

# ENSURING A TRANSFORMATIVE FUNCTION

*The Restorative Justice Ritual*

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The following recommendations will help to ensure that the restorative justice process is functioning as a transformative ritual that provides a space for significant and sustainable change at personal and relational levels.

## SEPARATION

The following recommendations will help you to achieve a successful separation phase, the first phase of a transformative ritual. During this phase, ritual participants are detached from everyday activities, social structures, and cultural conditions in order to enter the designated social space of the ritual. Separation is aided both by the physical space in which the ritual takes place and the values and way of interacting the space communicates and reinforces, and also by the clear establishment of a different way of being together, characterized by respect and equality.

- While preparing to facilitate a restorative process, take time to calm and center yourself, to be present in the moment and to shift to a more aware and integrated version of self. It can be helpful to establish a consistent practice that you do before all facilitation roles in order to achieve this internal separation phase prior to beginning the process.
- Pay attention to the symbolism of the physical space in which the process will take place. Ensure it is a neutral space for all participants that feels comfortable and home-like. Consider basic sensory concerns such as enough light, a comfortable temperature, quiet, and an absence of distractions.
- If you are in a borrowed space, bring items to help make the space feel welcoming and hospitable such as a tablecloth, flowers, tea, and snacks.
- Arrange chairs in a circle to communicate the equality of all present.
- Set a collective expectation of how all participants will be treated in the process by modeling respect and hospitality when you welcome participants.
- Open the process with a blessing or meaningful reading (when desired by participants).
- Share the ground rules of the process to set expectations for how participants will interact.
- When you speak, use a calm, warm, and respectful tone of voice.
- Towards the beginning of the process, have participants do a round of introductions in the circle to establish equal voice from the outset.

## LIMINALITY AND COMMUNITAS/COLLECTIVE EFFERVESCENCE

The following recommendations will help to pave the way for the second phase of transformative rituals: liminality and the emergence of communitas/collective effervescence. The radical equality of liminality and the type of communication it allows facilitate a revelation of deep connection and resulting sentiment of human kindness among participants.

- Ensure equality of relationships, meaning that each person receives the basic respect, concern, and dignity required for well-being and flourishing.
- Ensure that participants have equal opportunity to speak and that they are not competing with each other to speak.
- Ensure that all participants (including the facilitators) are sitting in a circle, on the same level, to communicate equality.
- Do not use labels such as victim/offender. Acknowledge the dignity and worth of all participants by using their names.
- Meet at a time and in a place that works well for people (take into consideration participants' schedules and restraints when scheduling). This shows respect to all involved.
- Demonstrate active listening.
- Uphold the ground rules when they are violated. Do not allow one voice to override the others.
- As facilitator, you must have equal standing to the others in the process. Cultivate self-awareness of how you are showing up as the facilitator and resist the urge to take control or dominate the process in face of uncertainty. Remember that you do not have decision-making power and also should not make value statements related to participants' contributions (i.e. responding to an agreement item idea with "I love that idea!"). This can compromise your ability to equally support all present.
- Consider using a talking piece to ensure equal voice and to reduce the control/domination of the process that you risk having as the facilitator.

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## REINCORPORATION

The following recommendations will help you to ensure a successful reincorporation phase, the third phase of a transformative ritual. During this phase, ritual participants re-enter social structures in a transformed way. This phase serves to transition participants out of the ritual space and back into their normal lives and also includes measures to help make the transformation sustainable to carry forward lessons learned.

- End the process with a closing round that allows participants to share a final statement or closing sentiment.
- Close the process with a blessing or meaningful reading (when desired by participants).
- Congratulate and thank each person for participating in the process.
- Allow physical gestures of reconciliation such as handshakes and hugs to take place when they occur naturally and are fully consensual.
- Create an opportunity for participants to eat together immediately following the conference process by bringing tea or snacks.
- Employ symbolic objects as a lasting symbol of the transformation that has been achieved. This could take the form of the signed agreement. This symbol is most effective if the agreement is honored and all parties are notified when all items on the agreement are complete. The other processes, procedures, and justice rituals surrounding the restorative justice process must also honor the agreement in order for it to be an effective symbol.
- Other possible symbolic objects include gifts exchanged between participants (which should be allowed when they occur naturally and are consensually given and received) and art pieces created over the course of the restorative justice process.
- Consider arranging additional meetings to recharge the experience of communitas/collective effervescence such as circle processes, which replicate the type of social space created by restorative encounters but can be held any time (not just in the aftermath of crime or conflict).

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