Summary
This article defines restorative justice and describes the models most relevant to social work. These include victim–offender conferencing (sometimes incorrectly referred to as mediation), family group conferencing, healing circles, and community reparations.

Restorative justice is an umbrella term for a victim–oriented method of righting a wrong, promoting healing following a conflict, including war, and/or providing a safety in the aftermath of violence (for example, child abuse). Such restorative strategies have their roots in the rituals of indigenous populations and modern-day religious practices, as stated by restorative justice pioneer, Howard Zehr. Restorative justice, as defined by the Social Work Dictionary, is “a non-adversarial approach usually monitored by a trained professional who seeks to offer justice to the individual victim, the offender, and the community, all of whom have been harmed by a crime or other form of wrongdoing.” This emerging model for resolving conflict and/or righting a wrong focuses on repairing the harm done by an offense by involving the victim, the offender, and the community.

This article identifies resources on restorative justice theories and strategies with special relevance to social workers and to mental health professionals, as well as school and correctional counselors. At the micro level, restorative justice is played out as conferencing between victims and offenders—for example, by way of family group conferences and healing circles. At the macro or societal level, restorative justice takes the form of reparations or truth commissions—to compensate for the harm that has been done, for example, when mass persecutions of people have taken place. The magnitude of the situations covered under the rubric of restorative justice ranges from interpersonal violence to school bullying to mass kidnappings to full-scale terrorism and warfare.

Restorative justice refers not only to a number of strategies for resolving conflicts peacefully but also to a political campaign of sorts to advocate for the rights of victims and for compassionate treatment of offenders. Instead of incarceration, for example, the option of community service coupled with

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substance abuse treatment might be favored. From the offender’s standpoint, accountability and truth-telling are stressed, as the offender typically offers to make amends for the harm that was done. From the victim’s standpoint, a key theme is empowerment, through receiving an apology from the wrongdoer and receiving the support of caring participants.

**Keywords:** criminal justice, victims, offenders, healing circles, forgiveness, family group conferencing, reparations, restorative strategies

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