

# Facilitating Restorative Group Conferences

# RGC

## Trainer's Guide Notes to Trainers

Minnesota Department of Corrections  
with technical assistance from the  
National Institute of Corrections

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Project Director:

Susan Stacey  
Restorative Justice Initiative  
Minnesota Department of Corrections  
St. Paul, Minnesota

Project Coordinator:

Ken Carpenter  
National Institute of Corrections  
Washington, D.C.

Curriculum Design Team/Contributors:

Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz  
U.S. Office on Crime and Justice Mennonite  
Central Committee  
Akron, Pennsylvania

Anne Rogers  
Victim Service Program  
Colorado Office of Probation Services  
Denver, Colorado

Stephanie Haider  
Restorative Conferencing Program  
Dakota County Community Corrections  
Apple Valley, Minnesota

Alice Lynch  
Black, Indian, Hispanic, and Asian Women in  
Action  
North Minneapolis Peacemaking Circles  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

David Hines  
Woodbury Community Conferencing Program  
Woodbury Public Safety  
Woodbury, Minnesota

Nancy Riestenberg  
Violence Prevention Program  
Minnesota Department of Children Families &  
Learning  
Roseville, Minnesota

Diego Hunt  
Barsness, Hopp and Flesch, LLC  
Englewood, Colorado

Reviewers/Contributors:

Mike Dooley  
National Institute of Corrections Academy  
Longmont, Colorado

Gena Gerard  
Restorative Justice Program  
Central City Neighborhoods Partnership  
Minneapolis, MN

Carolyn McLeod  
Community Justice Program  
Washington County Court Services  
Stillwater, Minnesota

Instructional Designer:

Phyllis Bebko, Ed.D.  
Community Justice Institute

Florida Atlantic University  
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

## INTRODUCTION

Facilitating Restorative Group Conferences is a curriculum designed for training volunteer and employed facilitators who will conduct restorative group conferences. Conferencing is only one of many restorative justice measures, and it may occur in a variety of settings including schools, workplaces, community-based justice programs, corrections facilities, faith community institutions and other community organizations.

Our purpose is not to advise people to use just one model of face to face meetings, but to provide training in model at a time, allowing people to get comfortable with it. They may then choose to go on and get trained in and experience other models so that they may use combinations of them to fit each case's needs. This training purposefully is on conferencing only. We encourage training on victim-offender mediation, peacemaking circles, and other restorative practices as well.

This curriculum package is appropriate for use in any conferencing setting, and is built upon the assumption that the individual trainer will customize the materials for their own setting. There will be issues related to the use of certain language. Many people doing conferences avoid the words victim and offender because they can be limiting labels. Some institutions, such as schools, also avoid using victim and offender because of their criminal justice connotation. For those reasons, they may want to replace the word 'victim' with the broader phrase 'person who has been harmed'. 'Offender' can be replaced with 'person who did the harm'. Trainers are welcome to adapt the language here to meet the needs of the participants in a particular training program.

Training for new facilitators is to be followed by an apprenticeship period with an experienced facilitator. In the rare situation where that is not possible, the new facilitator should work with a co-facilitator or partner for a minimum of the first five conferences. The format of this training, paired with an apprenticeship, follows training standards drafted by the international Victim Offender Mediation Association.

A restorative group conference, as the term is used here, refers to a process that seeks to identify, repair and prevent harm, based in restorative justice values including meaningful accountability. A restorative group conference is led by a trained facilitator and involves face-to-face contact among one or

more victims or their representative, the offenders, supporters for both, and other people who are affected. Participation of the victim is completely voluntary, and participation of the offender is based upon their willingness and readiness.

Restorative group conferences are incident-based, initiated in response to a crime, other harm or a dispute, and behavior-based, making a clear distinction between the harmful act and the actor. Conferences focus on empowering the participants, looking at underlying causes, and making referrals. Decisions are consensus based and end in an agreement with which all participants can live. Conferences are appropriate for use with adults or juveniles and can be used at any point in the justice system or at any point in a person's life. However, facilitators who will work with *crimes of severe violence, domestic violence, interfamilial violence, or abuse and neglect issues will require additional training* beyond that offered in this curriculum. Trainers need to make this very clear to participants in order to prevent participants mistakenly taking those cases without further training. Those cases involve much greater trauma due to the nature of the offense, relationships, and/or repeated offenses. [One place to get additional training in Victim Offender Dialogue is through the Center for Restorative Justice and Mediation at the University of Minnesota's School of Social Work, (612) 624-4923.]

