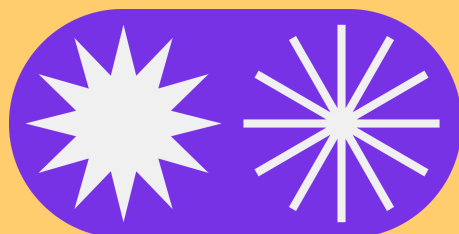


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Intention

The Restorative Conferencing Method is a step by step guideline intended to support the facilitation of a Restorative Conference.

The Restorative Conference follows the process in which not only the ¹affected party and the ²acting party, but also other people impacted in the wider community (such as family members, support persons etc.) meet and take turns to share the impact created by the affected party's actions with the purpose of repairing damage, restoring relationships and attending to needs.

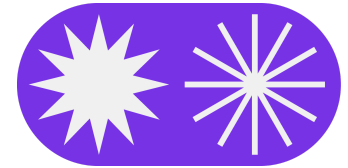
These guidelines are supported by a [self-assessment](#) (Appendix 1) sheet for the facilitator.

While this document specifically refers to situations where harm is caused by a child/young person, the general guidelines and points to keep in mind also apply to any Restorative Conference (including among adults).

¹ *affected party – the person(s) who were adversely impacted by the actions of the acting party.*

² *acting party – the person(s) who acted in ways that resulted in hurt, harm or otherwise adversely impacted someone.*

Preparation for the Restorative Conference



PRELIMINARY MEETINGS AND INVOLVEMENT OF THE PARTIES

1. PRELIMINARY MEETING WITH THE ACTING PARTY WHO CAUSED HARM

The facilitator should meet the young person who caused the harm face to face at least 1 time and at least 48 hours before the conference. During this meeting, the facilitator should:

- explain clearly to the young person what will happen at the meeting and what you want to achieve
- introduce who the people likely to be there are and why they are invited
- emphasize why it is important to listen to others' stories and tell your own story honestly
- explain how it can contribute to reaching agreements satisfactory to the parties and making things better
- discuss with the young person their thoughts and ideas about the conference and their participation, as well as their hesitations, fears and needs
- investigate and articulate the circumstances that motivated them to perform the undesirable behavior, the emotions they feel now and what options or suggestions they have to reduce or repair the damage
- explain the alternatives of participating in the conference and the possibility that no agreement will be reached during it
- ask and help the young person think about whether and who else they want to see as a support person at the conference (in addition to parents)
- find out what ideas they have about how to clearly express their regrets, their wish to make amends and restore the relationship

2. MEETING WITH FAMILY AND CLOSE NETWORK SUPPORT MEMBERS

- It is important to get confirmation that at least 1 key person from the family or another member of the close network will participate in the restorative conference. Best practices recommend that at least 1 additional supporter is present outside of the circle of parents or guardians. It is clear that the people a young person trusts, can play a key role in the success of counseling, supporting their development and life later
- Many family members experience great shame and anxiety about their young relative's undesirable behavior. Ask them to talk about their feelings, listen and discuss their perspectives and needs, and encourage them to seek professional

help (e.g. psychological counseling, therapy, etc.) if necessary, so that they too can get support when they need it. Discuss any suggestions they may have about possible consequences and how they can assist the young person in meeting future agreements.

3. MEETING THE AFFECTED PARTY

The presence of the person who experienced harm is a crucial aspect of restorative counseling. In order to decide and discuss attendance, you must meet with the affected party at least 1 time and at least 48 hours before the conference.

- It is important to explain to the affected party the objectives of the restorative conference and the course of its implementation, as well as carefully listen and explore their feelings about the upcoming conference. Often the affected party does not want to participate at first, but when they have time to think about it, they change their attitude. It is advisable to contact the affected party first, give them information about the process, invite them to participate in it and then contact them again after about 24 hours. The person who experienced harm needs enough information, respect and emotional support to develop trust.
- The affected party must not be pressured to come, and if they are unable to attend the conference, a letter will be drawn up together with them, describing the effect of what happened on them (reading it and discussing it also allows you to influence the person who caused the harm and at the same time express the experience of the affected party). An alternative can be the representation of the affected party by a close person or participation via video. For younger children, a drawing or a story they have written about the effect the act had on them is also a possible alternative.
- The best support person for the affected party is a nearby person who is aware of the impact of the act on the affected party. Encourage them to invite their support person and, if necessary, seek professional help (i.e. psychological counseling, therapy). This will help them feel that his experience is respected and they feel safe enough to come to the conference
- Emphasize at the preliminary meeting that this is a process of improving the situation, to help, both the affected party and the acting party, to move on with their lives
- Encouraging the affected party to participate in restorative conferencing is a delicate process, but his presence is very important to elicit empathy and remorse from the acting party and to help the affected party regain emotional self-confidence
- If the affected party decides not to participate, it is agreed whether and how he wants to be informed about the outcome of the conference
- If the facilitator has any doubts about retriggering the trauma or putting the affected party at risk by inviting them to a conference, they should rather avoid conducting the conference or consult with a support worker

