

Circles for Safe Streets: Driver Accountability Through Restorative Justice

Circles for Safe Streets, a project of the Center for Justice Innovation, in partnership with Families for Safe Streets, responds to the harm caused by the hundreds of lives that are lost or permanently altered each year due to traffic violence in New York City. Rooted in restorative justice, and developed in consultation with directly impacted people, Circles for Safe Streets provides support to both victims and drivers, and offers a pathway for communication in the aftermath of a crash. This process may be used as an alternative to incarceration or for sentence mitigation.

Core Elements

The Circles for Safe Streets process aims to be flexible and responsive to the needs of all parties. Core elements of the process include:

Victim Support and Engagement

Circles for Safe Streets offers people who have been harmed by traffic violence support through Families for Safe Streets (FSS). FSS is a member-driven organization founded

and led by those who have lost loved ones or have themselves been critically injured by a car crash. FSS provides people who have been harmed with critical support, a community of people who have suffered loss due to traffic violence, as well as specialized social workers/advocates who have knowledge of the concrete emotional, material, and medical needs that can arise in the wake of a crash.

Circle for Safe Streets staff also offer those who have been harmed the option to

participate in a restorative justice process, which can include a face-to-face meeting (circle) with the driver in their case. Participation is a personal, often difficult choice and facilitators are available to support the decision-making process. Harmed persons may opt to participate directly or send an ambassador of their choosing. If they choose to have a dialogue with the driver, facilitators help to prepare them by listening to their goals and expectations for the process and inviting in their supporters and other impacted people. These preparatory conversations help ensure that facilitators create a space responsive to the needs and expectations of those who have been harmed. Harmed parties may opt out of the process at any time.

Driver Accountability and Support

In order to participate in Circles for Safe Streets, drivers must be willing to take responsibility for the harm caused. During the preparation process, restorative justice facilitators provide support and work with responsible parties to:

- tell their story of the crash;
- identify the action or inaction that led to the crash and explore possible underlying causes they may not have considered;
- begin to process having caused an unintended death or grave harm;
- identify how they will work to prevent future traffic violence and be offered a connection to the Hyacinth Fellowship—a supportive community of people who have caused similar harm.

These conversations prepare the driver to participate in a circle with either a harmed party, or a surrogate victim who has suffered a similar experience. The driver's obligations to complete the restorative justice process include meaningful participation in:

- a minimum of 4 preparatory sessions;
- the Center for Justice Innovation's Driver Accountability Program, a 90-minute group-based intervention with other drivers who have been charged with vehicular offenses;
- one assessment session with a case manager or social worker to assess for any additional needs;
- a restorative justice circle (up to 5 hours);
- the completion of a reflection statement shared with the court parties about what they took away from the process; and
- one debrief session with the facilitator where the driver will be referred to additional resources on a voluntary basis.

Circle

The Circles for Safe Streets process culminates in a restorative justice circle. The driver and harmed party(s) or victim surrogate(s) are invited to bring other impacted people as well as supporters to the circle. During this conversation, participants have an opportunity to convey the life-changing impact of the crash on their lives; ask questions; express anger, pain, and grief; receive empathy and compassion; and potentially reduce some of the symptoms of victimization through the

empowerment the process offers. Drivers take accountability for the harm they caused by coming face-to-face with those they have impacted, telling the truth of what happened and committing to how they can work to prevent future harm. Participants may agree on actionable steps moving forward, though these steps will not be limited to the life of the case or be monitored by the program.

Contact Us

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To make a referral:

[https://surveys.innovatingjustice.org/s3/
Circles-for-Safe-Streets-Referral-Form](https://surveys.innovatingjustice.org/s3/Circles-for-Safe-Streets-Referral-Form)



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