

Sterling College: Transformative Justice

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What is Transformative Justice?

Transformative Justice is a political framework and approach for responding to threats, violence, harm, abuse, or other forms of wrongdoing. At its most basic, it seeks to respond to harm without creating more of the same.¹

Transformative Justice is a radical community response that comes from the belief that every individual is capable of having both positive and negative impacts on the health of a community and its members. It recognizes that norms are best set by and upheld within the community. The goal is not to isolate or “cancel” the person who caused harm but to aid in the recognition, resolution, and reparation needed to heal and move forward. It prizes continued connection over isolation.

When used as a tool for accountability and repair, Transformative Justice is distinct in that it holistically considers the needs of both the person who caused harm and those impacted by their actions. Those participating in Transformative Justice acknowledge state-sanctioned systems such as prisons, police, and I.C.E. are sites of tremendous harm, routinized violence and pervasive oppression. Such systems wield and often misuse power to maintain control – they rarely tend to repair.

Transformative justice responses and interventions:

1. Do not rely on the state (e.g. police, prisons, the criminal legal system, I.C.E., or the foster care system).
2. Do involve support systems such as mental health, medical intervention, or social services such as housing, food, and safety security
3. Do not reinforce or perpetuate violence such as oppressive norms or vigilantism
4. Actively cultivate healing, accountability, resilience, and safety for all involved

Transformative Justice is not the absence of harm and violence, but a framework where community care, mutual aid, and the health and wellness of the whole community are prioritized. The community proactively practices healthy boundaries, communication skills,

¹ says:, C. W., says:, J., says:, C., & says:, S. (2021, March 1). *Transformative justice: A brief description*. Transform Harm. Retrieved February 8, 2022, from <https://transformharm.org/transformative-justice-a-brief-description/>

skills to de-escalate active harm at the moment, and practice expressions of anger non-destructive means, while incorporating healing into the foundation of the daily norms.

Transformation interventions can be approached in a number of ways, but, most often they include:

1. Supporting survivors healing, safety, and working directly with the person who caused the harm to take accountability and make acts of reparations
2. Building community members' capacities to support the interventions, to heal, and take accountability for any harm they were complicit in
3. Building skills to prevent harm from occurring and most importantly supporting community members' skills to interrupt violence at the moment it is happening

How is Transformative Justice Practice Used at Sterling?

Sterling College is a small intentional community with shared values that center on the care of individuals within and the community as a whole. The college community is stronger when the individuals are actively involved, feel securely attached, and are empowered to speak their truth. The community openly and actively supports the elevation issues and awareness of actions, systems, and pathways in which either are currently harmful and/or could become harmful. These values are built into our community and academic policies and procedures and are edited as the needs within the community change.

One of the ways Sterling College creates a platform for building transformative justice skills is through our weekly community meetings. Students, staff, faculty, and administrators are invited, as equals, to update, celebrate, and address issues facing the community. The community meeting space serves to remind each other of our shared values, dedication, and personal accountability to community care. Each community member watches, practices, and models communication, conflict management, and the gift of feeling heard and validated. These are core skills to build the trust to address harm when it occurs.

Another way in which Sterling College practices Transformative Justice is the internal reaction to acts of harm and conflict on our college campus. Many college bylaws include a judicial board that looks and functions much like the legal system. Sterling has made an intentional investment in teaching, modeling, and practicing building the strength of community from before a student enrolls, and throughout their career on campus. When issues arise, through conversation and group process the harm and impact are discussed and the pathway to mending that harm is surfaced in collaboration between the aggressor and those impacted. The goal is to be able to return back to a kind and comfortable living environment where individuals' voices are heard, respected, and supported through the resolution.

Transformations Justice is a radical expression of love.

Sterling College Statement on Belonging:

Inspired by and with gratitude to bell hooks, Toko-pa Turner, Peter Block, Margaret Wheatley, Brené Brown, Prentis Hemphill, Robin Wall Kimmerer, adrienne maree brown, Audre Lorde, and pema chödrön

We invite you to:

BE BRAVE. SERVE THE WORK. TAKE GOOD CARE. CULTIVATE BELONGING.

1. We believe the most effective way to tackle issues of privilege and systemic bias is to name them, discuss them, and take personal and collective responsibility to face and change them.
2. We believe that doing nothing to address inequality is supporting inequality. There are oppressive systems in place, and our words and actions either support those existing systems or work to dismantle them.
3. We believe it is not the job of the people being targeted by prejudice and discrimination to start the dialogue, carry the emotional labor of the conversations, or grant absolution to those who are feeling shame and guilt about the pain being experienced by others.
4. We believe the greatest casualty of trauma is emotional, and sometimes physical, safety required to be vulnerable, and that, in addition to violence and neglect, poverty, racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, sizeism, homophobia, transphobia, Islamophobia, xenophobia, and other systemic forms of oppression and/or bias are trauma.
5. We believe we must recognize these systems are pervasive and be mindful when we ask people to “take off their armor” we may be asking them to do something that is not emotionally or even physically safe in all environments.
6. We believe everyone deserves brave and safe spaces to be vulnerable; therefore, we work to create brave, safe spaces for individuals.
7. We acknowledge these beliefs only have value if they are also reflected in our practice, and we are committed to practicing these beliefs at every level.
8. We believe shame is a tool of oppression and is not an effective social justice tool.
9. We believe that love, grace, accountability, courage, vulnerability, empathy, shame, resilience, and the power of story can change the world.
10. We believe in the possibilities of creating the world we want to see by walking our talk and learning from our mistakes.

Other Resources on Transformative Justice:

[Transform Harm](#)

Video: [Everyday Practices of Transformative Justice](#)

[Community Accountability](#), Incite!

[Community Care Task Force Resources](#)

[Restorative or Transformative Justice?](#), Zehr Institute for Restorative Justice

[Transformative Justice, Explained](#), Teen Vogue