



Difficult Conversations

What do victims and survivors say about taking part in restorative justice?

Can I meet the offender?

Do I have to meet the offender?

How can I get answers about what happened?

Does it work?

Will they apologise?

Will I be safe?

How can I tell the offender what it's been like for me?

Will they be punished?

Why me?

Will it help me feel better?

NOTES

We are going to use the words ‘**victim**’ and ‘**survivor**’ in this booklet, to mean the person (or people) who have been affected by a crime. This is for clarity, although we recognise that you might not think of yourself this way.

We are going to use the phrase ‘**the offender**’ throughout this booklet but this could be your child, partner, parent, friend, co-worker, etc.

In general, we will talk about restorative justice after a criminal justice process has ended. However, the offender may or may not have been arrested, charged, or convicted. **If there hasn’t already been a criminal justice process** in your case, just skip those bits of this booklet.

This booklet is **not about the practical aspects of restorative justice**: if you are in the UK and want to know who to contact, how long it might take, or who your local restorative justice organisations are, then please visit www.restorativejustice.org.uk.

If you are in the Thames Valley (Buckinghamshire, Berkshire or Oxfordshire), you can visit www.tvrjs.org.uk or call **01844 202 001**.

What is this booklet about?

If you are thinking about having contact with the person who committed a crime against you, you may find it helpful to read about other people's experiences before making your decision.

This booklet is based on interviews with 38 people who were victims and survivors of lots of different types of crime. Some met the person who committed the offence against them, others didn't. Some of the crimes were very serious, others caused less harm. Some people were related to the person who committed the crime against them, others were strangers. Some were young, others old. Some people were completely satisfied with the restorative justice process, others weren't.

The people we interviewed said they didn't want anyone to persuade them to take part, or persuade them not to take part. They wanted information about what it was like for other people – both the good and the bad experiences – so they could make up their own minds. That is why you will find victims and survivors' own words in the coloured speech bubbles, like this (their names have been changed):

In the whole preparation stage there just needs to be much more information really, for people deciding on getting involved.

Rose

You can explain both sides, what you got from it and what you didn't. It arms the next person with more knowledge of whether it's the right thing for them.

Michelle

There are three main sections of the booklet. The first section covers five types of things that people want from restorative justice, and whether or not they got them. The second section is a number of 'what if...?' questions. In the third section victims and survivors offer advice to others who are considering taking part in restorative justice. The next page shows you where to find each section.

What is most *important* to you?

People have lots of different reasons for wanting to meet the offender. Most people we interviewed wanted at least one of the following five types of things. You can read about them all in turn, or just go straight to the one that is most important to you.



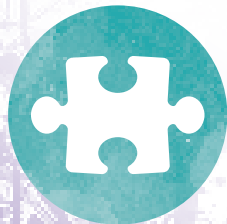
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What *if...?*

Do you have questions about what will happen if it doesn't all go well? Maybe they have been answered in this section.

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What do *people say* about...?

People were asked what advice they would give to others thinking about taking part in restorative justice. Here is what they said about...

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To have

your say

If the criminal justice process has finished, you might feel completely satisfied with the process and that you don't have any outstanding issues. Some people feel, however, that they didn't have a chance to say what they wanted to, that they weren't listened to, or that they still have unanswered questions – either about the process, the outcome, or maybe even about the crime itself. Kaitlyn, who was raped by someone she had thought of as a friend, said:

'Through the court process... I didn't really have any control over anything, I didn't get to say what I wanted to say... it seemed like the barristers were just playing a game with each other.'

Kaitlyn

Many people turn to restorative justice in the hope that the process will be fair, that they will be listened to, and that they will get the information they need.

'Just someone to say "Look, I'm gonna do my best for you to get what you need". People say that, but their actions prove different - but [the facilitator] seems to be doing everything she can.'

Casey

Casey, who was sexually abused as a child, said she appreciated having the chance to tell someone what she needed, and get help.

Philip, whose house was burgled, said about restorative justice:

'It allowed me to look him in the eye and really have a go – "you have made my life so much more difficult because of your crappy choices".'

Philip

Terri, whose father abused her as a child, said she was glad to have considered restorative justice even though she decided in the end not to go ahead with the actual meeting:

'Restorative justice is an option open for the rest of my life if I wanted it. And, it's nice that I feel that I had control of all that. That I had somebody who respected the way I felt, and didn't tell me I was stupid.'

