

TOOLS FOR INTEGRATING STRUCTURAL HARM IN RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES

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1. Forefront, integrate and create space for structural harm in circles, prep. programs and dialogs:

Why is this important?

- People won't trust you if you don't, and they might not tell you.
- There is a whole realm of harm that is not being talked about.
- RJ continues to be critiqued as a process that does not understand the impact of structural harm.
- Because oppression and structural harm are always at play, and contribute to the conditions of interpersonal violence.
- Because if people who've committed harm don't talk about oppression stories they might not be telling their whole story.
- Allows us to hold a "200%" reality, so we can tend to both: interpersonal violence and structural oppression, and all the feelings that go with it.
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What strategies would you use?

- Don't compartmentalize the conversation to a certain time but integrate it throughout.
- Be the one to bring it up (don't waiting for it to "come up" or hope it doesn't at all).
- Gently moving conversation back (if it gets diverted).
- Don't give "survivors" a free pass. Gently challenging victims (without shaming them) if they say oppressive things.
- Oppression can be traumatizing so might present in that way. Engage it with compassion, the same way you would an interpersonal harm.
- Create safety for participants to name the impact of intergenerational trauma in their lives and whatever they feel (anger, rage, sadness, etc).
- Allow space for rage about the length of sentence, or oppression or inequity in ones life.
- Stay vigilant and appropriate about how you integrate structural harm in the circle, dialog, et cetera.
- Watch the tendency for people to compete in their histories. Create space for noncompetitive histories. There is enough room for all of our stories.

*Self-evaluation in
critical self reflection
re: power over/
power with*

2. Practice from a nonjudgmental and power-with approach:

Why is this important?

- Because people are the authorities of their life experiences.
- Challenges the charity-based model of “working with others”.
- Demonstrates that you have an oppression lens and you are interested in “the whole story” and the agency of others.
- Creates safety and for deeper processing to happen.
- It allows people the space to find their own answers to their unique challenges.
- Demonstrates love and compassion for peoples lived experiences.
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What strategies would you use?

- Situate yourself— name your positionality- name the life experiences that did and didn't inform you.
- Practice inquiry or asking versus advice giving, judging or telling.
- Don't insist that “the model” works for everyone. Your model is not one size fits all. Community, the context, the people and their life experience should inform the model. Make adjustments based on these factors.
- Name your approach—i.e. power with. You can say, “You are authorities of your own life experience”. “I'm not here to tell you what to do or how to feel, but to create an environment where you can find it yourself.” Or “I'm offering a model, try it on, but if it doesn't work for you, that's ok.”
- Be self reflective throughout – look for the subtle ways you might be judging or operating from a power-over approach.
- Find balance between offering your unique skills and enacting a power-over approach.
- “Meet the person where they are at”: don't force anyone to be more ready than they are. Make space for dissent, resistance, a change of mind, and consent.
- Watching your assumptions about “success”. For some success might be a small step towards healing or accountability.
- Watch your language — use non-pathologizing and non-labeling language.

3. Engage with what you don't know/Truly practice cultural humility:

Why is this important?

- Because it is honest.
- It counters a supremacy way of thinking.
- It builds trust.
- It allows space for people to speak from their cultural lens and their cultural stories.

What strategies would you use?

- Name that you don't have same life experience as others and that you are not expecting others to teach you about theirs.
- Ask others when you don't know what to do next.
- Discern when to offer your expertise and when to pull back. Often people think "not knowing" means that they should stop contributing. This reinforces their authority, instead of choosing to sit in the discomfort of not-knowing, and express their vulnerability. Not contributing (as the facilitator) maintains a position of authority.
- Don't ask people of color to do the hard work for you, or when the conversation turns to oppression turn to them. Become skilled in understanding how to engage oppression in yourself and in participants.

4. Do your own personal work (within the RJ process you are facilitating and outside of it) in order to understand the impact of oppression, supremacy and privilege:

Why is this important?

- “A facilitator can only take a group as deep as they have gone or are willing to go themselves”.
- Because it builds trust.
- Oppression is real and pervasive and its everyone responsibility to engage with it.
- My value is to engaging abuses, harms, and oppression in all of its forms. Know your values and what you need to learn in order to better enact them.
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What strategies would you use?

