

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE – FAQs

WHAT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE MEANS

What is Restorative Justice?

Restorative justice is a facilitated process that brings together, directly or indirectly, people who have been harmed by crime and those responsible for causing that harm. It provides an opportunity for participants to ask questions, explain the impact of the offence, identify ways to repair harm and help those affected move forward positively.

Restorative justice also provides those who have caused harm with an opportunity to understand the impact of their actions, take responsibility and, where appropriate, make amends.

This takes place in a safe and structured environment, supported by trained and accredited restorative justice practitioners.

What is the purpose of restorative justice?

Restorative justice is a facilitated process, that aims to address and repair the harm caused by crime, promote accountability, answer questions and help those affected to move forward positively.

Is Restorative Justice the same as mediation?

Restorative justice is not mediation. While both involve facilitated communication, restorative justice focuses specifically on addressing harm caused by crime, considering the impact of the crime.

Why use restorative justice?

Restorative justice provides an additional way of responding to crime alongside traditional criminal justice approaches. It focuses on establishing positive and reparative ways of addressing offending behaviour and thereby reducing the risk of future harm.

Is restorative justice a soft option?

No. Restorative Justice is not a 'soft option'. For the person who has caused harm it is not easy to meet with those they have hurt. It is also not easy for the person who has been harmed to choose to meet with those who, in some cases, have caused them significant, life changing impacts. However, it can help them to recover, regain control of their lives and meet their needs.

Does restorative justice replace the criminal justice system?

Restorative justice is designed to present a fresh approach to the relationship between the criminal justice system, those that have been harmed and those that have caused harm. The use of restorative justice as a diversionary disposal will involve skilled

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practitioners from community and voluntary sector organisations delivering restorative justice services. These will operate alongside the criminal justice system.

HOW RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CAN HELP

What are the benefits for those that have been harmed?

Through the use of restorative justice, we can better meet the needs of those harmed by crime, provide redress for this and find an effective alternative to punitive responses. It can help people harmed by crime to:

- have their voice heard;
- explain the impact of the offence;
- receive answers to questions they may have;
- move forward positively;
- increase their sense of safety and wellbeing; and
- identify ways the harm might be repaired.

How can restorative justice help those that have caused harm?

Restorative justice can help people who have caused harm to:

- better understand the impact of their actions
- take responsibility for the harm caused
- make amends; and
- support their journey away from offending behaviour.

WHERE AND HOW RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IS AVAILABLE

What areas will have the restorative justice option?

Restorative justice, in the form of a criminal justice diversionary disposal, is currently operating in Ards & North Down, Lisburn & Castlereagh (from 30 March 2026) and Derry City and Strabane (from 30 June 2026) police districts. By late 2027 it is intended that the restorative justice diversionary disposal will be available across all of Northern Ireland.

Who decides on the use of restorative justice?

In terms of the diversionary disposal, as part of the criminal justice system, the police will consider whether a case is suitable for this approach and make a recommendation to the Public Prosecution Service. Where the person who has caused harm accepts responsibility contact will then be made with the person who has been harmed to determine if they are willing to engage. Following this an accredited restorative justice practitioner will meet and undertake preparation with both parties, ahead of a restorative justice conference.

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Can victims request restorative justice?

As this stage, as part of the criminal justice system restorative justice diversionary disposal process, cases will be identified by the police and then considered by the Public Prosecution Service. Self-selection by those who have been harmed, or have caused harm, will be further considered at a later date.

How much does it cost to take part in restorative justice process?

The Department of Justice provides funding to accredited practitioners / organisations to facilitate the restorative justice conference process. There is no cost to participants.

TAKING PART IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Who can take part in the restorative justice process?

The person who has been harmed (or a representative).

The person who has caused the harm.

Each of these individuals can be supported by a family member, friend or other support person known to them, if deemed suitable by the restorative justice practitioner. A representative of the wider community that has been affected may also be involved.

Does the offence have to be admitted?

The person who has caused harm must accept the basic facts of the offence before participating in the restorative justice process.

Do victims have to take part?

No, participation is completely voluntary by both the person who has been harmed and the person that has caused harm. Where the person harmed chooses not to participate directly, there may be other restorative options available, including indirect communication or representation where appropriate.

Will I have to meet the offender?

While a meeting between those involved is preferred, communication can take place indirectly through letters, recorded messages, representatives or other arrangements agreed during the preparatory process.

Can a participant withdraw from the restorative justice process?

Participation is voluntary throughout the restorative justice process, including during preparation and any restorative justice conference. A participant can withdraw at any stage. The restorative justice practitioner will discuss any concerns and ensure that the individual is supported in making an informed decision.

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SAFETY, SUITABILITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Are all cases suitable for restorative justice?

Not all cases are suitable for restorative justice and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Robust processes are in place for both PSNI and PPS to ensure appropriate referrals are made and safeguards are applied.

Will restorative justice be used in domestic and sexual abuse cases?

At this point restorative justice will not be used in domestic and sexual abuse cases. This will be kept under review, including engagement with expert services, before considering taking restorative justice forward for these cases.

Is the restorative justice process confidential and safe?

Information is treated sensitively, while the accredited practitioners will explain any limits to confidentiality before the process begins. Accredited practitioners undertaken suitability assessments, risk assessments and preparation meetings with participants to ensure the process is safe and appropriate. Any concerns that you may have will be considered.

