

THE LITTLE BOOK OF RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

By Howard Zehr

112 pp. The Little Books of Justice and Peacebuilding (series) / Good Books, an imprint of Skyhorse Publishing, Inc. 2d ed. 2015.

The Little Book of Restorative Justice is the non-narrative primer of a term bandied about since the late 1970s but little understood, written by the grandfather of the field, Howard Zehr, PhD. Broadly applied and quick to mutate, restorative justice (RJ) is an "alternative framework for thinking about wrongdoing" (7), and aims to achieve justice by balancing the concerns and interests of all. In a word, RJ is about respect—respect for the victim's needs, the offender's obligations, and the community's responsibilities. Thus, its principles are restoration, accountability, and engagement. By embracing our interconnectedness, RJ programs can respond more effectively than the criminal justice system, which is adversarial and retributive, can exclude victims' needs, and often is not rehabilitative. The RJ process is an opportunity to "explore facts, feelings, and resolutions" (57) in a facilitated, direct encounter among stakeholders (such as a victim offender conference, a family group conference, or a circle process based on the indigenous tradition of passing a talking piece to each participant-speaker), "to heal and put things as right as possible" (48). According to practitioner Ron Claassen, resolution requires parties to acknowledge the injustice, create or restore equity, and address future intentions. In RJ, a victim's needs can be met without an offender having been identified and a victim's participation is voluntary. Having clarified a legal muddle, Zehr ends with "Ten Ways to Live Restoratively." Number ten is to "sensitively confront everyday injustices including sexism, racism, homophobia, and classism" (96). Again, it comes down to respect. —Lisa Thaler, author of *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*, 17 August 2020