



September 27, 2021

Amidst the continuing conversation and actions aimed at keeping people safe from sexual harm and gendered violence in artistic, activist, and other spaces, and rightful calls for accountability in the wake of the silencing (and threatening) of protestors advocating for survivors at the Ynot Lot, a number of people have called for restorative processes to address the harm done over a number of years.

Restorative Response Baltimore believes that for accountability to take place, those who have caused harm must acknowledge and own their actions. And some survivors and their supporters may not be in a space to enter into restorative or transformative justice processes, which they're well within their rights to determine.

Above all, we believe survivors and victims, and we aim to support them both collectively and individually in whatever ways we can. And we acknowledge that these processes cannot always guarantee that survivors feel whole or safe in their bodies.

RRB has been working with people in Baltimore for 23 years, and in that time we have facilitated thousands of circle processes, many of which have supported powerful healing, accountability, and connection. A few, however, have involved no change to the conflict, or worse, additional harm. When matters can't be resolved, we work to connect process participants that want continued support with relevant community support and resources, such as like-minded organizations and community members.



We began formally working on creating restorative processes specifically for sexual harm five years ago because so many survivors/victims*, who often cannot trust the criminal punishment system to support their healing or promote the kind of justice they want to see, continue to reach out to us. In all of our restorative justice work, we only pursue processes initiated by the people who have been harmed.

We do not believe it is advocacy to ask people to put their faith in a criminal punishment system that does not center their experiences and well-being. In addition to the many stories we have heard from survivors in Baltimore to this effect, there is much research across the country demonstrating that many stages of our criminal punishment system often re-traumatize survivors and fail to achieve accountability from the vast majority of people who commit sexual violence.

Looking to the legal system or incarceration as a site of accountability is not only not supported by statistics on preventing future harm, but it also completely dismisses those survivors whose rapes and assaults occur within prison walls.

We believe that survivors deserve more choices. We believe in particular that Black and Brown survivors should not be forced to seek accountability from the very systems that are designed to enact violence on them. We believe that when survivors ask for restorative and transformative justice as part of their journey toward reclaiming power, it is our responsibility to listen. We also believe that people who have raped and sexually harmed others need to be held responsible, and that isolating and incarcerating them does not work and is not accountability.



We also encourage people to initiate more proactive conversations around what transformative justice and restorative justice look like within their existing communities and networks, particularly in spaces where there is already a foundation of trust, and ideally before harm occurs.

The restorative processes we currently offer that center around sexual violence are proactive dialogue circles, which focus on developing a culture of consent within the systems before harm is done. These processes work especially well for young people and families.

We are committed to the belief that restorative justice for sexual violence is possible, with extensive and patient preparation that includes trust-building between facilitators and those directly impacted by the harm. We also understand that restorative processes may not be appropriate in many incidents of sexual violence to address the power imbalances that exist between someone who has raped and someone who is a victim/survivor of this rape.

When survivors and their supporters reach out to us, we direct them to advocacy organizations such as UMB ROAR Center, TurnAround, Inc. and Indigo Mateo's Soul Showers for support and services. And we believe that organizing and public calls for accountability can be part of restorative justice and that media serves as a tool that, if wielded responsibly, can help create the conditions for healing, collective accountability, and transformation.

*Our choice of "survivor/victim" language is informed by many of the focus groups we have held with survivors and victims in the last several years.