

From GenerationFIVE

About generationFIVE

generationFIVE works to change the root causes of child sexual abuse, so that we can truly prevent it. We work to respond to present and past experiences of CSA [child sexual abuse] in ways that help to change the community and social norms that perpetuate it. We organize to change our community and social values and norms, so that child sexual abuse no longer happens. gen5 holds its vision of liberation, justice and sustainability for all of our futures.

Our Approach

generationFIVE's analysis of intersecting systemic oppression and trauma and resilience leads to gen5's approach of Transformative Justice (TJ). Through extensive community work and development with numerous national organizations since 2002, g5 has developed this Transformative Justice approach. To read gen5's Transformative Justice document and learn more about its background as well as application, contact our Program Director.

Transformative Justice links how we respond to incidences and experiences of child sexual abuse to social justice. This means that we work to respond to experiences of child sexual abuse (both current and past) while also changing the community beliefs and practices, and social institutions and norms that keep child sexual abuse going. Also, we do not use nor support responses to child sexual abuse that perpetuate systemic oppression and/or trauma.

TJ Definition

Transformative Justice is an approach which secures individual justice in cases of CSA while transforming structures of community and social injustice that are perpetuated by and perpetuate CSA.

Transformative Justice addresses incidences of child sexual abuse and social conditions. This is necessary for prevention and revealing the intersection of child sexual abuse with other social justice issues. Transformative Justice orients toward more choices for individuals and communities. The Transformative Justice approach to child sexual abuse challenges people to integrate their emotional and political commitments to change. It holds the two together in a set of principles and practices that are focused on achieving individual and social transformation.

TJ Goals

We locate a Transformative Justice approach and response inside of community networks and relationships, with support and alliance from broader TJ collaborative. Transformative Justice seeks to provide survivors of CSA with immediate safety and long term healing and reparations while holding offenders of child sexual abuse accountable within and by their communities. This accountability includes stopping immediate abuse, making a commitment to not engage in future abuse, and offering reparations for past abuse. Such offender accountability requires community responsibility and access to on-going support transformative healing for offenders. Beyond survivors and offenders, Transformative Justice also seeks to transform inequity and power abuses within communities. Through building the capacity of communities to increase justice internally, Transformative Justice seeks to support collective action towards addressing larger issues of injustice and oppression.

The goals of Transformative Justice as a response to child sexual abuse are:

- Survivor safety, healing and agency
- Offender accountability and transformation

- Community response and accountability
- Transformation of the community and societal conditions that create and perpetuate child sexual abuse, i.e. systems of oppression, exploitation, domination, and State violence.

TJ also seeks to...

- Build collective power for liberation efforts through addressing the inequity and injustice happening inside of communities
- Build capacity of individuals and collectives to address larger conditions of inequality and injustice

Transformative Justice practices

The principles we have described are intended to guide the implementation Transformative Justice response to child sexual abuse. The practices discussed here take a closer look at what this response involves. This set of practices does not comprise a model that has been applied and evaluated but, rather, the best describes what generationFIVE knows so far from its work with communities. As such, this account of the practices of Transformative Justice is a work in progress to which generationFIVE welcomes feedback.

The sequence in which the practices of Transformative Justice are presented is not intended to imply a linear set of steps. The sequence in which these practices are applied will depend on specific circumstances, but it is important that a Transformative Justice process touch upon them all. Generation FIVE believes that most situations will require cycling through these practices several times at various moments and to different depths. In implementing any of these practices, people will face a number of emotional challenges. So that we can better prepare to effectively respond to these challenges, they are discussed in more detail in Appendix 2 of our Transformative Justice paper.

Practices of Transformative justice include:

- Strengthening community capacity
- Naming child sexual abuse
- Assessing level of concern
- Developing a safety strategy
- Supporting healing and resilience
- Holding accountability
- Working for community transformation
Collective resistance, vision and strength

Principles of Transformative Justice

Liberation

Liberation is central to the political project of Transformative Justice. We envision relationships, communities, and society liberated from the intergenerational legacies of violence and colonization. Efforts to secure individual and personal justice in cases of child sexual abuse must also work for this vision of social justice and political liberation. The application of Transformative Justice centers the principle of liberation by addressing current manifestations of multiple, intersecting forms of intimate, community and State violence. Rather than assign narrow blame on individualized “criminals,” the Transformative Justice model seeks to expand the very notion of who is responsible by mobilizing bystanders, challenging collusions with power, and situating individual interventions in the larger context of social justice movement. We seek methods of attaining justice that challenge State and

systemic violence rather than attempting to reform or re-direct it. Our task is to create conditions of cooperation, respect, self-determination, and equitable access to resources while building community-based institutions operating within values and practices that make possible a world without child sexual abuse.