Terri

Restorative justice service providers do not force anyone to engage in the process, including the offender. The main reason for this is that an offender who is not there voluntarily is unlikely to behave in ways that are helpful for the victim. However, some people feel that this is unfair because the offender has the final say about whether restorative justice goes ahead. Rose, who was assaulted at knife point, spoke about the offender's decision not to meet with her:

'I felt that he had the last word... He has got his way, he knew I wanted to do it, but he's chosen not to do it.'

Rose

'I just felt like I had more say in what was happening... rather than somebody saying "right now you do this"... When the facilitator came she said "how do you feel about it?" whereas no one had ever done that - the police hadn't done that, the justice system had never done that.'

Kaitlyn

In Kaitlyn's case, the offender also effectively 'had the last word' about whether there would be communication between them. However, despite her disappointment that her questions would not be answered, she was pleased she had been listened to and taken seriously.

Overall, the people we interviewed tended to feel that they could achieve at least some of their goals even when the offender refused to take part.

This is discussed further on page 18: 'What if the offender won't take part?'

To know the offender has been *punished*

You may or may not feel the offender has been appropriately punished for the crime. Even when the offender had been sent to prison, most of the people we interviewed felt that the sentence wasn't long enough. For some of them, a meeting with the offender was an opportunity to see for themselves what the punishment was like.

Hannah, who was sexually abused as a child, said:

'I needed to see [him in prison] because I needed to see that I've put him there.... And I was able to walk out and go home.'

Hannah

'To know that he wasn't having the time of his life in prison did feel good for me.'

Oliver

Oliver said he was glad he met the man who stabbed him because he got to hear about the prison sentence.

Anger, and the desire to know that the offender has been punished, are natural responses to wrongdoing. Taking part in restorative justice will not provide you with a chance to physically hurt or insult the offender, because the facilitators have to look out for the safety and wellbeing of all concerned. However, you will be given the opportunity to tell them how you feel, and many of the people we interviewed said that the meeting was a chance for them to express their anger.

Gemma met with the young man who violently assaulted her son:

'I thought he was going to start crying, and that was the best bit for me. It sounds evil, but that was the best bit.'

Gemma

If seeing the offender punished is important to you, restorative justice may give you the chance to hear about the way the offender has suffered as a result of the crime and/or express your anger. Sometimes, though, it may be difficult to meet this goal through restorative justice. Some people said that even after hearing in person about the offender's sentence, they were still unhappy with it. One person, Faye, decided to meet with the man who had sexually abused her instead of going to the police, in the hope of getting justice. After the process, even though she said the meeting had been good and she was pleased with how it went, she wasn't sure if it had achieved 'justice' for her and gave this advice to others:

'I'd say actually go to court first. And then go to restorative justice. So you've got justice.'

Faye

Faye wished that she had reported the crime to the police, but it is not right for everyone. Even if you do report it, there is no guarantee that the case will go to court, as the police may not have enough evidence to arrest the offender. Overall, the people we interviewed said that being part of a criminal justice process was very hard, sometimes even traumatic. Yet most of them also were pleased that some form of justice had been done. Only you can make this difficult decision, but if you haven't yet decided whether to report the crime to the police, you may want to talk through your options with your facilitator and/or one of the agencies listed on page 28.

Punishment was not important to some people, and a couple of people who said they forgave the offender even wrote to the judge to ask for a lower sentence. About 1 in 5 of the people we interviewed mentioned forgiveness, but most did not mean that they wanted less punishment. On the contrary, more people forgave the offender if they were satisfied with the sentence than if they were not satisfied with the sentence. Forgiveness was instead a personal process of letting go of their anger – a way to feel less of a victim (see page 14).

'The worst thing [for the offender] is actually to tell them face to face that you forgive them. Because that's you releasing their control, and they've got no control of that.'

Sam

To

stop it from happening again

It is never your responsibility to stop the crime from happening again. That is why we have a criminal justice system, including the police, probation and prisons. Having said that, many people want to do everything they can do to make sure it doesn't happen again - either to themselves, or to other people. Some people find restorative justice can be a way to do this.

For some people it is a way for them to feel safer – to hear that the offender is not going to come after them again. For example, Gemma, who met with the young man who assaulted her son, said:

'I said "So you're not going to come out and go for [my son] again?" And he said "No"... so I am quite relieved to hear that. I just hope they keep their promise.'

