

Community Conferencing

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Community Conference?

A Community Conference is a highly participatory and voluntary meeting that is convened by a trained, neutral facilitator that allows people to resolve their own crime and conflict safely and in their own community. The process *holds people accountable* for their behavior by addressing the root causes of the behavior. Finally, everyone is involved in collectively creating and signing a written agreement, including the victim.

Who is invited to the Community Conference?

First, the victim is invited. If the victim isn't interested in participating or if the offender doesn't admit their responsibility, then the case gets returned to the traditional system. Everyone who is affected by the conflict, as well as their supporters, are invited to participate in the Community Conference. Participants include children, family members, school administrators and staff, and resource organizations e.g. counselors. *Participation is 100% voluntary.*

Which agencies refer cases for Community Conferencing?

SOURCE

Schools
Police Department
Dept. of Juvenile Services
State's Attorney's Office
Prison Re-Integration

TYPES of CASES

Ongoing conflicts, fights, theft, vandalism, weapon to school
Misdemeanors (e.g. 2nd degree assault, theft, breaking & entering)
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Addressing family / community plan following incarceration

How does a Community Conference work?

After preparing each participant, the trained, **neutral** Facilitator invites everyone involved and affected by an incident together at a convenient location. The Facilitator asks three key questions:

1. What happened?
2. Who has been affected and how?
3. What can be done to repair the harm and to prevent it from happening again?

How successful is Community Conferencing?

Over 95% have resulted in an agreement and over 95% are compliant with the agreement.

What happens if the agreement is broken?

Typically, the group decides what needs to happen if the agreement is broken and they include that information in their signed agreement. The facilitator verbally confirms how the participants want to handle the broken agreement and, in certain cases, the case is returned to the referral source to be processed in the traditional manner.

Impact

- Immediate response to the incident (within 2 weeks)
- Holds offenders accountable for their behavior in a meaningful way to the victim
- Victims are involved to make sure "justice is served"
- Addresses the root causes of the problem and provides connection to a support network
- Prevents re-occurrences and entry into the criminal justice system
- Cost effective and relieves a portion of the burden off the court system
- Improves the health of the community
- Fosters a culture of accountability and open communication

Where did Community Conferencing begin?

Community Conferencing was adapted from the Maori in New Zealand (NZ) who developed "Family Group Conferencing" within the NZ justice system. In 1995, Dr. Lauren Abramson and her Australian colleagues brought the adaptation to the Community Conferencing Center in Baltimore, Maryland. In 2013, The Restorative Justice Project at Loyola Marymount University brought Community Conferencing to the greater Los Angeles area.

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