WHAT IS RESTORATIVE PRACTICES?

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INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
RESTORATIVE PRACTICES
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The social science of restorative practices is an emerging field of study that enables people to restore and build community in an increasingly disconnected world. It offers a common thread to tie together theory, research and practice in seemingly disparate fields, such as education, counseling, criminal justice, social work and organizational management.

The restorative practices concept has its roots in "restorative justice," a new way of looking at criminal justice that focuses on repairing the harm done to people and relationships rather than on punishing offenders (although restorative justice does not preclude incarceration of offenders or other sanctions). Originating in the 1970s as mediation between victims and offenders, in the 1990s restorative justice broadened to include communities of care as well, with victims' and offenders' families and friends participating in collaborative processes called "conferences" and "circles." (For a useful summary of restorative justice theory, go to www.realjustice.org/library/paradigm.html.)

For the last decade the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), which grew out of the Real Justice program (see www.realjustice.org), has been developing a comprehensive framework for practice and theory that expands the restorative paradigm beyond its origins in criminal justice (McCold and Wachtel, 2003).

The fundamental unifying hypothesis of restorative practices is disarmingly simple: that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, 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. This hypothesis maintains that the punitive and authoritarian *to* mode and the permissive and paternalistic *for* mode are not as effective as the restorative, participatory, engaging *with* mode. If this restorative hypothesis is valid, then it has significant implications for many disciplines.

For example, contemporary criminal justice and educational disciplinary practices rely on punishment to change behavior. As the number of prison inmates and excluded students grows unabated, the validity of that approach is very much in question. In a similar vein, social workers doing things for and to children and families have not turned back the tide of abuse and neglect.

Meanwhile, individuals and organizations in many fields are developing innovative models and methodology and doing empirical research, unaware that they share the same fundamental hypothesis. In social work, family group conferencing or family group decision-making processes empower extended families to meet privately, without professionals in the room, to make a plan to protect children in their own families from further violence and neglect (American Humane Association, 2003). In criminal justice, restorative circles and conferences allow victims, offenders and their respective family members and friends to come together to explore how everyone has been affected by an offense and, when possible, to decide how to repair the harm and meet their own needs (McCold, 2003). In education (for more about restorative practices in schools go to www.safersanerschools.org), circles and groups provide opportunities for students to share their feelings, build relationships and problem-solve, and when there is wrongdoing, to play an active role in addressing the wrong and making things right (Riestenberg, 2002).

In the criminal justice field these innovators use the term "restorative justice" (Zehr, 1990); in social work they advocate "empowerment" (Simon, 1994); in education they talk about "positive discipline" (Nelsen, 1996) or "responsive classrooms" (Charney, 1992); and in organizational leadership they use terms like "horizontal management" (Denton, 1998). All of these phrases are related to a similar perspective about people, their needs and their motivation. But in all of these fields, the implementation of this new thinking and practice grows only at a modest rate.

Restorative practices is the science of building social capital and achieving social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making. Through the advent of restorative practices, using its common perspective and vocabulary, there is now the potential to create much greater visibility for this way of thinking, to foster exchange between various fields and to accelerate the development of theory, research and practice.

The social discipline window (Figure 1) is a simple but useful framework with broad application in many settings. It describes four basic approaches to maintaining social norms
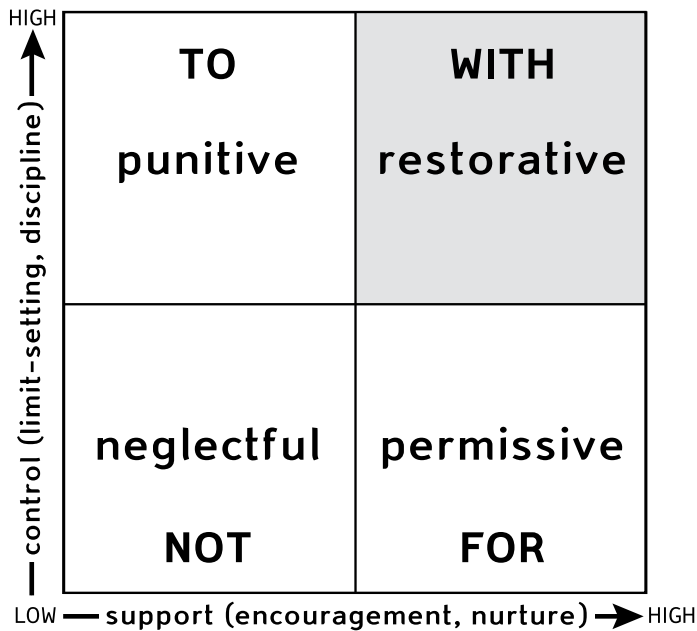
Figure 1: Social Discipline Window

and behavioral boundaries. The four are represented as different combinations of high or low control and high or low support. The restorative domain combines both high control and high support and is characterized by doing things *with* people, rather than *to* them or *for* them.