### **AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR TRAINERS:**

This curriculum package is designed to develop essential knowledge and skills needed by the facilitator of restorative group conferences. It does, however, contain more content than can be effectively delivered in a classroom in three days or six evenings. Depending upon the size and the baseline knowledge and skills of your participants, you will want to choose from the content the most appropriate and highest priority learning activities to present. Much of the content is also supplemented by written resources. There are a variety of chapters, fact sheets, and articles in the Appendix that can also support what you deliver in the class setting.

The design team encourages you to plan your agenda to include a balance between the facilitation practice and learning about the values and principles upon which that practice is based. Skill practice is essential. Understanding the basis of that practice is also of the utmost importance. It is important that the trained facilitator understand why they do what they do.



## TRAINER SELECTION

The ideal trainer for this curriculum will have:

- Previous training in restorative justice principles and processes such as victim offender mediation/dialogue, conferencing, peacemaking circles, and/or victims' services.
- A demonstrated awareness of victims' issues and skill in victim sensitive communication.
- Group facilitation and training skills.
- Significant experience conducting restorative group conferences themselves – 30 may a good benchmark.
- A demonstrated ability to work effectively with people whose cultures are different from their own (including differences in race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, gender, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, age).
- Prior experience as a trainer, competence using a curriculum.
- An effective network of other conferencing facilitators with whom they consult for feedback.
- An awareness of how conferencing as presented here differs in goal and process from other restorative justice practice and from formal forms of civil dispute resolution.

While it is possible for one skilled trainer to train as many as 15 participants, a training team is strongly recommended. Much of the effectiveness of delivery of this curriculum depends upon observing participant practice and giving constructive feedback. A smaller trainer to participant ratio allows for more and better feedback. Another advantage of a training team is the ability to have trainers of diverse backgrounds, gender, ethnicity, personality, etc. Since it is important for trainers to model restorative justice values to participants, having a diverse training team is a good opportunity to demonstrate the inclusiveness of restorative practices. It also broadens the ability of the trainers to reach the participants, since in any group of people, some will respond better with one trainer than another.

## **THE FACILITY**

The ideal physical setting for this course will be based upon considerations below.

Rooms - Look for a facility with rooms:

- That are accessible to people with handicaps
- That are carpeted or have great acoustics and enough space that two or three practice conferences can go on simultaneously in each room without interrupting each other
- That allow food and beverages in them
- At least one of which is large enough for the whole group to sit around small tables or classroom style (chairs behind tables facing front) and large enough to move tables back and have everyone in a circle - minimum of 25'x35' for a group of 20-25 participants
- In addition to the main room, that include one or two nearby that allow easy transition into and out of practice conferences (First choice is one room for the large group presentations and two others nearby for practice conferences.)
- That can be configured to hold a refreshment table, a check in table, and a resource/handout table
- That include provision of low cost refreshments or give permission to bring in low cost refreshments from outside

Building - look for a building with:

- Plentiful, convenient, free or cheap parking
- Adequate lighting that can be made dark enough to see projected slides and video
- Comfort control of temperature - not too cold, not too hot

Equipment - Plan to have available:

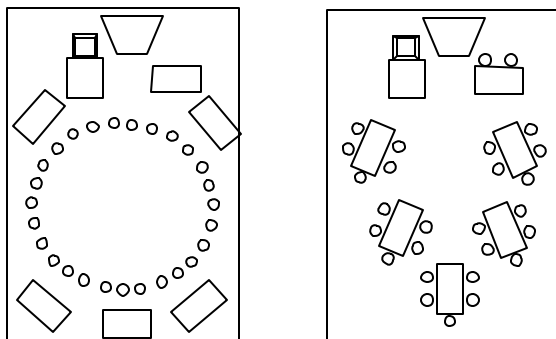
- At least one easel with a pad and markers, and two or three is better
- Chalkboard or whiteboard
- Podium
- VCR and TV/monitor (nothing smaller than 19") -- preferably on a tall rolling stand so people can see it more easily
- Overhead projector and screen (or wall if it's smooth enough) or a laptop computer connected to an LCD projection unit with a screen
- A boom box for playing the West Side Story CD