How do you ensure that the process doesn't re-traumatise the person harmed?

The skilled restorative justice practitioner will work to ensure the physical, psychological and emotional safety of all participants. They will create a safe space for the expression of participants views about the harm that has been caused and how best to address this. A risk assessment and the management of risk will be in place to ensure appropriate safeguards are applied as necessary.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROCESS

What does the restorative justice process involve?

Restorative justice interventions are always be a voluntary process for both the person who has been harmed and the person who has caused harm.

It may involve face-to-face meetings, letters or indirect communication through a facilitator. Typically, in terms of the current restorative justice criminal justice system diversionary disposal it will be a meeting (a restorative justice conference) between the person that has been harmed and the person that has caused harm. The person who has been harmed can nominate an individual to participate in the restorative conference on their behalf. Alternatively, they may prepare a statement, or video outlining their experience and what is needed to repair the harm caused.

The restorative justice conference process will normally involve:

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- Referral and assessment.
- Initial contact with participants.
- Preparation meetings.
- A restorative justice conference or other restorative intervention.
- Agreement, follow-up and review.

What happens during a restorative justice conference meeting?

During the restorative justice conference, the person who has been harmed, and the person who caused harm, will discuss what happened, who was affected, the impact of the offence and what can be done to repair the harm caused.

The restorative justice practitioners facilitate the discussion and ensure that all participants are treated fairly, respectfully and safely.

How long does the restorative conference process take?

After a case has been agreed for a diversionary disposal by the Public Prosecution Service, initial contact will be made with the person who caused harm to advise them on the process. Where they accept the facts of the offence the restorative justice practitioner will meet them and then contact the person who has been harmed – meeting with them where they agree to this. Typically, this should take place within 10 working days from referral, with the restorative justice conference held within 25 working days.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE CONFERENCE OUTCOMES AND AGREEMENTS

What is the outcome of the restorative justice conference?

Participants can agree actions that help repair harm or support positive change. Agreements are tailored to the circumstances of each case and will be agreed by those that are participating in the restorative justice conference. They must be proportionate, realistic and achievable.

How is an Agreement reached?

An agreement coming out of a restorative justice conference can include actions to help repair the harm caused and support the person who has caused harm to cease further offending. During the preparatory phase the restorative justice practitioner will work with individuals to identify and consider what their needs are as well as reparative actions that are considered fair, proportionate, realistic and achievable. Signing up to the Agreement must be reached voluntarily by those involved in the conference.

What happens if someone doesn't follow the agreement?

The content of an Agreement, following a restorative justice conference, is arrived at voluntarily by those involved in the conference. As part of this there may be a number of

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actions or outcomes. Where agreed actions are not completed this will be discussed with the restorative justice practitioner.

PRACTITIONER, STANDARDS AND ACCREDITATION

Who can deliver formal restorative justice interventions in NI?

The restorative justice criminal justice system diversionary disposal will only be delivered by individuals accredited by the Department of Justice, who are skilled, appropriately trained and competent.

Is there an NI standards/accreditation framework for restorative justice?

The [Restorative Justice Protocol 2023](#), as well as the [Adult Restorative Justice Practice Standards and Accreditation Framework 2025](#), apply to and govern the operation of accredited restorative justice practice in Northern Ireland. Accredited practitioners are required to have demonstrated a set level of experience and skills. They must also have completed enhanced Access NI checks and commit to uphold the rule of law and human rights standards.

How do I become an accredited restorative justice practitioner?

Restorative justice practitioners providing interventions on behalf of, and in partnership with, the criminal justice system are required to provide evidence of training and experience as part of their application for accreditation. At present there are 16 practitioners accredited to undertake criminal justice system diversionary disposal cases across six voluntary sector organisations. Applications are not currently open for additional practitioners to be accredited.

The application form, and associated requirements, will be made available on the Department of Justice website when the application process is open again.

What training/skills are expected of restorative justice practitioners?

Organisations and individuals working under the 2023 Restorative Justice Protocol, and undertaking criminal justice system cases, must be accredited by the Department of Justice.

Accredited restorative justice practitioners must have a proven level of expertise and skills, work to fundamental standards to operate within and uphold the rule of law, have a track record of working with criminal justice agencies, adhere to international human rights standards and as part of their accreditation work with all criminal justice agencies, including the police.

For individual practitioners and organisations formal accreditation under the [Adult Restorative Justice Practice Standards and Accreditation Framework 2025](#) and the [Restorative Justice Protocol 2023](#) is needed.

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An accredited organisation must ensure that the practice of both the organisation and individuals within it are of a high standard, complying with relevant guidance and policy. It must also have in place written policies and operational procedures needed for restorative work to take place. It

What organisations are accredited by the Department of Justice to deliver restorative justice services in the criminal justice system?

Seven organisations are accredited by the Department of Justice.

Six of the accredited organisations, have practitioners accredited to deliver restorative justice services, in the form of restorative justice conferences, as part of the criminal justice system. This includes Community Restorative Justice Derry; Community Restorative Justice Ireland; Community Restorative Justice Newry / Armagh; Northern Ireland Alternatives; Tides MNI; and Victim Support NI. Prison Fellowship is also an accredited restorative justice organisation.