Restorative practices are not limited to formal processes, such as restorative and family group conferences or family group decision making, but range from informal to formal. On a restorative practices continuum (Figure 2), the informal practices include affective statements that communicate people's feelings, as well as affective questions that cause people to reflect on how their behavior has affected others. Impromptu restorative conferences, groups and circles are somewhat more structured but do not require the elaborate preparation needed for formal conferences. Moving from left to right on the continuum, as restorative practices become more formal they involve more people, require more planning and time, and are more structured

and complete. Although a formal restorative process might have dramatic impact, informal practices have a cumulative impact because they are part of everyday life.

The most critical function of restorative practices is restoring and building relationships. Because informal and formal restorative processes foster the expression of affect or emotion, they also foster emotional bonds. The late Silvan S. Tomkins's writings about psychology of affect (Tomkins, 1962, 1963, 1991) assert that human relationships are best and healthiest when there is free expression of affect—or emotion—minimizing the negative, maximizing the positive, but allowing for free expression. Donald Nathanson, director of the Silvan S. Tomkins

Institute, adds that it is through the mutual exchange of expressed affect that we build community, creating the emotional bonds that tie us all together (Nathanson, 1998). Restorative practices such as conferences and circles provide a safe environment for people to express and exchange intense emotion.

Tomkins identified nine distinct affects (Figure 3) to explain the expression of emotion in all human beings. Most of the affects are defined by pairs of words that represent the least and the most intense expression of a particular affect. The six negative affects include anger-rage, fear-terror, distress-anguish, disgust, dissmell (a word Tomkins coined to describe "turning up one's nose" at someone or something in a rejecting way), and shame-humiliation. Surprise-startle is the neutral affect, which functions like a reset button. The two positive affects are interest-excitement and enjoyment-joy.

Shame is worthy of special attention. Nathanson explains that shame is a critical regulator of human social behavior. Tomkins defined shame as occurring any time that our experience of the positive affects is interrupted (Tomkins, 1987). So an individual does not have to do something wrong to feel shame. The individual just has to experience something that interrupts interest-excitement or enjoyment-joy (Nathanson, 1997). This understanding of shame provides a critical explanation for why vic-
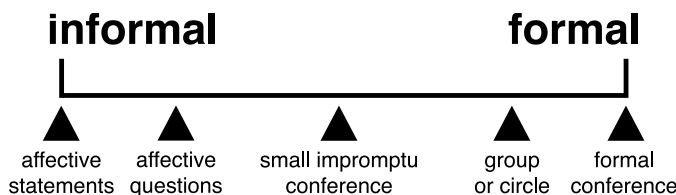

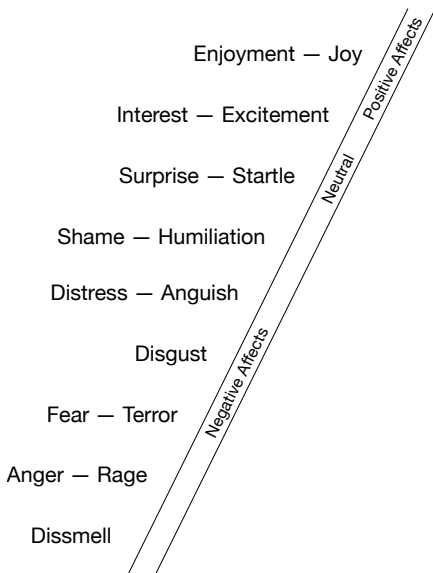**Figure 2: Restorative Practices Continuum**

Enjoyment — Joy
Interest — Excitement
Surprise — Startle
Shame — Humiliation
Distress — Anguish
Disgust
Fear — Terror
Anger — Rage
Dissmell

Positive Affects
Neutral
Negative Affects

Figure 3. The Nine Affects
(adapted from Nathanson, 1992)

tims of crime often feel a strong sense of shame, even though the offender committed the "shameful" act.

Nathanson (1992, p. 132) has developed the compass of shame (Figure 4) to illustrate the various ways that human beings react when they feel shame. The four poles of the compass of shame and behaviors associated with them are:

Withdrawal — isolating oneself, running and hiding;

Attack self — self put-down, masochism;

Avoidance — denial, abusing drugs, distraction through thrill seeking;

Attack others — turning the tables, lashing out verbally or physically, blaming others.

Nathanson says that the "attack other" response to shame is responsible for the proliferation of violence in modern life. Usually people who have adequate self-esteem readily move beyond their feelings of shame. Nonetheless we all react to shame, in varying degrees, in the ways described by the compass. Restorative practices, by their very nature, provide an op-

portunity for us to express our shame, along with other emotions, and in doing so reduce their intensity. In restorative conferences, for example, people routinely move from negative affects through the neutral affect to positive affects.