**ROOM SET UP**

The ideal room set up permits chairs around tables allowing for 5 or 6 people at each, placed at an angle to allow for easy viewing of video and overhead projection.

The room must also be large enough, when tables are pushed to the outside, to allow for all participants to sit in one circle.

One or more breakout rooms, depending upon class size, would be helpful for the second and third days.



## FOOD

The following sample menus are to assist you in your planning. Remember that this is only a suggestion based upon needs in one location. The timing and region of your event as well as the culture(s) of your participants may suggest alternatives.

Morning arrival and/or break food menu for 25 people:

- 2 gallons coffee (or if you bring in your own: a huge coffee percolator, coffee and filters, cups, napkins, and plates),
- 12 muffins or doughnuts or rolls
- 12 bagels and cream cheese, necessary to provide people on sugar-restricted diets with an alternative
- 20 juices, and
- 3- 4 pitchers of ice water (and glasses)

Lunch for 25 people:

**Trainer's Note:** Most trainers prefer to have the group eat together to help build the relationships within the group. If you must leave the training site, try to find a low cost alternative where a buffet is ready when you arrive or where they can seat the whole group and serve quickly. Keeping costs low is crucial

- Soup and sandwich buffet or delivered sandwiches, pizza, fried chicken with fixings, Chinese or Mexican takeout or a big pot of spaghetti with bread and salad if someone is willing to cook
- Fruit or cookie

Afternoon break for 25 people:

- Cold soda/pops
- Small amount of coffee
- 25 - 30 cookies or bars

## CURRICULUM PACKAGE

This curriculum package includes a Trainer's Guide with six lesson plans and six accompanying sets of overhead transparency masters.

Lesson One: Introduction

Lesson Two: Conferencing and Restorative Justice

Lesson Three: Understanding the Conference Participants:  
Victims, Offenders and Others in the Community

Lesson Four: Role of the Facilitator

Lesson Five: Further Development of Conferencing Skills

Lesson Six: Next Steps

The overheads are also available as PowerPoint files so that they may be used for projection as a computer slide show.

In addition, there is a Participant's Guide that complements the Lesson Plan materials and the overhead transparencies.

An Appendix (Module Seven) includes a variety of support materials and additional references. It is often made part of the Participant's Guide.

The Sample Scenarios from which the trainer may select appropriate situations for the practice conferences are in a separate section (Module Eight).

The curriculum suggests the use of a video in Lesson 2. If you do not have one of the two alternative videos, you may want to acquire one prior to the course. They are:

- *Restoring Justice*, (a 1-hour documentary by the National Council of Churches from the Presbyterian Church Distribution Center, 1-800-524-2612, \$5, or
- *Restorative Justice: For Victims, Communities, and Offenders*, (a 25-minute edit of the video above) Center for Restorative Justice and Peacemaking, School of Social Work, University of Minnesota, 1-612-624-4923, \$50

The curriculum also calls for the use of a recorded song (CD or audio tape), *Gee Office Krupke*, from *West Side Story*. This musical is from the 1950's but still easily available.

The curriculum mentions the option of using a video in Lesson 3: *Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Crime Victims* (a 40-minute training tape by the National Victim Assistance Academy). It is available free from the Office of Victims of Crime Resource Center, 800-627-6872, item number NCJ #167235. You may want to acquire that prior to the course.

## **TARGET PARTICIPANTS**

The target participants are facilitators, volunteer and employed, who will conduct restorative group conferences in any setting. Appropriate candidates will include school, criminal justice and corrections personnel (volunteer and employed); youth workers; members of the faith community and other community organizations; human services workers; staff in victim-serving programs; and other living and/or working in the community

Groups of 15-20 participants are recommended for one trainer. Larger groups are possible with additional trainers or coaches.

