

# Wisdom Projects

Peace, Healing, and Justice For All



## Community Participatory Mediation™

Note: This document runs 4 (four) pages.

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### Definitions

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- Summary** Community Participatory Mediation™ is the process of managing, restoring, transforming, or resolving conflicts and disputes valued and practiced at Wisdom Projects. This practice was invented in 1992 and is trademarked to Miss tree turtle (Cleis Abeni).
- Community Participatory** This term refers to preventative and interventional health systems and experiences valued and practiced by community members who participate within the implementation of the systems.
- Mediation** This definition may be different from others. Here mediation refers to processes and procedures for managing, restoring, transforming, or resolving conflicts and disputes. The goal of this mediation is to bring communities and individuals together while ensuring humane, nonviolent accountability when mistakes and offenses occur. Mediation in this regard overlaps with conflict resolution and education. Mediation is the cornerstone work of Restorative Justice (which is explained at <https://wisdomprojects.org/restorative-justice>).
- Restorative Justice** Restorative justice refers to organizing, educating, coping and healing practices that bring people within communities into conversation, mediation, amends, reconciliation, and agreement in the wake of mistakes and offenses to foster healthy, safe, ongoing accountability instead of punishing people vengefully to make them suffer. Most importantly, restorative justice centers victims, survivors, and communities (instead of police, prosecutors, attorneys, caseworkers, officials, and judges) so we are maximally heard, seen, and empowered to make wise decisions. Most criminal justice and retributive justice systems do not center us.
- Circle or Circling** When we sit in a circle, we are able to look at and discourse with each other as equals in a process of mediation and restorative justice. That is why we engage in circling—gathering in a circle—when we create the spaces and places for this work.

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### Core Considerations of Community Participatory Mediation™ for Restorative Justice

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See <https://wisdomprojects.org/restorative-justice> for a full explanation of these concepts and practices.

## Understanding Conflict

Conflicts are common and basic to all life on earth. Even on cellular and microbial level that the human eye cannot see, there are conflictual struggles for the survival of living tissue. Consequently, not all conflicts are adverse.

Our first goal is to understand when we must be open to disagreement and differences of views and experience. Most of these kinds of conflicts do not merit extensive intervention, but rather acceptance of differing experiences and views.

Conflicts that *do* merit prevention and/or intervention generally involve mistakes or offenses that lead to harm towards oneself or others.

The ideas in this document pertain to these latter conflicts.

## Understanding Power

Human life is often organized around experiences of power. Power refers to the authority, responsibility, and related resources afforded to key people or groups.

In workplaces, the head or heads of a business (be it nonprofit or for-profit), hold legal responsibility and accountability for all of the organization's activities, and they incur enormous risks and liabilities that, at their worse, could involve defunding or even imprisonment for certain kinds of mistakes and offenses.

That is why it is imperative that people in workplaces, everyone must respect the authority of the head or heads of the organization.

In turn, it is important that the head or heads are clear about values, practices, policies, and procedures, and that they are compassionate and fair in uplifting and engaging with employees.

The ideas in this document pertain to power in workplaces.

Yet, even outside of the workplace, it is crucial that we are always attuned to the responsibilities and accountabilities that people hold and wield.

Children under the age of 18 hold the least power in our societies because they cannot enter into contracts without the written permission of their parent. In Maryland, people below the age of 21 cannot drink, smoke, or buy drinking and smoking products.

There are clear, power-laden legal rules for the regulation of the conduct minors under the law in many jurisdictions in the United States, and we must understand and teach youth to abide by and adhere to these rules and regulations for their health, protection, and well-being.

Moreover, in all relationships, consent is important for actions. Further still, some types of people hold more societal power than others. For example, people with great wealth often wield power over low-income people, using their money to influence the views, policies, and laws of elected officials. We must work hard to equalize societal power in our country.

### **Procedures for Community Participatory Mediation™**

**For Mediations** (which may be or become opportunities for crisis interventions)—Bringing all parties together within a conflict, dispute, or offense **without punishment or suffering** to do the following:

1. Delineate the facts of what happened—honestly, what is the who, what, where, when, how, and why of what happened;
2. Assess the nature of the pain, suffering, mistake, harm, or offense—ask participants to share how they feel about the facts once the facts have been determined;
3. Ascertain roles and experiences of power, responsibility, and accountability;
4. Identify consequences; and
5. Devise plans (including verbal agreements, written and signed agreements, or mental health treatment plans with the aid of medical or clinical referrals) for accountability, amends, healing, and justice.

**Crisis Interventions** (which are mediations that must include the five processes above)—With the aid of sources like Lisa R. Jackson-Cherry and Bradley T. Erford's *Crisis Assessment, Intervention, and Prevention*, when community members are in crisis involving direct, imminent threats to their safety or well-being (or perceived threats) and they reach out to us for help, we support them with one-on-one or group mediations and negotiations to do the following:

- De-escalate the situation so that the individual or group is in a calm, sober state of mind, to make the safest decisions.
- Ascertain the facts of the conflict.
- Talk through or negotiate so that the individual makes decisions that do not involve harming themselves, others, or their environments.
- **Affirm and humanize** the individual or group so that they can move to a place of strength and resourcefulness instead of breaking down.
- See <https://treeturtle.com/affirmation> for what is meant by affirming and humanizing.
- Encourage the individual or group to understand the **natural, logical, or imposed consequences** that inform their actions (see the definitions below later on this web-page).
- Setting clear behavioral boundaries (including articulating the limits of what we can do in the crisis situation and what they can, should, could, or cannot and should not do).

- Providing referrals or contacting entities for mental, physical, or medical help, including Maryland groups with whom we have engaged previously like Baltimore Crisis Response and Thrive.

## Consequences

We encourage accountability by thinking-through and investigating the root causes of a conflict in a community and in the lives of individuals, and then creating responses (or treatment plans) that solve, resolve, manage, transform, or address the problems that prompted problematic behavior.

This requires rethinking how we conceive of **natural consequences**, **logical consequences**, and **imposed consequences**.

- **Natural Consequences:** These are the direct results of our actions.
- **Imposed Consequences:** These are healthy interventions that make amends in the wake of offense after discussion with different people involved in a conflict. Imposed consequences become unhealthy when they involve punishment.
- **Logical Consequences:** Expectations predetermined by a group and explained to group members thereby making the un-fulfillment of the expectations a choice by a person.

## Understanding Neurodivergence and Mental Health

At Wisdom Projects, we are committed to uplifting people with neurodivergence and disabilities involving mental health challenges.

At <https://wisdomprojects.org/neurodivergence>, we include resources designed for understanding our approach to caring for these community members, which include members of our staff and leadership.

It is important to share that, while neurodivergence may explain some mistakes and offenses, it does not excuse them and we must still work for Community Participatory Mediation™ so that everyone is held accountable for harm.