Gemma

Others wanted to know what the offender looks like now, to stop them fearing everyone they see in the street. Sam, who was abused by her father, said that she often had panic attacks, and didn't go out of her house for fear that she would bump into him. She felt that meeting him would stop her being afraid *'because I'll know what he looks like now'*.

'I hope that one day he could turn his life around and think about other people's emotions.'

Razik

Similarly Dorothy, whose son was murdered, said she wanted the offender to know she forgave him, so that he could go on to live a good life.

'I can't be angry with him. I've forgiven him, and that's that. And I just pray that he makes something of his life. And learns something.'

Dorothy

Kathy, who had been violently assaulted, said that after her meeting with the offender:

'He sounded as if he had actually learned a lesson... And I came away feeling hopeful.'

Kathy

'I didn't feel that I'd completely impacted in the way that I was hoping... I didn't feel [the offender's remorse] was absolutely genuine.'

Philip

Some people wanted to meet the offender to stop them from doing it again, but were not convinced by the end of the process that it would make much difference.

Despite his doubts, Philip still thought the process might have been a *'helpful thing to do'* because *'I think it would be incredibly hard, if I was a criminal, to go through this... Because I think it just personalises it much more.'*

Lots of people want to know whether taking part in restorative justice will stop the offender from doing it again. There is evidence that communication with victims makes offenders more aware of the impact of their crime, and it can reduce the frequency and severity of reoffending. However, it is not possible to know which offenders will change, so there is no guarantee that a meeting with the victim will stop any particular offender from committing crimes. Sometimes people assume it helps most with minor crimes, but in fact there is evidence that restorative justice makes a bigger difference to offenders who have committed serious, violent crimes. If stopping the offender from committing further crimes is something important to you, you may want to discuss this with your restorative justice facilitator. You may also want to read more about it:

- A systematic review of the evidence (Strang et al., 2013) summarised by the College of Policing: www.whatworks.college.police.uk/toolkit/Pages/Intervention.aspx?InterventionID=24
- Home Office research (Shapland et al., 2008. Does restorative justice affect reconviction?):
 - Summarised by Why Me?: www.why-me.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Shapland-reports-summary-1.pdf
 - Summarised by the Restorative Justice Council: www.restorativejustice.org.uk/resources/evidence-supporting-use-restorative-justice

To find out about the

crime or the offender

For many people, the choice to take part in restorative justice is about making sense of what happened. Some people find themselves trying to replay events to work out what really happened, whether it might have been different, or how much the offender intended to do what they did. Replaying these questions in your mind can be exhausting and can affect your recovery from the crime. Lisa, who was attacked by her partner, said:

'I couldn't sleep at night, because I'd be thinking "What if that night we'd stayed at our friends' house?" ... And I'd think - just go to sleep! But the cogs in my head were going round and round and round.'

Lisa

If the person who committed the crime was a friend or family member, the crime can be even more confusing. Often the person affected by the crime is left desperate to understand why someone they should have been able to trust would do such a thing.

'I think about that a lot, who he really is, and if he's completely crazy and doesn't have any emotion, or he does have emotion he's just ill... So I want to figure him out a little bit.'

Sadie

Sadie, whose father raped her sister and mother, was left trying to understand who he was as a person.

Some people describe the offender as a 'Jekyll and Hyde' – someone who could be loving and kind one minute, but violent and abusive the next. Restorative justice may not be able to completely answer the questions, but it is an opportunity to find out – who are they now? Is this someone I ever want to see again? Is it someone I can trust in future? How do I feel about them being in prison?

'The shame that I had, not only because [my son] was in prison, but because it was me, it was my fault he was there.'

Barbara

Barbara was violently attacked and threatened by her son, but felt guilty about having called the police.

Barbara described how hearing her son apologise helped her deal with her feelings of guilt and shame.

'The relief of the guilt [being] lifted - it wasn't me, it was you, cos I heard you say it. It was absolutely amazing.'

Barbara

If you are trying to find out why the crime happened and who the offender really is, there are lots of possible answers. Many people were surprised at what they found out. Most were pleased to know one way or the other, even if it wasn't what they wanted to hear.

'I do feel a little bit more ready for him to come out [of prison]. I'm not quite sure why... I suppose because I know what he's still saying... So at least I know kind of how the land lies now. So that's helpful.'

Kaitlyn

Kaitlyn was told by the facilitator that the person who raped her was still denying the offence, despite having been convicted. While this was disappointing, she said that knowing something was better than not knowing anything.