## **MESSAGE TO POTENTIAL TRAINING HOSTS**

Thank you for your interest in hosting a three day Facilitating Restorative Group Conferencing (FRGC) training seminar! Here is some information on the details of arranging a seminar.

### **Training Hosts**

If you choose to host a FRGC seminar here is what you will be agreeing to do:

- Recruit participants (20-35) by a deadline that's at least three weeks before the seminar. Note: the Department of Corrections will also publicize the training.
- Handle registration
- Arrange for appropriate rooms in which to hold the training (a large room plus breakout rooms for the second and third days – see attached “The Facility”)
- Arrange for refreshments, and hopefully lunches, for participants for all three days (see attached “Food”)
- Make photocopies of the Participant Guide (training manual) and the Agenda for each participant

- Provide audio visual equipment not provided by the trainers (see “The Facility”)
- Handle all monies (registration fees, any room or equipment rental, food and photocopying costs, and any trainer fee/expenses)
- Attend the training and “host” – help make sure things go smoothly
- Make and distribute training certificates and a Participant List to participants

### **Restorative Group Conferencing**

As you may know, conferencing was developed out of Maori tribal traditions and is being used to successfully resolve criminal and non-criminal harms across the United States and in other countries. A restorative group conference, as used here, refers to a process that seeks to identify, repair and prevent harm, based in restorative justice values including meaningful accountability. A restorative group conference is led by a trained facilitator and involves face-to-face contact among one or more victims or their representative, the offenders, supporters for both, and other people who are affected. Participation of the victim is completely voluntary, and participation of the offender is based upon their willingness and readiness.

Restorative group conferences are incident-based, initiated in response to a crime, harm, school rule violation or a dispute, and behavior-based, making a clear distinction between the harmful act and the actor. Conferences focus on empowering the participants, look at underlying causes, and make referrals. Decisions are consensus based and end in an agreement with which all participants can live.

Conferences are appropriate for use with adults or youth and can be used at any point in the justice system or the school system, or at any point in a person's life. However, facilitators who will work with *crimes of severe violence, domestic violence, interfamilial violence, or abuse and neglect issues will require additional training* beyond that offered in this curriculum. Hosts need to make this very clear to people registering for the seminar in order to prevent misunderstanding. Those cases involve much greater trauma due to the nature of the offense, relationships, and/or repeated offenses.

Hosts should also be clear that restorative group conferences are a completely different process from mediation that is done with civil disputes such as divorces, neighborhood disputes, and employment issues. Those mediations, sometimes called civil mediations, are done between parties who have equal moral standing; a civil mediation's goal is settlement and its tool is compromise by both sides.

Restorative group conferences, like victim offender dialogs and peacemaking circles, are done with people who do not have equal moral standing (since the offender chose to harm the victim and community). A conference's goals are to increase understanding and to find ways for the offender to make amends to the victim and community. Unlike civil mediations, victims are never coached to compromise because the focus is on repairing the harm to them and to the community. Hosts need to be clear with people registering for the seminar that civil mediation training does not prepare people to facilitate restorative group conferences, nor does this seminar in any way prepare people to mediate civil disputes.

### *The Training*

Please see the attached Sample Agenda. The seminar is largely experiential, with interactive exercises and lots of role plays so participants can practice in an open, comfortable setting. It is a fun and intense seminar and trainers who have long experience actually facilitating restorative group conferences bring colorful "war stories" to share.

The FRGC seminar is designed to be the classroom component of a classroom + apprenticeship training, in keeping with training standards drafted by the international Victim Offender Mediation Association. This means that training participants will not be qualified to facilitate conferences alone after the three day seminar but must then go through an apprenticeship period co-facilitating a number of cases with an experienced conferencing or victim offender mediation facilitator. In the rare situation where that is not possible, the new facilitator should work with a co-facilitator or partner for a minimum of the first five conferences and reconvene with other facilitators to debrief and for continuing education presentations.