Thus, when we name liberation as a guiding principle of this work, we mean that a critical feature of a Transformative Justice approach to child sexual abuse is that it seeks to build the capacity of organizations, communities, and intimate networks to respond to the needs of individuals and relationships within a broader liberation politic. We envision our organizations and movements as supporting the healing, accountability and transformation of individuals and relationships while engaging people in collective action no challenge the conditions of oppression and violence experienced by communities. As we increase our capacity to transform the histories of violence and oppression as they play out in our relationships and cultures, we believe our effectiveness, visions, and hope will grow.

Shifting Power

Transformative Justice challenges definitions of power based on domination, exploitation, violence, privilege, and entitlement. Instead, we seek to build power and forms of shared power based on equity, cooperation, and self-determination. Transformative Justice responses seek to shift power away from those individuals, community institutions and systems that aim to maintain oppression toward individuals, collectives, and community and alternative institutions that promote Transformative Justice and liberation. Specifically, in a Transformative Justice intervention, we will need to shift power from those who sexually abuse children and the power that supports their behavior to survivors, allies, and the Collective aligned with a Transformative Justice approach.

Historically, survivors' experiences have been silenced to maintain the arrangements of power that characterize abuse and/or avoid conflict within families or communities. A key component of shifting power is to support the self-determination of survivors. In practice, this means supporting a survivors' decision to challenge, prevent, or respond to a violation intended to take their power. At the same time, because Transformative Justice is a community intervention model, it is important to stress that the survivor alone does not have the sole responsibility of determining what justice will look like. A survivor's safety must never be compromised for the comfort of family or community, or in order to avoid a potential conflict that addressing violence might surface. For interventions in child sexual abuse, this is especially important because in the case of current incidents, the immediate survivor is a child. Given the power relationship between children and adults, children cannot be responsible for surfacing and then making decisions about how to intervene and prevent child sexual abuse and other forms of violence.

We honor the voices, experiences, and rights of children and challenge the adultism that denies children their age-appropriate self-determination while supporting their development toward finding their power. Yet, we see the responsibility for intervening in and preventing child sexual abuse and other forms of violence to be our collective responsibility. More broadly, no matter what the age of the survivor, we do not believe intervention and prevention should be solely the responsibility of survivors. However, there may be times when the desires of any given survivor contradict our political commitments. Such times require supporting the power and self-determination of the survivor in a way that does not compromise our political commitments.

An example of this might be that the (adult or child) survivor does not want to address child sexual abuse and would rather 'move on'. On the other hand, the community may feel it is critical to confront

the offending behavior in the interests of the safety of other children and the community. Thus, supporting the survivor's safety and their self-determination while moving toward broader transformation and collective self-determination might mean that the survivor is not involved in the intervention themselves. It could mean that they remain informed about the intervention but not involved. Either way, Transformative Justice requires that the survivor's interests are central in an intervention and prevention plan; however, in the aforementioned case, intervention is happening on behalf of the survivor but in the interest of the Collective.

Child sexual abuse is an attack not only on its survivors but on our collective safety, values, politics, and commitments. Therefore, we collectively have a vital stake in intervention. Collective responses support broader shifts in power toward equity within intimate and community relationships and networks. The voices, experiences, and leadership of all those who share this vision are required if we are going to shift power and transform our relationships, families, and communities as we address and prevent the violence in our lives.

Safety

We understand safety as liberation from violence, exploitation, and the threat of further acts of violence. The safety that we seek manifests on three intersecting and mutually reinforcing levels. On an individual level, a survivors' safety from immediate violence and the threat of further acts of violence (sexual, economic, etc.) is central. For the community, safety comes from fostering community norms and practices which challenge violence and support conditions for liberation. Lastly, across communities and collectives, safety means mutual accountability, challenging power dynamics within and between groups, guarding against backlash, and building strong alliances so that we can collectively support and protect each other from interference and targeting by the State.

