

Study Guide
Little Book of Restorative Justice for People in Prison
Barb Toews

Please visit the Pennsylvania Prison Society Web site, www.prisonssociety.org, for additional restorative justice discussion and reflection materials to complement this study guide.

General questions for all chapters:

1. What is your reaction to the case studies?
2. What stands out as important or meaningful to you?
3. What does the chapter mean to you in light of your personal experiences?
4. In what ways have you seen or experienced the concepts in real life?
5. With what do you agree? Why?
6. With what do you disagree? Why?
7. What benefits and risks are there to applying the concepts in prison?
8. How can, or do, you apply the concepts in your life?

Chapter 1 - Introduction

1. What have your personal experiences been with the criminal justice system?
2. Why should you be concerned about offenders or prisoners and understanding restorative justice through their eyes and experiences?
3. What does “restorative” mean to you? What might it mean for victims? For offenders? For offender families? For communities?
4. How have you been personally impacted by labels such as “offender” or “victim”? How do such labels impact the justice system and community life?

Chapter 2 - Web of Relationships

1. Is it possible to create a strong web of relationships within society? If yes, what makes it possible? If not, what gets in the way?
2. What does “respect” mean to you?
3. What comes first:
 - a. One’s ability to give respect or one’s ability to receive respect?
 - b. A community’s respect for the individual or the individual’s respect for community?
4. What are the roles and responsibilities of individuals within a web of relationships?

Chapter 3 – Crime and Criminal Justice

1. Do you agree that crime “is a sign that something is wrong with our relationships?” If so, why? If not, what other factors are involved?
2. What are the implications – for individuals and communities – of seeing crime and justice as a struggle between respect and disrespect?
3. Are there times when punishment is appropriate? If so, when are those times? If not, when is punishment insufficient or inappropriate?

Chapter 4 – Restorative Justice

1. What does the definition of restorative justice (p. 20) mean to you? How is it similar or different from other definitions that you have heard?
2. Should a justice system adhere to restorative justice questions, beliefs and elements? What are the potential benefits and risks to justice participants if they participate in such a system?
3. How do restorative justice values differ from the values by which the criminal justice system operates? What additional restorative values would you add?
4. Can a justice system live out restorative values within a society that may not share the same beliefs and values? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. How does accountability differ between the criminal justice system and restorative justice? How is this difference positive? How does it make you feel uncomfortable?
6. What does it mean to “do no harm” to each of the justice participants? What does this say about what a justice system should and should not do?
7. Are there times when restorative justice may be inappropriate or impossible? If so, when are those times? If not, when is it most appropriate and possible?

Chapter 5 – Reconnecting Community

1. Why, if at all, should restorative justice look forward rather than focus on the past? What does your response suggest about the factors that justice should consider?
2. Which comes first:
 - a. A community’s influence on the individual or an individual’s influence on community?
 - b. A community’s responsibility to individuals or individuals’ responsibility to community?
 - c. Community needs and obligations or individual needs and obligations?
3. Discuss each of the justice needs. What are the ways in which you have seen these needs play out in your community? What do they suggest about what a justice system should or should not do?
4. What does this chapter have to say about the needs and obligations of a prison community?

Chapter 6 – Reconnecting Individuals

1. Which comes first – individual healing or community healing?
2. What is your reaction to the idea that the three justice participants have the same justice needs? Why do you react that way?
3. The author suggests that an individual may have multiple justice identities as an offender, victim, and offender family member. How can a justice system honor the breadth of experiences that justice participants embody?
4. What element in the justice tree is most meaningful or important to you? Why?
5. Are there times when meeting individual justice needs is inappropriate or impossible? If so, when are those times? If not, when is it most appropriate and possible?

Chapter 7 – Reconnecting Victims and Their Communities of Care

1. What is your reaction to the idea:

- a. That victims are frequently ignored by the criminal justice system?
 - b. Of putting victims at the center of the justice process?
2. Discuss each of the justice needs. How have you seen these needs being met, or not being met, in your own life or in the lives of loved ones?
3. What can an understanding of victim needs tell you about the experiences and needs of the other justice participants, including community?
4. What can you learn about your own healing journey from victims?

