



The Restorative Justice Project engages in victim/survivor-initiated dialogue requests with offenders, typically in sensitive crimes and crimes of severe violence.

WHEN DOES THE DIALOGUE TAKE PLACE?

RJP communicates with both parties separately as many times as necessary for sufficient preparation. Once both sides are ready to meet and an outline for the discussion has been created, the dialogue will take place. This preparation process typically takes anywhere from several months up to a year or longer, depending on the nature of the request. For individuals who are incarcerated, the dialogue will take place in the institution where the offender is located.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROJECT

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For a listing of additional resources and services for victims/survivors in Wisconsin, please visit our website.

Victim-offender dialogue is a service of the Frank J. Remington Center's Restorative Justice Project at the University of Wisconsin Law School.



Restorative Justice Project
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN LAW SCHOOL

VICTIM-OFFENDER DIALOGUE

Restorative Justice Project UW Law School

VICTIM-OFFENDER DIALOGUE

WHAT IS THE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE APPROACH?

Restorative justice takes an approach to crime that seeks to help victims/survivors move forward, hold offenders accountable for their behavior, and provide a meaningful opportunity for those directly impacted by crime and the affected community to have an elevated voice in responding to crime.

WHAT IS VICTIM-OFFENDER DIALOGUE?

Victim-offender dialogue is a process that allows a victim/survivor and an offender to meet in a safe and structured setting to discuss the circumstances and impact of an offense with the assistance of a facilitator. The focus is on meeting the needs of victims and surviving family members in the aftermath of serious crime, including the harm that has been done and the offender's responsibility for the crime.

HOW DOES THE PROCESS START?

Victim-offender dialogue is victim/survivor-initiated. A victim/survivor may contact the Restorative Justice Project directly, request services through our website, or be referred to RJP through the Department of Corrections Office of Victim Services and Programs or other agencies.

“I can’t begin to tell you how much this has helped me. I feel all my anger and hate for the world has left me, I now see life as hopeful rather than ugly and bitter.”

PARTICIPATION

WHY WOULD A VICTIM CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE?

Victim-offender dialogue lets a victim/survivor participate directly, and in a very human way, in the criminal justice process. Victims/survivors may choose to participate for a number of reasons, including:

- Having questions about the crime that only the offender can answer:
 - “Why did you pick me/my loved one?”
 - “What were my loved one’s last words?”
 - “What actually happened before, during, and after the crime?”
 - “Why did this offense happen?”
 - “Could anything have happened to prevent or stop this offense?”
- Wanting to know what kind of person the offender is, whether they are sorry, and what the offender’s life is like now—whether in prison or in the community.
- Wanting an opportunity to explain how the crime has impacted their lives and their families, to discuss steps the offender can take to help address the harm caused, and to express their thoughts and feelings about the crime.
- Needing to meet with an offender to reduce their feelings of anxiety or fear--of the offender or revictimization—or to seek some assurance that the offender will not commit the same crime again in the future.

“For 15 years I’ve been making up what the offender might think or say and now I know the truth...and now I have a new understanding of the crime.”

WHY WOULD AN OFFENDER CHOOSE TO PARTICIPATE?

Some offenders want to apologize directly to the people they’ve hurt and to express remorse for the crimes they committed. Answering questions honestly and providing the desired details about an offense can be one way for an offender to take responsibility for the harm caused. An offender may also want to present a more complete picture of who they are compared to what was presented in court. Participation may also be a starting point of an offender’s attempt to make amends.



The restorative process focuses on meeting victim/survivor needs and achieving offender accountability; the results can be transformative for all parties involved.

IS PARTICIPATION VOLUNTARY?

Yes, participation is completely voluntary for both victim/survivor and offender throughout the process. Under no circumstances is either the victim/survivor or the offender compelled or pressured to participate.

PROGRAM PRINCIPLES

- Victim-offender dialogue should be available at whatever point in the criminal justice process a victim/survivor wants to participate. It doesn’t matter whether it is months, years, or decades after an offense.
- The dialogue process is victim/survivor-focused and offender-sensitive.
- There is no anticipated outcome for dialogue sessions and no result is predetermined. Rather, participants determine a resolution, consistent with the guidelines of the process.
- In addition to direct face-to-face meetings between the victim/survivor and offender, victim-offender dialogue can occur through letters, teleconferences, or video conferences.
- Participation in a victim-offender dialogue does not impact or change the length of a person’s sentence.



RJP guides victims/survivors and offenders through the intensive preparation process culminating in one or more face-to-face meetings.



Director Jonathan Scharrer and Restorative Justice Project student prepare for an upcoming victim-offender dialogue.

WHY IS VICTIM-OFFENDER DIALOGUE IMPORTANT?

Victim-offender dialogue provides a way for people to participate in the criminal justice process in a way that may be more meaningful than other options available to them. Specifically, it gives people the opportunity to have their questions about an offense answered directly by the person involved, as well as the ability to let that person know the impact the crime has had on victims’ lives.

Victims/survivors occasionally have a strong desire to talk or interact with people who have offended against them in order to move forward in a positive fashion. RJP works to facilitate this contact in a productive and healing manner.

Offenders often perceive their offenses to be simply against property or the law. They may not understand the human consequences of the offense—that a person and a community were also harmed by their actions. Meeting with the people they’ve harmed often helps offenders understand that their behavior has a real and direct impact on other people and on a community.