Sometimes, it is hard to make sense of the crime when the offender can't explain it themselves. Michelle, who was sexually abused, said:

'I think a lot of the offenders, unless they've had a lot of treatment, they can't articulate what they have done, what led them to do what they did. I never got that from my father'

Michelle

Most people said their view of the offender did change when they met the offender or received letters. There were three main ways it changed:

1. **Less powerful than they thought:** After a crime, the person who did it may seem like a 'monster' – someone larger than life, big, scary and powerful. Often seeing the person in the flesh reassures people that the offender is actually more vulnerable, powerless or even physically smaller than they thought.

'So instead of being a big man, he was like a little man. You know, he had nothing. I would say a broken man.'

Mike

Mike who was physically and emotionally controlled by the offender for many years, said the restorative justice meeting made him realise the offender was not so powerful.

2. **Less of a bad person:** After a crime the person who did it may seem completely evil – it seems impossible to believe there is any good in them at all. For some people this can make the world seem like a scary place, making it hard to trust anyone. Some people found out through meeting the offender that they had a good side. Owen, whose house had been burgled, said:

'In different circumstances he'd just come across as a nice young man... But he seemed to have everything sort of set against him from the day he was born.'

Owen

'Now I know that I have been talking to a person. And there was no outburst, instead he broke down. So he has feelings.'

Dorothy

Dorothy said she found out that her son's murderer was not the angry young man she assumed he would be, and she was pleased to learn that he felt bad about what he had done.

Occasionally people continued to have contact with the person who committed the offence, but usually even seeing their good side didn't mean they wanted to rebuild a relationship. Rose, for example, said:

'I want to say something along the lines of, I forgive you for what you did, but I don't want to see you again.'

Rose

3. **Confirms the offender really is a bad person:** Sometimes people find out that the offender is not remorseful, or is more responsible for the crime than they thought. Although this is not usually what people are hoping to hear, sometimes it can help to stop people from blaming themselves or feeling ashamed that they were taken advantage of.

'That was the real positive thing about that meeting. It confirmed that he was a liar. Absolutely a liar.'

Karen

Karen was robbed by a young man who had been staying with her. After the crime, she wondered how she had been so taken in by him.

Willow was raped by her older ex-boyfriend. She wanted to meet him to find out whether he was remorseful. Her mother said:

'It came back that he said no to restorative justice. And that kind of changed her whole world on it. She was quite angry at him for that, and then after that she actually got much better... She kind of took it as, well he's not very remorseful if he's saying no.'

Willow's mother

To *not* feel like a victim anymore

Do you want acknowledgement that the crime happened and it had an impact on you? But at the same time you want to feel that you are not just a victim – that you are a strong person who has overcome or is currently overcoming the effects of what happened? If the answer is yes to either or both of these questions you are not alone. Many people want both of these things from a restorative justice process, and sometimes there is a tricky balance between the two: For example, Sam, who was abused by her father, said:

'I want to show him that despite what he's done I have come out the other side. I am still standing. Yes, I can't take a lot of painkillers because my body's so used to them. I've only just started getting feeling back in my left arm after 12 years of cutting and everything. But, you are who you are. You know your own strength.'

Sam

Most people said that it was very important to talk about the crime and its effects, even though it was difficult to do. Barbara's son had stolen from her and made violent threats towards her. She felt that in order to move on from feeling like a victim, she first needed her son to acknowledge that she was one.

'I didn't want to just go on a normal visit, handshake, that's it... I have been a victim, and you were the person that committed the crime. Regardless of whether you're my son.'

Barbara

'It is this feeling of not being believed that has haunted me my whole life.'

Michelle

Hearing that the offender acknowledges what happened, and listens to the effects of the crime, can make a big difference for a lot of people. Michelle, for example, who had been sexually abused by her father, said that what she liked about the restorative justice process was that she was believed by the facilitators and by her family.

After the meetings with her father, she said:

'I'm not afraid of him anymore... I feel like that's gone.'

Michelle

'[The abuse] left me even years later still feeling quite weak. So I needed to be able to look him in the eye and see him in prison, to be able to get my strength, well my power back really.'

Hannah

Many people wanted to show the offender that they were strong, that they were the ones in control now. People achieved this in a number of different ways. Some didn't want to focus on the ways they had been hurt by the crime, instead it was about facing their fear. Hannah, who was sexually abused by her stepfather, said that meeting him made her feel stronger.

For others it was about confirming that they were not specifically targeted and not to blame for the offence. Zoe, who was attacked and left with serious injuries by someone she had thought of as a friend, had spent more than two years wondering why it happened. After the meeting she said she felt relieved...

