


We Invite You to Sign the Community Compact on Restorative Justice

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Written by: Anna Thomas

The Justice & Equality for Kids (JE4K) Roundtable developed the  [Community Compact on Restorative Justice](#) to bring integrity and focus to ongoing efforts to make our schools safer, our juvenile justice system more effective and compassionate, and our communities healthier.

Utahns have heard more and more about Restorative Justice over the past decade, sometimes in legislative proposals - [such as this excellent offering by Rep. Sandra Hollins \(R-Salt Lake\)](#) - and sometimes as part of discussions of about school-based discipline - [such as this less instructive definition within the Utah State Board of Education's administrative rules \(R277-613-2.10\)](#). The term has been mentioned frequently in discussions about the appropriate role of School Resource Officers (SROs) practicing in Utah, as well as during the extensive juvenile justice reform process initiated by state leaders back in 2016.

Unfortunately, once a complex and deep-rooted philosophy becomes a buzzword, things can get a little hazy with regards to principles and definitions! **But Restorative Justice does have a specific definition, grounded in historical practice by indigenous cultures and built upon several key interrelated principles. The Community Compact on Restorative Justice is our iteration of that definition, developed in partnership with local Restorative Justice practitioners.** It is an honest effort, by multiple community stakeholders, to assert that you can't just slap a "Restorative Justice" label on a random diversion program, and expect it to produce the positive results that are associated with the practice of this philosophy.


If you prefer to add an audiovisual element to your review of the Community Compact on Restorative Justice, JE4K Roundtable members unveiled the Compact for the first time at the Fourth Annual Breaking the Pipeline Symposium in March, hosted by fellow JE4K Roundtable member organization, Racially Just Utah. [Here is a link to the livestreamed event](#), with discussion of the Community Compact on Restorative Justice beginning around the 39:09 minute mark.


It is hard to define Restorative Justice in a linear fashion, in a way that fits neatly into a slogan or list of bullet points. That is because the philosophy was not conceived in a linear way, and not developed by cultures that communicate in slogans or bullet

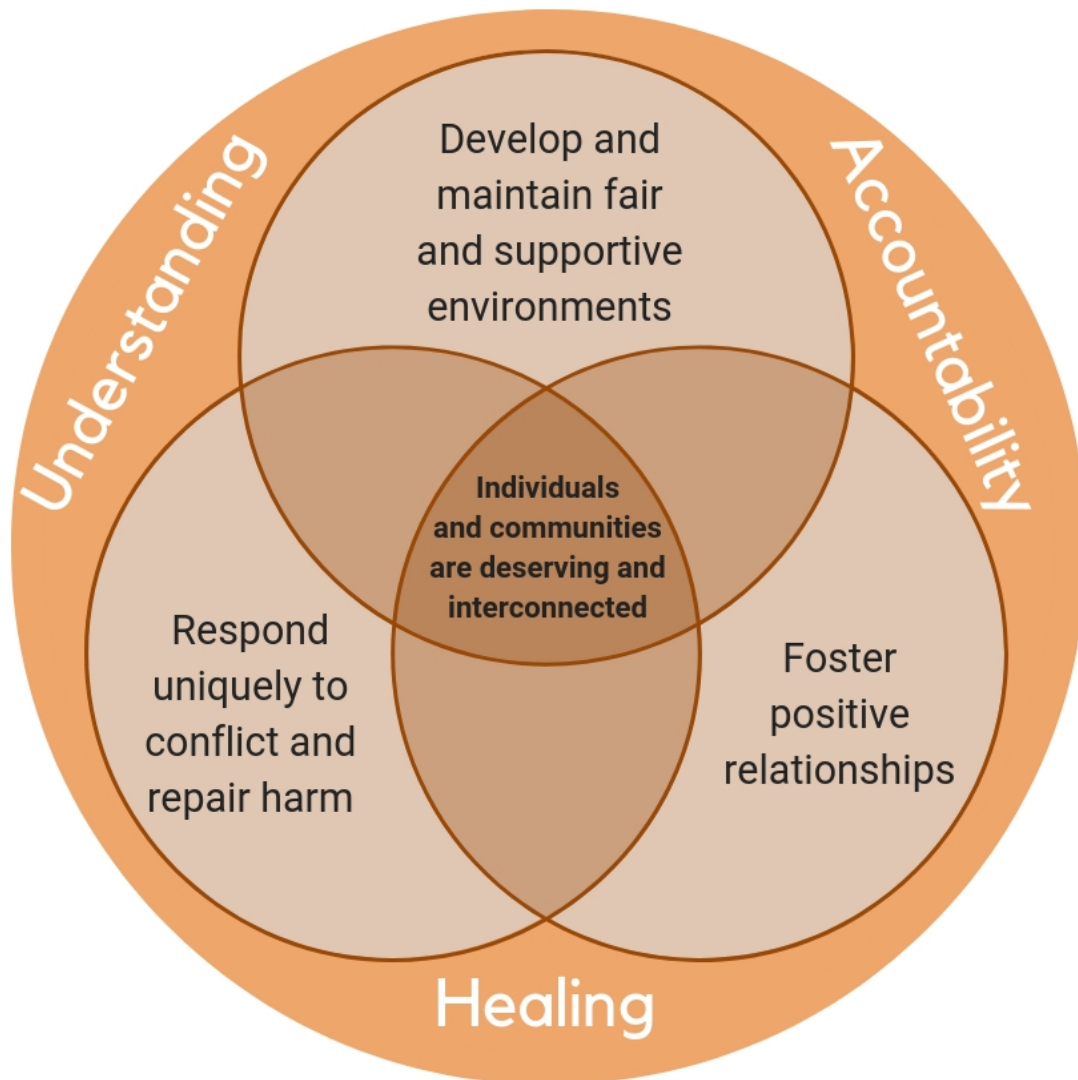
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points. That is why our Community Compact on Restorative Justice works together with a few simplified graphics, that stress the multi-dimensional nature of the approach. Below is the first and most foundational of the three graphics. The 

