



COMMUNITY CONFERENCING **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

WHAT IS COMMUNITY CONFERENCING?

Community Conferencing is a response to crime and wrongdoing that empowers a group of people affected by an incident (victims, offenders, and their supporters) to collectively resolve the problem themselves. The main themes of a Community Conference are those of the restorative model:

1. **Taking Responsibility:**
Persons who have caused harm have a chance to take responsibility for their actions in dialogue with the persons who have been affected by those actions.
2. **Understanding the Impact:**
Through a circle process, individuals have the opportunity to explain how they've been affected by the incident. The person who has caused the harm can better understand the broader impact of their actions on people, themselves and the community.
3. **Repairing the Harm:**
The Community Conference provides a chance to repair the harm of the incident and minimize the possibility of recurrence. All participants have a voice in any agreement that is reached. Those harmed have the opportunity to say what they need in order to move on and those who harmed them can take ownership in mending the hurt they caused.

WHAT TYPES OF ISSUES ARE APPROPRIATE FOR A CONFERENCE?

Community Conferencing is most often initiated to address issues such as (but not limited to) assaults, theft, harassment, criminal trespassing/mischief, menacing, and property damage.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN A CONFERENCE?

The number of people who participate in a Community Conference varies for each case. Along with everyone directly involved in the incident and their families or support people, a conference often incorporates social workers, community members, police officers and anyone else who may have been affected (whether directly or indirectly) by the offense. Parties are invited to attend if they have had some involvement in the situation and wish to contribute to its resolution. The conference facilitator will also be present, and an observer who supports the facilitator and parties as needed.

WHAT TYPE OF PREPARATION IS REQUIRED?

The facilitator will contact all involved parties by phone beforehand to describe the process, get a brief account of the incident, and understand what the party may want to get out of the community conference. During this conversation, the facilitator will get an idea about what additional issues may arise in the conference and who else should be invited to attend. The facilitator will also ask the participant to be prepared to discuss the incident, how it affected them and any ideas for repairing the harm done.

WHAT DOES THE CONFERENCE LOOK LIKE?

At the conference, the facilitator lays structure to the conversation by taking parties through the three main stages: discussing what happened and how they were involved in the incident, addressing how it impacted everyone, and strategizing about what can be done to fix the problem, repair harm, and make sure it doesn't happen again. The facilitator checks in as discussion proceeds, eventually helping everyone draw up a specific agreement and reporting the outcome to the court.

WHAT GOES INTO AGREEMENTS?

Agreements are detailed written terms that specify how and by when the parties want to resolve the problem, which might include restitution, community service, apologies, future interaction, communication and other ways to repair the harm caused by the incident. Agreements may also record positive affirmations made by parties to one another as a result of their renewed understanding. The agreement is signed by all participants and submitted back to the court.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO THE PARTICIPANTS?

- A chance to hear what happened from other points of view
- An opportunity for everyone to say and hear how the incident affected them
- A chance to discuss and decide how the harm should be repaired
- An opportunity to resolve the matter in a timely manner
- A chance to help prevent the incident from happening again
- An opportunity for closure and community building
- For those who caused the harm, an opportunity to take direct responsibility for what happened
- For those who were harmed, a way to have their needs directly addressed

WHAT IS THE NEW YORK PEACE INSTITUTE?

The New York Peace Institute is a non-profit agency supported by the NYS Unified Court System and the NYC Criminal Justice Coordinator's office. The center handles over 4,500 cases a year, and trains more than 3,000 people a year in conflict resolution and restorative justice, making it one of the largest community mediation centers in the country. Mediators are community volunteers and staff - professionals from all walks of life, such as attorneys or social workers. All mediators receive extensive training.

WHAT'S NEXT?

You will be contacted by the New York Peace Institute to prepare you for the Community Conference. If you have any further questions, please contact:

In Brooklyn, (718) 834-6671, x17 or x27.

In Manhattan, (212) 577-1740, x15 or x16.