4. ENGAGEMENT OF OTHER PARTIES

- Based on the information gathered from preliminary meetings with key persons, it may become clear that it is important to involve additional support persons or representatives of services (e.g. counselor, youth center employee, trainer, representative of some programs). It is important to involve them and at the same time explain to them the process of the conference, its goals, their possible role, and to explore their feelings about participating in it. Their role may be to provide such support or information about services that could support the acting party in changing their behavior in the future
- It would also be good to involve an influential older family member or other member of the immediate/community network who could act as a role model or mentor in the future for the young person who caused harm. Such people can help to shift their views and values, especially in a situation where the young person has already done a number of harmful acts, or if he shows little remorse or poor understanding of his actions, or an inability to draw conclusions about his future life

Leading a Restorative Conference

STAGE I: Introduction to the Conversation and Making Agreements

- Prepare a **sufficiently spacious room** where you can place the chairs in a circle. The table is not used during the restorative conference. It is worth thinking about where someone sits, so that there is not too much confrontation (for example the parties of the conflict sitting directly opposite). The best conversation angle is 90 degrees, place the parties of the conflict in this position. Many practices also use such an arrangement that people directly affected by the offense and their closest support persons are in a circle and others sit in the outer circle.
- **Sufficient time** is important: at least 2 hours should be taken, longer in complex and multi-party cases, in which case breaks must be planned.
- **Greet and help people feel as safe as possible:**
 - expressing support for all parties (smile, eye contact)
 - calm, firm guidance to seats (e.g. *"I'm glad you could come today. Please take a seat here"*).
 - greeting and expressing respect (*"Welcome! As many of you already know, I am Tiina Murakas, the school's social pedagogue, and I am the facilitator of today's meeting."*).

Here, it is important to monitor your body language and tone of voice (with anxiety, your voice can become too high and your body language nervous) and, if necessary, consciously relax the muscles of your face and shoulders.

- **Introduce the meeting:** *"Thank you everyone for coming. I know this is difficult for all parties, but your presence will help to deal with the problem that has brought us here. This is a good opportunity for all of you to participate in the process of repairing the damage."*
- **Introduce the participants** and their connection to the affected party or the acting party, it is good to let them say their name and their role.

- **Formulate the focus and objectives of the meeting** (*"This meeting is related to a situation that took place ... (date, place and more detailed description of the incident). Today we will focus on what ... (name of the acting party) has done and how his action has affected others. We are not here to decide whether ... (name of the acting party) is good or bad. We want to know how what has happened has affected other parties and hopefully we can move together towards repairing the damage. I hope that everyone present will work together towards this goal. Is everything understandable to everyone?"*)
- **Make agreements using clear I-language:**
 - **roles:** *"I'm leading the meeting today and I'm giving everyone the space to talk. I want us to talk one-by-one, and if that's not the case, I'll intervene."*
 - **confidentiality:** *"It is very important that no one takes any personal information **that** is said or **how** it is done outside of this meeting. Unless what we end up agreeing on here affects and needs to be communicated to people who are not present here today". Confidentiality is one of the key aspects of building trust in a meeting like this, so it's always worth asking if everyone agrees and can commit to it.*
 - **solution-oriented approach:** *"I wish that, as participants here, we do not blame, but describe what happened, our feelings and needs, focus on the solution and stop when we have reached an agreement that satisfies both parties"*
 - **participation:** *what happens if someone no longer wants to participate - leaving is allowed, but it is recommended to stay and talk until the end*
 - **participation and opportunities of the acting party:** *"... (name of the person who caused harm) has explained his part in the incident. I want to tell you that you don't have to attend this meeting and you can leave at any time, just like everyone else here. If you leave, we have to forward the case to be resolved ... (to the police, court, etc. as relevant)."*
 - **emotions and needs:** *"Feelings and their expressions are natural and desirable, but it is strongly requested to refrain from any insulting, threatening, humiliating and attacking each other, both emotionally and physically. If someone needs something (drink, go out for a while, get some air, etc.), then we encourage you to say it boldly."*