### **Who Should Attend?**

The target participants are facilitators, volunteer and employed, who will conduct restorative group conferences in any setting. Appropriate

candidates will include school, criminal justice and corrections personnel (volunteer and employed); youth workers; members of the faith community and other community organizations; human services workers; staff in victim-serving and offender-serving programs; and others living and/or working in the community (don't forget retired folks and youth!). Administrators, case referral agency staff, and others who want to know about restorative group conferencing but do not need to learn how to do it may want to attend just the first day.

### *Registration and Training Materials*

See attached sample training flier/registration form. If you decide to host a seminar we will provide you with the training manual for you to photocopy (it can be copied 2-sided), and a training agenda specific to your seminar. Our trainer will bring role plays and may be able to bring a LCD projector and laptop computer to the training for the trainers' presentations; otherwise, either a LCD and laptop or else an overhead projector will be needed (see The Facility, attached).

In order to recruit and meet the needs of professionals it is helpful for them to get Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for attending the seminar. Social workers, school personnel and nurses just need to send in a copy of the seminar agenda and their personal training certificate. For lawyers, judges and law enforcement you would need to send in forms well in advance of the training; we can help you do that.

**ANNOUNCING**

**A Training Opportunity for \_\_\_\_\_ County Citizens,  
Justice Personnel, Law Enforcement, School Personnel**

**FACILITATING RESTORATIVE GROUP CONFERENCES**

Three-day Training (attendance required for all three days)

*[DAYS OF WEEK], [CALENDAR DATES]*

8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

*[ADDRESS]*

Trainers: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

*Space is limited so please register early!*

Training cost is free for \_\_\_\_\_ County staff and volunteers

Training cost is \$\_\_.00 for non- \_\_\_\_\_ County staff and volunteers

Community teams including three or more of the following are encouraged to register:  
Law Enforcement, School Administrator, Teacher, or Other Staff, Community Members,  
Youth Workers

Restorative Group Conferencing (also known as Family Group Conferencing) is a process that:

- Seeks to identify, repair and prevent harm.
- Focuses on empowering all of the participants.
- Is based on restorative justice values and meaningful accountability.
- Can be used as a diversion from court to provide for accountability in a school or community setting.
- Can be used after court or after suspension to establish how the offender will make amends and go on.
- Involves a face-to-face dialogue between those harmed and affected and those who caused the harm.
- Is facilitated by a person specifically trained in this form of conflict resolution.

Register by returning this form and payment, if not staff or volunteer, to *[CONTACT PERSON]* no later than *[DEADLINE DATE]* by Fax: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_ or Mail: *[ADDRESS]*

If you have questions please call *[CONTACT PERSON]* at (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_-\_\_\_\_.

REGISTRATION FORM:

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

Agency \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Fax \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

If registering in a team, number in your team \_\_\_\_\_ Names of others registering:

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**(please use a separate registration form for each person)**

## Conclusion

If interested in scheduling a FRGC seminar please contact [the trainers] at \_\_\_\_\_ at *least three months before* your desired seminar date. They will be happy to assist you and to answer questions you have beyond the attached “Frequently Asked Questions”.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- Q:** Can some people come for just part of the three day seminar?
- A:** People who just want to know about restorative group conferencing (like administrators and case referral sources) are encouraged to attend the first day as an introduction. People who are interested in learning how to do conferencing need to attend all parts of the three day training and then do cases in an apprenticeship after the classroom training.
- Q:** Can people come and go from the training if they need to?
- A:** It is strongly discouraged because the training is very condensed. Each part of the training is intended to build on all previous parts, so missing a part puts a person – and then the whole class as class time needs to be used to catch the person up – at a significant disadvantage.
- Q:** Can we send registered participants their training manual before the seminar so they can read it or get familiar with it?
- A:** Some people DO like to read the manual beforehand. Since some people might forget to bring it to the training (or lose it), you might want to ask people in your registration confirmation letter to contact you if they want it sent to them ahead of time.
- Q:** How does this seminar usually get scheduled during a week?
- A:** It depends on who you anticipate the participants will be (or who you'd like them to be) and on the trainers' schedules. If it's professionals taking the training for their jobs they will probably want the training to be held during business hours (e.g., 8:00-4:00 or 9:00-5:00). If it includes community volunteers they will probably want to avoid taking much or any time away from their jobs; since more people work day shift that may mean scheduling the seminar for