- Practice critical self-reflection at every level (or praxis—the cycle of action and reflection. The circle or dialog is the actions. The reflection is you analyzing how you were in the circle, class or dialog so that you become more skilled).
- Consider deeply why you are “in the work?” Why are you really, really, really, really here? What is your fourth really?
- Model accountability and transparency.
- Depersonalize when appropriate: know the difference between when someone is trying to work something out versus it’s really about you or if there is a little bit of both.
- Take trainings to deepen your understanding of oppression.
- Sit with discomfort, critically reflect and offer vulnerability from there.
- Assess your own readiness, capacity and intentions (if you are working in a multicultural community or with people with different life experiences then yours):
 - Self-assess: how deep have you gone to understand issues of privilege, oppression? Where are you comfortable and uncomfortable? What work do you still have to do?
 - Celebrate your story— we all have rich stories to tell. Sometimes when we don’t spent time with the richness of our own history, we don’t make space for other peoples stories.
 - If you aren’t comfortable with the integration of oppression, be honest with yourself. Are you adequately trained to work in a multi-cultural or multi-experienced context?
 - I believe we will have arrived when anyone can fluidly story themselves from their ethnic, gendered, sexuality, class perspective and it is received.

5. Integrate Structural harm in the DESIGN of Restorative Justice Processes, and Trainings.:

Why is this important?

- In order to be embraced by a wide variety of people from different movements.
- Because oppression and structural harm is always at play and need to be engaged with in any RJ design process.
- To challenge the dominant power-over, and authoritarian paradigms.
- To forefront the agency of every person and the wisdom that their lived experience brings.
- To counter the critique that restorative justice does not engage with structural harm.

What strategies would you use?

- Allow for the methodology and practice to come directly from lived experience — fight the tendency to come up with the model before actually holding some of the process.
- Watch the tendency to overly claim singular ownership, “inventing” processes and copywriting processes while being able to name what you have created.
- Ground in power-with and critical pedagogy values.
- Don’t compartmentalizing structural harm to “Day 3” or a 90 minute session. Integrate it from the beginning and throughout.
- Build a structural analysis into your processes (intersectional approach example).
- Situate yourself (this is really important particularly in leadership).
- Practice critical self-reflection every step of the way.
- Speak from personal story (when appropriate) to build trust.
- About co-facilitation/co-keeping:
 - Try to offer cross-cultural and cross-experience facilitators that mirror participants. This way different participants will feel connected to different circle keepers.
 - If something is coming up around differences, you can ask the participant: how do you feel about me as the facilitator or co-keeper? What do you need from me?
 - Don’t underestimate reparative relationship you can offer cross culturally, or across gender if you’ve “done your work” around oppression. At the same time if you don’t have the lived experience, ask yourself if you are appropriate for you to be designing such processes.
 - Set your co-facilitator and the team up for success (i.e. are you telling everyone that your process is co-created but you have designed it? Do you offer the best parts of the training, while your co-lead does less? What does it mean to check and examine our own egos in this work).

- Watch our desire to be in control and in charge while understanding when it's important to put forth our leadership and unique gifts.
- As a leader watch the tendency to ask people of color to do the hard work around oppression dynamics for you. Become skilled at how to integrate this in your leadership.
- Understand the relevance and importance of time for exclusive circles (based on race, class gender, sexuality etc).
- Hold and participate in more structural harm circles and processes (around race, gender etc).

6. Engage oppression as a traumatic experience:

Why is this important?

- Trauma from oppression is real and needs to be understood as such. It will often show up in the room. This is being trauma informed.
- If we aren't afraid to engage with the trauma from oppression, it can pose an opportunity to break into a deeper place personally and for the group.
- Macro structural harm plays itself out in the interpersonal.
- Because there is a relationship between trauma, self harm and harm to others.
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What strategies would you use?

- Listening with compassion for "the harm" of oppression (the damage a person has felt as a result of racism, patriarchy, classism, homophobia) and treat it as you would an interpersonal harm.
- Track participants individually and as a whole. Notice when triggers are showing up. Adjust accordingly. Assess whether it's appropriate to engage the issue, whether the person who is feeling too triggered and needs space. A useful strategy is to ask that person what they need.
- Make space in the group/circle for structural harm stories to come out and the feelings that go with it. If others in the room haven't done work around the issue, tend to what's happening in the group but stay focused on the structural harm story. People who experience trauma from oppression often feels like their stories are silenced because of the dominant cultures discomfort in listening. Be vigilant about keeping appropriate attention on person most harmed by oppression and then find ways to also deal with the group dynamic that might be coming up.
- Understand and learn as much as you can about trauma and resiliency and use resiliency techniques to bring people back into their body: grounding, meditation, tapping, etc.
- Watch the tendency for people to compete in their histories. Create space for noncompetitive histories. There is enough room for all of our stories.
- If things are very difficult, consider when it is appropriate to take breaks, and time away, and change the flow of the circle or stick with the conversation. I would also name the discomfort we are feeling out-loud. If participants are getting really triggered is a good marker of whether folks are ready to stay in the conversation or not.
- Allow space for participants to take care of themselves in any way that they need to (leave, breathe, stop engaging).
- Know that some participants might need more space /they have experienced more harm, and that's ok.
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7. **In Movement Building Strategy and Conversations:**

Why is this important?

What strategies would you use?