STAGE II: Opening the Topic, Sharing and Listening to Stories

- **The story** of the acting party (if there is more than one acting person, each answers to the following questions individually)
 - *"We start with ... (name). Please tell me what happened from your perspective?"*
 - *"What were you thinking at that time? What did you feel?"*
 - *"What have you been thinking and feeling after what happened?"*

- *"Who do you think has been affected by the incident? How has it affected them?"*
- *"What do you need right now?"*

Support the acting party in self-expression above all by means of active listening (reflecting the content of the conversation by summarizing, and reflecting feelings). You can help them recall and express what was said during the preliminary meeting.

- **Affected party's story** (if there is more than one affected person, each individually answers the following questions)
 - *"... (Name), please tell me what happened from your perspective?"*
 - *"So what were you thinking? What did you feel? How did you react to what happened?"*
 - *"What have you been thinking and feeling since then?"*
 - *"How did your relatives and friends react when they heard about the incident?"*
 - *"How has this incident affected you? What has been the most difficult for you?"*
 - *"What do you need right now?"*
- **Affected party's supporters' stories** (have everyone answer the following questions)
 - *"What did you think when you heard what happened? What did you feel?"*
 - *"What do you now think about what happened? What do you feel?"*
 - *"What was the hardest for you?"* (this question does not need to be asked in all cases)
 - *"What do you think are the most important issues at this meeting now?"*
- **Stories of supporters of the acting party** (have everyone answer the following questions)
 - *"What did you think when you heard about what happened? What did you feel?"*
 - *"What do you think about what happened? What do you feel?"*
 - *"What has been the hardest for you?"* (this question does not need to be asked in all cases)
 - *"What do you think are the most important issues at this meeting now?"*

KEEP IN MIND:

- Since restorative conferencing is usually directed more towards adults than in the case of youths, special care must be taken to ensure that the young person is included as a full-fledged participant and that they do not experience abuse of power, pressure or humiliation from the system or adults during the meeting. The language and status of adults can be frightening for a young person, and it must be taken into account that change and taking responsibility are not possible in such situation. Therefore, it is especially important to avoid communication barriers and stop communication as soon as one of the adults starts speaking to them habitually and inappropriately. Participants must be guided to express their feelings

and speak appropriately, in a clear I-language. The facilitator's active listening and clear self-expression skills are helpful here.

- If the person who caused the harm begins to doubt his responsibility for the situation during the conference or strong psychological defenses are triggered (justification, rationalization, denial), then the facilitator must accept this, take time out, discuss what happened with the young person and, if necessary, interrupt the conference. Attempts to persuade the acting party to accept responsibility are never appropriate and may lead to accusations of abuse of power in conference.
- If one of the main parties (acting party, affected party) is clearly unable to participate in the meeting (e.g. due to consumption of alcohol or recreational drugs, severe distress or mental disorders), the meeting must be postponed.
- If any party shows intimidating or degrading behavior towards another, the facilitator must immediately exercise the authority arising from their role and demand that the party leaves the meeting.

PHASE III: Discussion, Potential Proposals and Selection of Possible Solutions

- **Repeat the needs of the parties**, don't forget to look deeper than the initially stated solution or feelings
- **Reach out to all parties, asking for their suggestions.** It is worth writing down potential solutions and considering them after each option. Ask: *"What could be done to repair the situation/damage (even partially)?"* Approach everyone by asking: *"What do you think would give a good result? What solutions do you offer?"*

KEEP IN MIND:

- It is good to keep the different solution options separate from their evaluation, i.e. in the case of a good cooperative atmosphere, the principle of brainstorming can be used.
- Look for opportunities to get creative and meaningful solutions, don't stop at the first options.

- In the case of brainstorming, you need to remember its rules: *"I now propose brainstorming as a source of coming up with solutions, where all ideas are welcome. The more ideas emerge, the better solution we can find. And everyone could come up with different solutions. We will evaluate the suitability of the ideas a little later."*

- **Evaluate solution options from the point of view of satisfaction and feasibility for the parties:**

All ideas are reviewed, their suitability for both parties is discussed. You have to ask both parties: *"Is this right for you? Is it possible?"*

Note that a suitable solution is:

- consensual, all parties must agree to it
- meaningful for the child/young person who caused harm and at the same time possible to implement, taking into account their personality and age
- respectful of the affected party's wishes
- measurable, i.e. time-bound as clearly described activity(ies).
- achievable, i.e. the acting party must have the ability and opportunity to perform them in the manner and time described
- restorative and remedial rather than punitive in nature

After selecting the ideas, ask the supporters of the acting party: *"What can you do to support the implementation of this solution?"*

KEEP IN MIND:

- In general, a time frame that does not exceed 3 months for children under 14 years of age and 6 months for children aged 14-17 years is considered acceptable for compensation and other agreements.
- The family and other support persons are encouraged to help and monitor the actions of the acting party in the implementation of the agreements, this can strengthen the local network and reduce the repetition of harmful acts.