Because the restorative concept has its roots in the field of criminal justice, we may erroneously assume that restorative practices are reactive, only to be used as a response to crime and wrongdoing. However, the free expression of emotion inherent in restorative practices not only restores, but also proactively builds new relationships and social capital. Social capital is defined as the connections among individuals (Putnam, 2001), and the trust, mutual understanding, shared values and behaviors that bind us together and make cooperative action possible (Cohen and Prusak, 2001).

For example, primary schools and more recently, some secondary schools use circles to provide students with opportunities to share their feelings, ideas and experiences, in order to establish relationships and social norms on a non-crisis basis. Businesses and other organizations utilize team-building circles or groups, in which employees are afforded opportunities to get to know each other better, similar to the processes used with students. The IIRP's experience has been that classrooms and workplaces tend to be more productive when they invest in building social capital through the proactive use of restorative practices. Also, when a problem does arise, teachers and managers find that the reaction of students and employees is more positive and cooperative.

When authorities do things with people, whether reactively—to deal with crisis, or proactively—in the normal course of school or busi-
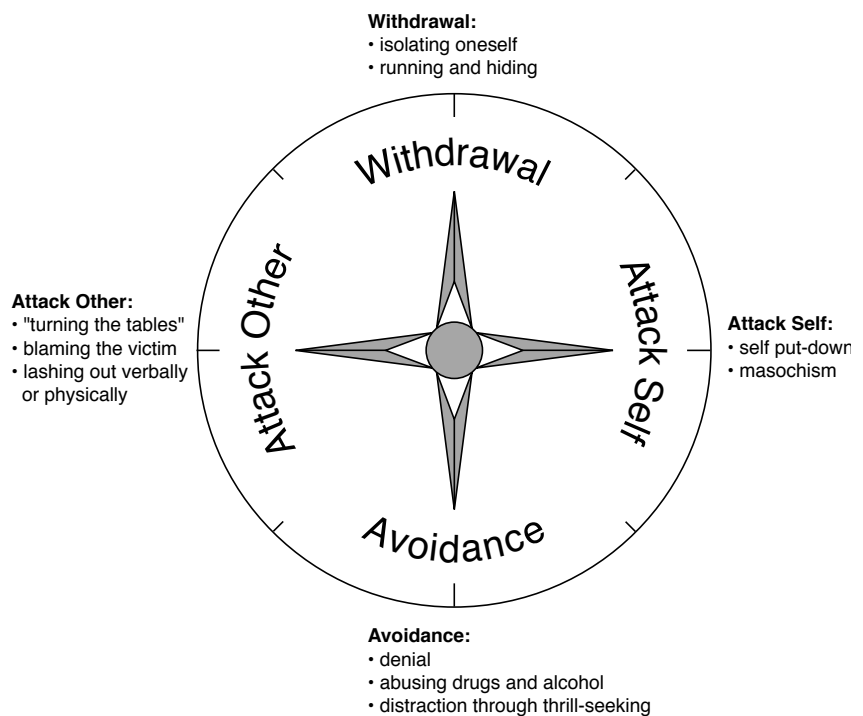

Withdrawal:
· isolating oneself
· running and hiding

Attack Other:
· "turning the tables"
· blaming the victim
· lashing out verbally or physically

Attack Self:
· self put-down
· masochism

Avoidance:
· denial
· abusing drugs and alcohol
· distraction through thrill-seeking

Figure 4. The Compass of Shame
(adapted from Nathanson, 1992)

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ness, the results are almost always better. This fundamental thesis was evident in a *Harvard Business Review* article about the concept of "fair process" in organizations (Kim and Mauborgne, 1997). The central idea of fair process is that "…individuals are most likely to trust and cooperate freely with systems—whether they themselves win or lose by those systems—when fair process is observed."

The three principles of fair process are:

Engagement — involving individuals in decisions that affect them by listening to their views and genuinely taking their opinions into account;

Explanation — explaining the reasoning behind a decision to everyone who has been involved or who is affected by it;

Expectation clarity — making sure that everyone clearly understands a decision and what is expected of them in the future.

Fair process applies the restorative with domain of the social discipline window to all kinds of organizations, in all kinds of disciplines and professions (O'Connell, 2002; Costello and O'Connell, 2002; Schnell, 2002). The fundamental hypothesis that people are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in behavior when authorities do things *with* them, rather than *to* them or *for* them expands the restorative paradigm far beyond its origins in restorative justice.

(This explanation of restorative practices is adapted from "From Restorative Justice to Restorative Practices: Expanding the Paradigm," by Ted Wachtel and Paul McCold, a paper presented at the IIRP's 5th International Conference on Conferencing, Circles and other Restorative Practices, August, 2004, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.)

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