We recognize that absolute safety is not something that we can guarantee people. Resistance to abuses of power and exploitation – in both individual and collective manifestations – will inevitably require some risk to our safety. However, taking these risks is essential to transforming our lives, relationships, communities, and movements. Risks are also an act of courage and self-determination when taken on with full consciousness of both the consequences and the potential for liberation. We realize safety is relative. Engaging in Transformative Justice means that individuals and collectives may risk the short-term safety that accompanies not challenging or colluding with violence.

But, in the long run, we believe taking these risk will lead us closer to long-term liberation from abuses of power, exploitation, and oppression. However, the decision to take these risks can only be made by those individuals and communities most likely to suffer the consequences of inaction – not by those less impacted. We are committed to developing new practices that we believe will bring about safety and justice. We must consciously and consensually take on this experimentation. As we engage in Transformative Justice-based models of resistance and intervention, we will gain experience, evaluate, and revise our practice. We do so in the service of our vision and in the struggle for liberation.

Accountability

Accountability is not only a critical mechanism of justice; it is a powerful tool of transformation. We hold ourselves individually and collectively accountable for transforming oppressive and abusive dynamics that prevent us from being in integrity with and realizing our visions of justice. People that commit violence are not born that way; they are created by their histories and given permission by the inequitable practices and arrangements of power within the society in which we live. Accountability in relationships means we are willing to interrupt problematic behaviors or dynamics and then support a process for transforming those behaviors. Accountability at a minimum requires:

- Acknowledging the harm done even if it is unintended;
- Acknowledging its negative impact on individuals and the community;
- Making appropriate reparations for this harm to individuals and the community;
- Transforming attitudes and behaviors to prevent further violence and contribute toward liberation;
- Engaging bystanders to hold individuals accountable, and toward shifting community institutions and conditions that perpetuate and allow violence; and;
- Building movements that can shift social conditions to prevent further harm and promote liberation, including holding the State accountable for the violence it perpetuates and condones.

Transformative Justice interventions seek concrete accountability from individuals who are violent. Simultaneously, they engage bystanders and build community responsibility for creating conditions that provide opportunities for accountability and change. Transformative Justice interventions seek accountability from bystanders for their collusion with violence while having compassion for their own histories and relationships of dependency, fear or love of the people they allowed to sexually abuse children that they know. The goal of this process is moving a non-protective bystander toward taking action to stop violence, creating accountability, and engaging in the transformation of abusive power dynamics.

Transformative Justice needs mechanisms of leverage and influence in order to ensure short and long-term accountability. These mechanisms may include: community relationships and identity, sanctions, monitoring agreements, consequences for non-compliance with agreements, etc. Different contexts will call for different methods and mechanisms. Different levels of concern about the behavior, likelihood of re-offending, ability to mobilize support for abusive behavior, and commitment to transformation will call for different accountability methods and mechanisms. Mechanisms have to evolve as the process and demonstration of accountability by the person who was abusive shifts. Ensuring immediate safety and long-term accountability may at times require self-defense by individuals or communities. This could take the form of force or removal, which we see as distinct from violence or oppression.

Building Collective Action

One of the central aspects of child sexual abuse, perhaps more than any other form of violence, is the isolation the abuse occurs within and creates. Thus, a key principle of a Transformative Justice approach must be to break this isolation and build collective action to secure individual justice in cases of child sexual abuse while transforming structures of social injustice that perpetuate such abuse.

This principle invites people to build with others when taking responsibility and action to address child sexual abuse. However formally or informally such collective action is constituted, it is important to remember that a Collective does not have to be a geographic entity, but rather shares a set of practices, values, beliefs, culture, politics, experiences, history, geography or relationships through which “belonging” to the group is established.

Transformative Justice breaks the isolation of individuals, which is created by violence, and which promotes further violence; Transformative Justice moves toward collective responsibility and action to challenge oppressive relations of power and to create community spaces that support liberation while building the capacity and self-determination of individuals to fully participate in collective liberation.