STAGE IV: Summary and Conclusions

- If you are sure that the parties have reached an agreement that they are satisfied with, **end the meeting**. It may also happen that no agreement is reached and the meeting must still be ended.
- Further clarify **whether all parties understand** the agreement, the time frames, how the acting party will be supported in implementing the agreements and what will happen if the decisions are not implemented.
- **Fill out the written summary page**, sign it by the parties and distribute 1 copy to all direct parties (affected party, acting party, school representative).
- **Thank everybody for their presence and contribution.**

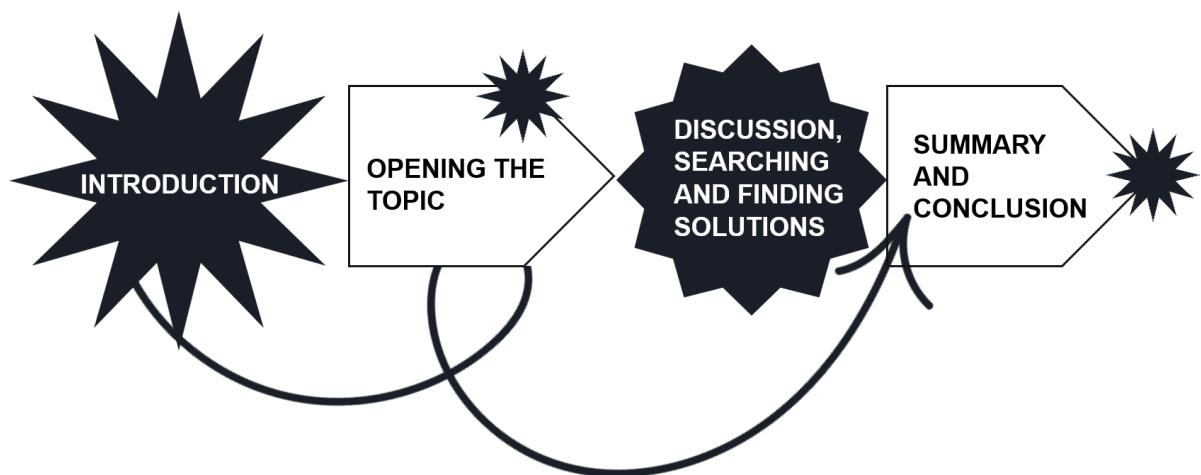
In international practice, it is considered advisable to offer tea/coffee and refreshing snacks after the restorative conference. This reinforces the feeling that it is an experience BETWEEN humans.

Even if the meeting ends without an agreement, it is important to thank the participants for their contribution and give a clear message about what will happen next.

KEEP IN MIND:

If you experience that the meeting participants are emotionally very tense, overly attacking, aggressive or not moving forward towards solutions, this is a clear sign that their emotions and needs need to be dealt with more thoroughly. De-escalate the tension, by mirroring the feelings (*"Yes, you feel ... (worried). I hear you feel ... (humiliated). If I understand you well, you are ... (desperate). You are ... (afraid). This is (embarrassing) for you."*)

Schema for Leading a Restorative Conference



I INTRODUCTION

- Greeting, directing to seats, helping to change
- Introduction of yourself and the participants
- Setting the focus, introducing the goal
- Making agreements (time, facilitator's role, refraining from offending, termination)
- Brief description of the process

II OPENING THE TOPIC: TALKING AND LISTENING TO STORIES

- **CAUSE OF DAMAGE / ACTING PARTY WHO CAUSED HARM**
 - *Please tell me what happened.*
 - *What did you think and feel during this incident?*
 - *What do you think now after all this? What do you feel?*
 - *Who was affected by your act? In what way did it influence them? Who else was affected?*
- **AFFECTED PARTY**
 - *Please tell me what happened.*
 - *What were you thinking? What did you feel? What did you do? How did you react to what happened?*
 - *What have you been thinking and feeling since then? How did your relatives and friends react when they heard about the incident?*

