



One minute guide

Restorative Conflict Resolution and Restorative Conferences

No. 148, January 2025

What do we mean by Restorative Conflict Resolution and Conferences?

Restorative Conflict Resolution means involving those directly affected when there has been a relationship breakdown at work. It involves them in seeking to repair the perceived harm by allowing them an opportunity to reflect, listen and have their voice heard. This is done by holding a space for people to lean into difficult conversations with compassion, listening to understand, and helping them to find language that supports connection and empathy rather than blame and shame. It means that those affected are taking responsibility for repairing harm to a relationship and are part of finding their own best way forward.

The restorative conference is a restorative process whereby a trained facilitator brings together those who have been affected by conflict for a facilitated conversation.

What is available in Leeds?

Restorative conflict resolution might be used when conflict arises in the workplace, when people experience behaviour they find inappropriate or when relationships break down and individuals or teams are affected. It takes an informal approach and sits outside of formal HR process.

It will always begin with a voluntary 'Walking With' conversation, where a facilitator will meet with anybody interested in exploring Restorative Conflict Resolution, to explain and offer guidance about the process, before deciding if the process is appropriate to undertake. If so, at this point a Restorative Conference can be requested. Once requested, one to one preparation meetings will take place to explore the possibility of coming together in a restorative conference.

What stages are involved in a Restorative Conference?

Phase 1: Requesting a conference

A Restorative Conference can be requested by:

- Anyone directly affected; and/ or
- Those supporting affected parties e.g. line manager, HR, Union Representative etc, after which a facilitator will reach out to those affected to explain the process and agree if they would like to explore it further.

Phase 2: Exploring a Restorative Conference

When there is agreement from affected parties and the facilitator to proceed, preparation meetings take place to coach parties to be able to talk at conference, about their thoughts and feelings, the impact, and what they think needs to happen next.

When all parties feel ready, and when facilitators agree it is appropriate and safe, a Restorative Conference can take place at a venue and time agreed by all. Parties will develop a group agreement, hear each-other and have the opportunity to develop and agree a way forward that meets their needs.

In some instances, the preparation meetings are all that's required in order for affected parties to be able to move forward and a Restorative Conference is not always needed.

Phase 3: Follow up and Evaluation

At several future points, the facilitator will reach out to the affected parties to understand the impact of the process on them, and to understand their experience and how it might be improved in future.

What can you expect from the process?

The voluntary and reflective nature of this work means that committing to a timeframe for this work is impossible at the outset. The process is led entirely by the needs of the participants. Nor can a conference be guaranteed to take place at the end of a piece of preparation work. A participant can choose to withdraw from the process at any point, and there are occasions when the facilitators may need to stop a conference taking place where there is deemed to be the potential for further harm, or where it becomes clear that outcomes are not compatible.

The process is 100% confidential so whilst facilitators can never share or update line managers on the content of the conversations, they can agree with participants what they may want to share by way of updating on the process. Facilitators can also offer coaching for line managers who may be faced with difficulties in managing team and service pressures whilst participants are involved in the Restorative Conflict Resolution and Restorative Conferencing process.

You can also expect that Restorative Conflict Resolution and Restorative Conferencing is only undertaken by trained and supervised facilitators who abide by the code of conduct from the Restorative Justice Council as well as local safeguarding arrangements.

A restorative conference is not:

- A formal HR Process;
- In any way punitive or disciplinary;
- Mediation; or
- Mandatory.

Restorative Conflict Resolution differs from mediation; while mediation focuses on the conflict, restorative conferencing focuses on the harm and moving on from the harm. The facilitator does not negotiate, and they know (from the preparation work) that the requested outcomes can be met.

Other support available if Restorative Conferencing is not suitable includes:

- [Coaching](#);
- [Mediation](#); and the
- [Freedom To Speak Up Guardian](#) (Leeds City Council).

Key contacts

For more information about how we are using restorative approaches in Leeds you can contact:

Julie Devonald, Head of Service for Workforce Development.

julie.devonald@leeds.gov.uk

Sarah Horner, Restorative Practice Facilitation Lead

Sarah.horner2@leeds.gov.uk

Sue Pennycook, Restorative Practice Facilitation Lead

Sue.pennycook@leeds.gov.uk