Building collective action, the results of collaborative alliances and movements, can also protect us from backlash. An individual or small collective of people implementing intervention or prevention

without broader support can be vulnerable to being targeted by the same powers used to perpetuate or collude with abuse. Even in the absence of such targeting, an isolated collective is unlikely to be able to sustain the emotional and political pressures of engaging in Transformative Justice work over time. By building collective action, we demonstrate our commitment to challenging the targeting of other communities. We build powerful movements that will ultimately be capable of challenging the violence and abuse of the State.

Honoring the Diversity of Our Communities, Cultures, Histories and Experiences

Transformative Justice approaches should respond to the historic, cultural, geographic, or population specific experiences and needs of the community in which they are implemented. We are committed to creating cross-community or cross-national Transformative Justice standards and mechanisms for support and accountability that continue to be responsive to local, evolving needs. An example of a standard might be that those working within a Transformative Justice Framework never leverage racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, or classism to mobilize a community to hold someone who sexually abuses children accountable.

Our commitment to collective self-determination toward liberation requires that we support those in closest relationship with the community providing leadership toward addressing violence. Such leadership is in the best position to assess the consequences and potential of any intervention and prevention work. This leadership will also be able to better mobilize intimate and community networks toward taking the consensual and necessary risks to implement Transformative Justice. Although effective Transformative Justice approaches will challenge cultural norms that support abuse, shifting cultural norms does not mean rejecting cultures wholesale, or labeling some cultures as more ‘civilized,’ moral, or salvageable than others. We honor the role of culture in supporting and transmitting legacies of resilience and resistance. We believe: that cultural traditions can be shifted by those within the culture and reoriented toward the liberation of those who share and practice it.

Cultural relativism can be a setback and a dangerous argument. Cultural relativism manipulates the value of cultural diversity and integrity for the sake of preserving traditional arrangements of power that are harmful. Cultural relativism assumes that culture is static and that there is danger, rather than liberation, in the shifting of traditions. It assumes that harmful practices were inherent to the culture rather than imported or a reflection of abusive relationships of power. People with different agendas can use relativist arguments to justify and minimize violence, harm caused, intent, and willfulness of actions. Those in the best position to challenge cultural relativism are those who are part of the culture in which the practices or behavior take place. Attempts to challenge cultural practices by people outside of the community or culture can result in defensiveness. This can make it more difficult for those inside of the community who want to challenge harmful practices, as their activism is likely to be interpreted as betraying, rather than improving, the community.

As we develop collective, community-based processes of Transformative Justice, we are committed to maintaining their flexibility and responsiveness in order to prevent community definitions and processes from becoming rigid, administrative bodies akin to those of the State.

Sustainability

We have a responsibility to create intervention and prevention strategies that are sustainable over time and throughout the transformation process. Generation FIVE, or any group supporting Transformative Justice-based interventions, must be conscious and transparent about the support we offer and the limitations of what we can provide at any given stage in an intervention. We must also recognize the long-term challenges of building Transformative Justice approaches, processes, and alternative

institutions. Like any organizing project, we seek to build the internal capacity of intimate and community networks and collectives toward this sustainability. Transformative Justice models need to plan for the sustainability of their responses. They must be able to support survivor safety and healing, maintain ongoing accountability and transformation for people who abuse, build bystander and community accountability, and redefine community and social norms. Various resources – financial, emotional, political; and material – will be necessary to sustain Transformative Justice responses and organizing. This might include such things as:

- Strategic relationships
- Methods of individual and collective healing
- Mechanisms of accountability; organizational and community infrastructure to support collective action
- Opportunities for individual and collective consciousness-raising or political education.
- Strong internal commitments to the collective and the larger process

Different communities have different relationships to State resources, institutions, violence, and support. Their access to alternative options than the State may vary, For example, families with more resources can afford therapy to address sexual abuse rather than engaging with the State. People without any community support to challenge their experiences of violence may see the State as their only resource. In the face of the devastation and urgency caused by violence in our lives, it can be difficult to do the work in ways that are sustainable. However, we believe the work itself can sustain us if we build support through collective action – with the vision of immediate safety and transformation over time.