'because I know it was nothing that I did...it wasn't because it was specifically me, it could have been anyone. It was just time and place, circumstances.'

Zoe

'I'm not being totally altruistic. If you don't forgive, bitterness will eat away at you, and damage you.'

Kathy

Several people said that their way of moving on was to forgive the offender. For example, Kathy, who was attacked by someone she had considered a friend, said that forgiving the offender made her feel better.

'I want him to see me as a human being. And I don't want him to see me as that laptop or the bike that he picked or the window that he smashed.'

Mona

Some people wanted the offender to see them as more than just as a victim. Mona, who had been burgled and had been quite scared for a long time afterwards, said that she wanted the offender to see her as a real person.

Many people pointed out that taking part in a restorative justice process is taking a risk, because even though facilitators will assess the risk and make it safe for everyone, no-one can really guarantee what the offender will say or how it will go. Many people also felt that it was precisely by taking a risk that they could stop feeling like a victim. Taking part tended to make people feel strong.

'I think you have to be brave full-stop to go through any of this anyway.'

Casey

'To be brave around him and not to run off for a change, to be near him and not be so scared of him.'

Bridget

'[I'm] proud of myself for doing it, cos it's not an easy thing to do.'

Faye

What

if...?

Ideally, the person who committed the crime admits it, is remorseful, and is willing to do whatever you want them to do to put things right. Sometimes, however, this is not the case. Does that mean restorative justice is not for you? Here are some of the things people said about how to get the most out of the process even when it doesn't go exactly to plan.

...what if I start the process then change my mind?

'It's helpful to know that I can stop at any time. So I think I'd just say, you know, you can stop at any time... It's not like you're signing up for it and that's it.'

Sadie

Zoe, who suffered serious injuries from a violent attack, said:

Sadie said the main thing she would want other people to know is that you can explore the possibility and if you decide not to go ahead with it that's up to you.

'You can walk up to that door and think "no, not for me, can't do this" and turn back around and go away. But until you give it that chance you don't know what benefit it would give you in your life.'

Zoe

'You don't have to pay! ... Honestly, because I've paid for counselling and bits and bobs, it's quite a lot of money... But tell people restorative justice is nothing to be fearful of. You are guided and helped so much.'

Brenda

Brenda said that she thinks everyone should know that you don't have to pay for restorative justice.

...what if the offender won't take part?

Sometimes the offender wasn't willing to take part in restorative justice, and this was disappointing because the victim didn't have the opportunity to ask questions, get an apology or tell the offender about the impact of the crime. Most people said, however, that they were still able to achieve at least some of their goals – either through the restorative justice process or in some other way. If their main priority was 'having their say', for example, some people felt better after talking to the facilitator or joining a campaign for victims' rights. Casey said she felt more confident because the decision to try restorative justice had been hers, even though it was not possible in the end:

'I feel that I'm more confident within myself because I've gone through the necessary channels, and I've tried my best. Yeah, I would say that just knowing that I'm doing what I can, has helped to bring me out.'

Casey

For those who wanted to make sure the offender had been punished, it was sometimes possible to find out more about their sentence or licence conditions. There may be some information that cannot be passed on because of confidentiality, but your restorative justice facilitator will advise you on what is feasible and who to ask.

People whose priority was to stop it from happening again sometimes found other ways of doing this. To feel safer, they explored other ways of finding out what the offender looks like, installed extra security measures, got safety advice from the police, or got help from friends and family. To prevent future crime, people spoke about their experience to other offenders (e.g. through a Youth Offending Team or prison programme) or joined community safety organisations.

It was difficult to get answers to questions about the crime and the offender without the offender's involvement, but it was not impossible. Some people took the offender's non-cooperation as an answer to whether or not they were remorseful. Others found out information about the crime through the Victim Liaison Unit, the police, the CPS, a barrister, or a hospital where they got medical treatment. It may be difficult to know who to approach for information, but your restorative justice facilitator will be able to help you with this.

Finally, many people came up with their own ways to stop themselves from feeling like a victim. Almost everyone said that it was useful to have another source of support, whether it was from a counsellor or therapist, a victim-survivor organisation, or friends and family. People mentioned that opening up to others was difficult because it made them feel vulnerable, but it was worth it:

'Because I worked through it a lot, I feel I got closure. Whereas if I hadn't, in a couple of years' time it might come back to haunt me.'