[second graphic](#) and  [third graphic](#) demonstrate the practical application of these principles in an education and a juvenile justice setting, respectively.



So far, several organizations have signed on to the Community Compact on Restorative Justice - including the following members of our JE4K Roundtable:

- Voices for Utah Children (of course!),
- [Journey of Hope](#),

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- [Ogden Branch NAACP](#),
- [Utah Juvenile Defender Attorneys](#),
- [Restorative Justice Collaborative of Utah](#),
- [Disability Law Center](#),
- [YWCA of Utah](#),
- [ACLU of Utah](#),
- [Mountain Mediation Center](#), and
- [Racially Just Utah](#).

We would like your organization to join us on this list, and commit to holding restorative justice programs in our state to this standard. Your participation will also signal your organization's intention and commitment to practicing restorative justice in a manner that is based on this understanding of Restorative Justice. Our intent is to share this definition of Restorative Justice with governmental and community partners, toward the end of pushing policy in the direction of a more restorative framework.

For example, as we take part in policy conversations about "school safety" in the era of Parkland, Newtown and Santa Fe, we will continually point our stakeholder/partners to the underlying principles in this definition. That means a successful approach to school safety - if it truly aspires to be restorative - must be primarily preventative, relationship-based and encompassing of the whole school community. "Solutions" that focus only on [emergency drills](#), [mobilizing law enforcement](#), [high-tech gadgetry](#) and [threat assessments](#) cannot claim to be restorative, and will not lead to the positive outcomes associated with Restorative Justice practices (one of those positive outcomes being safe schools!). These approaches, when utilized, can and should be grounded in Restorative Justice principles, in order to ensure **prevention** of future problems rather than simply mitigation of current ones.

Restorative Justice

A values-based approach to building trust, strengthening relationships and resolving conflict.

A philosophy with deep roots in many indigenous cultures, with broad practical application.

NOT Restorative Justice

A discretely-packaged program with a defined curriculum that will work in any setting, from school to prison.

A cool new idea, created by modern professionals and espoused only by bleeding heart liberals.

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Restorative Justice

Practices are primarily preventative and can be easily integrated into other activities.

Example: Law enforcement officers and administrators meet regularly with community members to discuss neighborhood needs and issues.

Example: Bringing a group of students together to check in about their day before beginning the lesson.

NOT Restorative Justice

Practices are only employed after harm has been caused and all "traditional" solutions exhausted.

Example: City officials hold an annual Town Hall where frustrated and angry community members sit in a circle and vent their frustrations at members of the local police department, who are forced to attend and listen.

Example: Forcing a student who has bullied peer to apologize, then sit with the bullied student at lunch for a month to "get to know her."

Restorative Justice is harder to explain than an active shooter drill or counseling program. It requires more than the hiring of a few new staff people, or the implementation of a new curriculum. It is not a quick fix, but it is a research-supported and fruitful investment in our community's health, prosperity and safety. This approach is worth the investment of time and intention, and we will continue to champion its principles in Utah's education, justice, and community landscapes in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for Utah kids.

To add your organization's name to this Compact, please contact the JE4K Roundtable via anna@utahchildren.org.