## Frequently Asked Questions, continued

- Friday, Saturday and Sunday, or for Friday afternoon, Saturday, Sunday afternoon and one or two evenings right before or after those.
- Q:** Can the training be conducted in a scheduling format other than those you've mentioned?
- A:** Occasionally, depending on trainers' availability, other schedules can be worked out such as two evenings plus two Saturdays, or six evenings.
- Q:** You said this training seminar is designed to be supplemented by an apprenticeship for each participant after the classroom training. How does that work?
- A:** The classroom training is just the start of participants developing the competence to do restorative group conferences. In order to gain experience and more skills each new facilitator (training participant) should co-facilitate a number of conferences with an experienced facilitator. Ideally, new facilitators would be apprenticed by experienced facilitators in their local, established conferencing or victim offender mediation programs. If that is not possible, the new facilitator should work with a co-facilitator or partner for a minimum of the first five conferences. Your organization, the new facilitators, and possibly their organizations will want to set up ways for them to do apprenticeship **and** to set up future meetings where they will reconvene to discuss their facilitation experiences and have continuing education speakers and/or role plays. It would be great to start thinking about apprenticeship and continuing education now so you have some ideas with which to stimulate participants' discussion in the seminar's Lesson Six: Next Steps, toward the end of the training. Note: The format of this training, paired with an apprenticeship, follows training standards drafted by the international Victim Offender Mediation Association.
- Q:** What about the registration fee? How much should it be?
- A:** Most conferencing programs provide training to their volunteers for free in exchange for a written commitment from each volunteer to facilitate cases for a period of time (e.g., a year) or for a number of cases (e.g., 6-10). So, if you are hosting a seminar to train your

volunteers, you will probably not charge them for the training. If you are hosting a seminar for participants who will not volunteer for your organization, or some participants will volunteer and others will not, you will probably need to charge a registration fee to participants not subsidized by your organization. Registration fees should reflect the actual cost of putting on the seminar (food; photocopying; any fees for a trainer, rooms or audio visual equipment; and perhaps some of your staff time coordinating it, if that's necessary) minus your organization's portion to pay for its volunteer training. If you can get rooms, audio visual equipment and food donated, it will drop the cost of the registration fee. Start by lining up the trainers and their A/V equipment, the seminar dates and the rooms, and then look into getting the rest donated. If you still aren't sure by the time you need to begin advertising the seminar (at least two months before the seminar) you could put "registration fee will be \$\_\_ - \$\_\_" or "registration fee will be no more than \$\_\_" on your seminar flier/registration form. (Note: meals and refreshments can run from \$10-13/person/day, and you know what photocopying costs in your area.) One other note: in order to best serve your area your program facilitators' backgrounds should reflect all those parts of the community your program serves, so it is important to take steps to include people from all different backgrounds, communities, ages and experiences. (And don't forget, for instance, victims, victims services, retirees, youth, Public Defenders, elders from non-Anglo ethnic communities, or faith communities!)

## **SAMPLE AGENDA**

### Day One:

- 8:00 Lesson One: Introduction
- 9:15 Lesson Two: Conferencing and Restorative Justice
- 11:30 Break for lunch
- 12:30 Lesson Three: Understanding the Conference Participants: Victims, Offenders and Others in the Community
- 5:00 Break for the Day

### Day Two:

- 8:00 Lesson Four: Role of the Facilitator
- 12:15 Break for lunch
- 1:00 Continue Lesson Four
- 1:50 Lesson Five: Further Development of Conferencing Skills
- 5:00 Break for the Day

### Day Three:

- 8:00 Continue Lesson Five
- 12:00 Break for Working Lunch – Begin Lesson Six: Next Steps
- 1:15 Continue Lesson Five
- 4:30 Continue Lesson Six
- 5:00 Training Complete

Alternatives to the three-day schedule are a six-evening schedule (i.e. two evenings a week for three weeks) or a combination with two evenings followed by a two-day weekend.