Chapter 8 - Reconnecting Offenders

1. Do you agree that people who offend can be “experts” in what they need and need to do following crime? What are the implications of this for the justice process?
2. What is your reaction to the idea that the criminal justice system and prison make it difficult for offenders to be accountable for their crimes and to heal?
3. Discuss each of the justice needs. How have you seen these needs being met, or not being met, in your own life or in those of loved ones?
4. What can an understanding of offender needs tell you about the experiences and needs of the other justice participants, including community?
5. What can you learn about your own healing journey from offenders?

Chapter 9 – Reconnecting Offenders’ Families

1. In what ways can an offender family’s involvement in the justice process promote healing for victims and offenders? In what ways could it cause more harm to victims and offenders?
2. Discuss each of the justice needs. How have you seen these needs being met, or not being met, in your own life or in the lives of loved ones?
3. Are there times when a family should accept responsibility for their loved one’s actions and be held accountable? If so, when? If not, why not?
4. What can an understanding of offender family needs tell you about the experiences and needs of the other justice participants, including community?
5. What can you learn about your own healing journey from offender families?

Chapter 10 – Restorative Justice Practices

1. Of the three levels of restorative justice practice, which interests you most? Why?
2. What case study or practice interested you most? Why?
3. What risks and benefits – for each justice participant, including community – accompany each practice?
4. To what degree do these common practices connect with your cultural or faith traditions? What of your cultural or faith practices are restorative in nature?
5. The case studies throughout the book offer examples of ways to apply restorative justice in different ways. How do these case studies differ from those in this chapter? To what degree are they individually, relationally, or socially restorative?
6. Is a fully restorative justice system possible or desirable? What benefits and risks are associated with a fully restorative system? What, if any, aspects of the criminal justice system could or would need to be part of a fully restorative system?

Chapter 11 – Restorative Practices, Justice, and Prison

1. How would you characterize the prison culture? What of the prison culture impedes restorative justice? What of the prison culture promotes restorative justice?
2. To what degree is it realistic or do-able to use restorative practices in prison? What conditions are in place or need to be created in order to use restorative practices in prison?
3. To what degree are you aware of what services are, or are not, available in your community? How can you (as a victim, offender, offender family member or community member) connect with those services?
4. What role, if any, do prisons themselves have in the restorative justice philosophy and its practices?
5. How do you react to the statement “relationships are a means to justice, not something to which one returns after justice”?

Chapter 12 – Restorative Living

1. Is it realistic for incarcerated individuals to live restoratively in prison? What challenges do they face in doing so? How might their restorative living impact the whole prison community?
2. What might it mean for prison staff to live and work restoratively while on the job? What challenges would staff face in doing so? How might their restorative living and working impact the whole prison community?
3. What does restorative justice say about how men and women relate to each other? How parents and children relate to each other? How community members relate to each other?
4. What does advocacy within a restorative justice framework look like?
5. The author believes that incarcerated individuals have the personal power to create healthy and strong communities and to transform the criminal justice system. To what degree do you agree or disagree? What would need to happen for this idea to be true?

Questions for faith communities

Barb Toews and Rev. Lynn McLaughlin, Coordinator for Restorative Justice Ministries, Episcopal Community Services and former prison chaplain

1. What, in each chapter, captures your attention when looking through the lens of your faith?
2. How is justice defined, clarified, or interpreted by your faith’s laws and codes? How do these understandings resonate with restorative justice?
3. Which stories or passages from your faith and holy book communicate similar messages as the case studies?
4. Is there a theological model for restorative justice?
5. Where in your scriptures/holy book do you see examples of restorative practices?
6. How does restorative justice call you to obedience to your faith?

7. For individuals and faith communities interested in offering criminal or restorative justice programs:
 - a. Look at the justice needs tree on p. 32. What need on the tree connects with your individual gifts and/or your faith community's passion?
 - b. Look at the restorative justice practice levels on p. 61. In which practice level are you and/or your faith community most interested in order to address that need?
 - c. What implications does restorative justice have for programs that your faith community already offers – for instance, prison ministries?
 - d. Are there potential obstacles or pitfalls in developing a ministry based on restorative justice concepts? If so, how can these difficulties be addressed?
8. What implications does restorative justice have for the life of your faith community and for the relationships between community members?