Rose

Sometimes people needed help talking to someone else about the crime – their family or friends, someone else who was with them at the time, their boss or teacher, or someone who supported them. Restorative justice facilitators are experts in having difficult conversations, so there may be ways they can help you.

People said that the most important thing was working out what their own needs and priorities were, and then asking for help. To help you do this, you may want to contact one of the organisations for victims and survivors listed at the back of this booklet.

...what if I don't want to meet the offender or they won't meet me?

Sometimes, it was possible to communicate with the offender but not to meet them directly. This happened for a number of different reasons (e.g. the victim or offender didn't want to meet, or the restorative justice service felt it would not be safe for it to go ahead).

There were many different types of communication between the victim and the offender. Sometimes, the facilitators got permission to pass on information – e.g. if someone wanted to know what the offender thought now about the crime, or about the sentence. In some cases people were relieved to hear that the offender did not intend them any further harm.

Sometimes the victim wrote a letter to the offender, giving them a chance to get things off their chest and have their say. Sometimes, the offender wrote to the victim. The purpose of this was usually for the offender to answer questions.

Sometimes, people wrote letters back and forth, giving both a chance to ask and answer questions. Naomi, whose ex-boyfriend had distributed indecent images of her, said:

'The restorative justice facilitator helped me draft a letter up and I wrote down all the questions I had that I wanted to ask him in person. And he wrote back, and it was hard to read it... but I was pleased that he'd written back...and that he apologised that he was wrong. And it finally kind of shut it down, that I was believed.'

Naomi

'It was really quite extraordinary to read that he was suffering because of [my daughter's] death, and what that said to me was that it mattered, her life mattered.'

Beatrice

Beatrice, who exchanged several letters with the offender, said that this worked well for her. She was able to say much of what she wanted to say, and to hear from the offender about what happened.

There were some things she was not able to achieve, however, and her advice to others was that they think about the *'chance that you will never get the answers you need from that person.'* She advises everyone to make their own plan for recovery, saying she had to *'find some sort of resolution within it for myself, for my sanity, for my future...I knew ultimately that it was me getting myself out of bed every morning.'*

...what if the offender is denying the offence or part of the offence?

Most of the time, if the offender denied the offence entirely, the people we interviewed felt that there would be no benefit from meeting the offender. Sometimes, however, even though they thought the offender might be lying, or not taking full responsibility for what happened, they still felt that communicating with the offender would be worthwhile. This was usually when they wanted to face the offender in order to stop them from doing it again, or because they felt it would help them to not feel like a victim anymore.

In order to make restorative justice successful when the offender is denying what happened, it is important that they at least agree to listen to what you have to say. The facilitator will explore their reasons for agreeing to meet with you, to check they are not intending to say anything hurtful.

...what if the offender isn't remorseful?

In general, if the offender is not remorseful it will be up to you whether you still want to communicate with them. The facilitators will let you know in advance what the offender is saying about the offence.

Some people only wanted to go ahead if the offender was remorseful. Nita, who experienced voyeurism, was dissatisfied with the meeting even though he apologised:

'He couldn't look me in the eye, and so it couldn't convince me that he was at all sorry.'

Nita

Others felt that they could still get a lot out of the restorative justice process even if the offender was not remorseful. In particular, people felt they could still have their say, find out about the offender, or stop feeling like a victim. Some people achieved this by having specific questions answered, facing the offender, or telling the offender about the impact of the crime.

'I really hope he'd say sorry. But that's the best possible outcome which I don't think will happen. But even just by sending a letter, it would help me... to be able to say how I feel.'

Megan

Once again, people emphasised the need for a support network outside of the restorative justice process, and for people to have their own ways of dealing with what happened that didn't rely on the offender.

'You need to have that knowledge that whatever you do or say [in the meeting with the offender], you're going to get up and walk away from them, and deal with it away from them.'

Terri

What do

people say about...?

Everyone was asked what advice they would give to someone else who was thinking about talking to or meeting the offender. Here are a few areas that people suggested are good to think about when considering restorative justice. This booklet can't cover everything they said, but the most important thing is for you to consider how you want to approach things.

How to decide about taking part

Some people said unreservedly that they would recommend it to everyone:

'I would say yes - definitely do it! ... No matter how hard it seems... You might find that you get back more than you're expecting in the long term. You have to be heard.'