- *What has been the hardest for you?*
- *What do you need right now? What do you want from today's meeting?*

- **SUPPORTERS OF THE AFFECTED PARTY**

- *What did you think when you heard what happened? What did you feel?*
- *What do you think about it now? What do you feel?*
- *What has been the hardest for you?*
- *What do you think are the most important issues at the moment?*

- **SUPPORTERS OF THE PERSON WHO HAS CAUSED HARM**

- *What did you think when you heard what happened? What did you feel?*
- *What do you think about it now? What do you feel?*
- *What has been the hardest for you?*
- *What do you think are the most important issues at the moment?*

- **THE ACTING PARTY**

- *Do you want to add something at this moment?*
- *What do you need right now? What is important to you?*

III DISCUSSION, SEARCHING AND FINDING SOLUTIONS

- Repeat the needs of both parties
- Ask from everyone at the meeting:
 - *"What do you think would give a good result?", "What could be done to repair the situation/damage?" "Any ideas are welcome. The more ideas we come up with, the better solution we can find. And I propose that everyone come up with solutions. We will evaluate the suitability of the ideas a little later."*
- All ideas are reviewed, their suitability for both parties is discussed. Both sides are asked: *"Is it OK for you?", "Is that possible for you?"*
- After selecting the ideas, ask the supporters of the acting party: *"What can you do to support the implementation of this solution?"*

IV SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- Repetition of agreements and writing them down
- Does anyone wish to add something?
- Thanks
- Informal conversation (water, tea, coffee, cookies)

Restorative Conference Summary.

AN EXAMPLE

Time and place:

Facilitator:

Participants:

NAME: (acting party 1)

NAME: (acting party 2)

NAME: (acting party 3)

NAME: (affected party)

NAME: (affected party who does not participate in the conference, but has contributed in other ways)

OTHER PARTICIPANTS and their relationship with the affected/acting party:

AGREEMENTS:

Agreement	Who?	What do they do exactly?	By what time?	Who else has a role in this?

We confirm that the agreements have been made voluntarily between the acting party, the affected party and in the presence of a mediator/facilitator.

SIGNATURES:

Name of the acting party:

Signature:

Name of the affected party:

Signature:

Name of facilitator:

Signature:

Appendix 1 - Restorative Conference: A Self-Assessment Sheet

Please put a cross or a tick in front of the activities that you implemented when conducting restorative conferencing.

RESTORATIVE CONFERENCING: AN INTRODUCTION

- ☐ I introduced myself and my role
- ☐ I formulated the purpose of the meeting and the expected result
- ☐ I allowed the parties to express their feelings right from the start and reflected them
- ☐ I made clear enough agreements to talk one-on-one
- ☐ I made sufficiently clear agreements to refrain from insulting, threatening, etc.
- ☐ I formulated the principle of refraining from looking for the culprit and focusing on finding a solution
- ☐ I recorded the consent of the parties to participate in the conference and informed them of the possibility to interrupt the process if they wished

RESTORATIVE CONFERENCING: ESSENTIALS

- ☐ I invited the acting party to speak first and share their story, thoughts and feelings about the situation and the potential harm and impact
- ☐ I used active listening and encouraging speaking
- ☐ I helped articulate the impact and/or damage
- ☐ I invited the affected party to be the second to share their story, thoughts and feelings related to the situation, and the damage and impact
- ☐ I gave the floor to the affected party's supporters to express their thoughts and feelings about the situation, the impact and the main issue
- ☐ I asked the acting party's supporters to express their thoughts and feelings about the situation, the impact, and the main issue
- ☐ I directed the participants to talk to each other and address each other
- ☐ I mirrored feelings
- ☐ I intervened if the agreements were not fulfilled
- ☐ I helped to formulate the needs and goals of the affected party
- ☐ I helped to articulate the needs and goals of the acting party
- ☐ I encouraged to generate multiple different solutions
- ☐ I directed the parties to choose the most suitable solution by deciding for themselves

RESTORATIVE CONFERENCING: SUMMARY

- ☐ I formulated the initial agreement orally
- ☐ I formulated the agreement or action plan in writing
- ☐ I asked the supporting parties about their contributions and activities in supporting the carrying out of the agreement
- ☐ I agreed on a deadline to review the performance of the solution
- ☐ I summarized the agreements, terms and actions of the parties for this purpose
- ☐ I thanked and acknowledged the participants
- ☐ I organized an informal environment for the final communication (e.g. tea, coffee table)

I AM SATISFIED/I DID WELL...

NEXT TIME I WILL....