Brenda

Most people answered that it was hard to give advice because it depends so much on the person, on the crime, and on the circumstances. Most importantly, everyone said that the decision should be entirely up to the person affected by the crime:

'You've got to know what you want out of it, whether you want answers or whether you just want to look him in the eye... It doesn't make you stronger or weaker for doing it or not doing it... Not everyone wants to do it, some people think it's insane! And it is, kind of! Why would you want to go and see the person that's done that to you?! But if you've got to do it, you've got to do it.'

Hannah

Managing your own expectations

Most people said that restorative justice had achieved some of the things they wanted, but that keeping their expectations low was the best way to deal with setbacks in the process. Casey wanted to meet with the offender but he refused. Even so, she was able to achieve some of her goals; she said this was because she had realistic expectations from the beginning.

'Expect the best, but prepare for the worst. ... because it's the one bit of advice that has helped me get through it.'

Casey

'I think a tip would be - try and be realistic. If you have problems with your family before, this won't magically reset the button.'

Faye

Timing & Preparation

Dorothy said she wasn't ready when she was offered restorative justice two years after her son's murder, but she was ready six years after that. Asked what advice she would give others about when to communicate with the offender, she said:

'Don't force the issue. Because it takes time. Because I had thought about it much earlier on, and I couldn't. So it takes time. You have to be ready in yourself, to take that step. And move forward.'

Dorothy

The people we interviewed said they were pleased that the facilitators spent time preparing them and the offender, so they could be confident that the restorative justice process would go well. People met with the facilitators as many times as they needed until they felt ready. For a number of reasons, the process often took a long time. Some people said this was helpful, because it gave them time to get ready.

'The whole process is a bit long winded... there seemed to be a series of hiccups, like the offender getting moved from one prison to another.'

Owen

Owen, whose house had been burgled, advised being prepared for it to take longer than you might imagine. He was very pleased with the process, but was surprised it took so long.

Can it make you feel worse?

Many people said that the process itself was difficult, and a few people said they felt angry or sad during or immediately after meeting the offender. However, no-one we interviewed said that they felt worse long-term because of the restorative justice process. On the contrary, nearly everyone said that it made them feel better; some just a little bit better, others significantly so.

'I just feel like a different person. I feel like the me I would have been if the crime had never happened... Cos I've gone in there and dealt with it my way... It's not for everyone but for me it was the best thing I think I've ever done.'

Hannah

Most people said they got some of the things they wanted out of the restorative justice process, but were not able to get some other things. For example, Brenda met the man who sexually abused her son. She was very satisfied with the meeting and it resolved a lot of her concerns. However, she wanted others to know that it is not a miracle cure that guarantees you will feel better.

'It's just that the situation is so sorrowful... I'm glad I could say what I wanted to say. It was all done calmly, no-one hit anyone or anything like that, it was all very good. But yet, inside I don't feel much better.'

Brenda

Dealing with other people's reactions

Most people said that they had a variety of reactions from friends and family.

'They'd all be different, it was funny! One person would be like "What on earth are you doing, what do you want to see him for?" Another person would be like "Oh yeah, I suppose, to get a closure and that, get some sort of ending."

Oliver

Willow, for example, had very different reactions from her parents. Her dad was against it because he was worried that it would set her back, whereas her mum understood the reasons she wanted to do it.

Most people found that there were some people they wanted to tell and others they didn't want to tell. Francis, who experienced a hate-motivated attack by a large group, was worried that his friends wouldn't understand why he wanted to take part: 'I don't want people to be judgemental and think that I've lost my marbles'. However, like others, he recommended that people choose at least one person (as well as the facilitator) to support them through the process. In his case he got valuable support from his alcohol and drugs worker.

Preparing for a meeting with the offender

Everyone had different ways to prepare for a meeting with the offender. There is no right or wrong way, but here are a few things that people said they found helpful. The most important thing is for you to think about what you personally need, and ask for it. Do you need more information? More time? A visit to the prison before the meeting? Someone else to come with you? Someone to wait for you outside? Of course, in some cases the thing you want may not be possible, but the facilitators will do their best to fit the process to your needs.

Most people recommended keeping a note of what you want to say, or at least telling the facilitators in advance so they can prompt you. Karen said that in the time leading up to the meeting:

'I wrote down every time I thought of something, "Oh I'll say that to the offender when I see him" - I jotted down.'

Karen

'It was really important for me to have control over the meeting. And I went in there with three pages of questions... Because you're concentrating on not breaking down, and keeping your hands still, and all these things, you don't want to have to concentrate again on - or even think about - what you have to say.'

Hannah

Hannah also suggested that it may be useful to have indirect communication with the offender before meeting them:

'I asked the restorative justice facilitators to ask him to write me a letter - because I wanted to be able to gauge my reaction. I didn't know whether I was going to get really angry, or just get really upset or what.'

Hannah

'I was offered if I wanted to take anyone. But I didn't want to just in case it sort of altered what I wanted to say.'

Oliver

Some people wanted to take someone with them into the meeting with the offender, others didn't. The choice is entirely yours.

A lot of people recommended that even if you don't want someone to actually attend with you, it is still a good idea to have someone drive you there or meet you afterwards. Faye regretted that she hadn't arranged for someone to support her on the day of the meeting with the offender:

'Get support around you... Just somebody who's going to drive you there, be a part of the process, sit with you afterwards, have a cup of coffee.'

Faye



We hope this booklet has given you the information you were looking for. It includes a range of different people's experiences, in particular, whether they were able to reach their goals: to have their say, to know the offender has been punished, to stop it from happening again, to find out about the crime or the offender, or to not feel like a victim anymore. A lot of the people we interviewed were able to achieve these goals when they met the offender, particularly when they had a chance to ask the offender questions, receive an apology and tell the offender about the impact of the crime. Some people were able to do this by letter or through the facilitator. Yet others were able to reach these goals even when it was not possible to communicate with the offender. In all three cases, most people said they reached some, but not necessarily all of their goals.

Taking part in restorative justice is about having difficult conversations. We may prefer not to have the conversation, and that is fine. We may want to have the conversation but the other person might not agree. The conversation might be painful. But just like the difficult conversations we have in everyday life, these conversations are often worth a try, because they can make us feel better, more in control, and allow us to move forward. And unlike an everyday conversation, they are made easier by a controlled environment and experienced facilitators:

'I had a lot I needed to say, and get to the bottom of... because it is a very difficult conversation, it's really difficult. You want people who've done it a lot... they know what they're doing, and I felt like I was in really good hands with them.'

Brenda

For more information about restorative justice, you might also want to read:

- Restorative Justice Council (RJC) www.restorativejustice.org.uk
Includes FAQs; 'Introduction to RJ, is it for you?' and case studies
- Thames Valley Restorative Justice Service (TVRJS): Information for Victims
www.tvrjs.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/RJV_leaflet.pdf
- Victim Support RJ Guidance
www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/your-rights/restorative-justice
- Why Me? www.why-me.org Includes stories from victims of crime who have taken part in RJ.

Other places you can get support and information if you have been a victim of crime:

- Victims First www.victims-first.org.uk. Provides support to victims of all crime across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. You can search their service directory for support in your local area (for victims of any type of crime)
www.victims-first.org.uk/service-directory
- Victim Support guide to Coping with Crime
www.victimsupport.org.uk/help-and-support/coping-crime
- Cruse Bereavement Care, if you have lost a loved one
www.cruse.org.uk/traumatic-bereavement/violence-and-crime
- Government Support and Advice for Victims of Crime
www.gov.uk/get-support-as-a-victim-of-crime
- Code of Practice for Victims of Crime
www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-code-of-practice-for-victims-of-crime
- Rape Crisis www.rapecrisis.org.uk Support and counselling for those affected by rape and sexual abuse
- The Survivors Trust www.thesurvivorstrust.org Support for all survivors of rape or sexual abuse
- Women's Aid www.womensaid.org.uk Domestic Violence charity that helps women and children
- Survivors UK www.survivorsuk.org Male Rape and Sexual Abuse Support

Are you thinking about having contact with someone who committed a crime against you? If so, this booklet is for you.

It is based on interviews with people who were victims and survivors of lots of different types of crime. They describe why they wanted to communicate with the offender, what they got out of it, and how they felt when things didn't go to plan. The people we interviewed wanted to talk about their experiences to help other victims and survivors. Only you can make the decision about whether restorative justice is right for you, and we hope that the information in this booklet helps you decide.

The booklet was written by Diana Batchelor, based on research at the University of Oxford in collaboration with Thames Valley Partnership, from 2015-2018. The project was made possible by the Thames Valley Restorative Justice Service facilitators who worked closely with the interviewees, and offered their support and expertise. Production of the booklet was sponsored by the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner and the ESRC, with help from Megan Davies and several Thames Valley Partnership associates. Above all, many thanks go to the generous victims and survivors who were willing to give their time, energy and advice, so that others can learn from their experiences.

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