

Frequently Asked Questions about Re-evaluation Counseling

What is Re-evaluation Counseling or RC?

Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is an international, grassroots peer-support network that exists to improve the lives of ordinary people. The heart of Re-evaluation Counseling is the voluntary exchange of active listening between willing participants. This peer counseling of each other is a private activity that, at its best, approximates deep conversations between close friends in pursuit of a better life and happiness. That's one reason RC is often called "co-counseling." Our use of the words Re-evaluation Counseling, RC, and co-counseling all refer to the same practice and the same international community. Many people all around the world who want to improve their lives and the lives of their loved ones, and who seek justice and a more equitable society, have found useful tools and support from RC.

What are RC's core ideas?

RC has a hopeful perspective that it is possible for people to continuously grow, change, and be a part of building a better world for everyone. The core ideas outline RC's understanding of the human condition: (1) that painful experiences and unresolved trauma from people's past can interfere with having fulfilling lives in the present, (2) that societal oppressions like racism, sexism, and others, are a major source of many of these traumas, and (3) that it is possible for people to resolve the effects of these hurts by telling their stories without suppressing emotional release.

Can people really recover from hurts?

Yes. The RC Community's experience has been that the effects of hurtful incidents can be healed if someone listens attentively and allows and encourages the person to share their experiences fully, including the grief, fear, and other painful emotions that are part of those experiences. Recovery happens by means of natural mental healing processes, whose outward signs are talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. Sharing experiences in a supportive network without holding back their emotions, allows the hurtful feelings to begin to dissipate, assisting people to be more thoughtful, joyful, and hopeful about their lives.

How do people practice co-counseling?

In RC, people listen to each other, usually in pairs, and take turns telling their full stories. People want to be respectfully heard and share our triumphs, hopes, and struggles, including how they have been hurt. Most co-counselors have a regular partner with whom they do a co-counseling session weekly. As co-counselors get to know each other they can be more open, and also show the grief, rage, fears, and embarrassment that are part of their painful experiences. People often reach out to each other when they need support. Co-counselors also participate in RC classes, where RC teachers communicate the theory and practice of RC. Classes, along with workshops

on particular topics, often include demonstrations of how to counsel, short sessions, and small groups.

What is the difference between RC and the RC Community?

Re-evaluation Counseling is a practice in which people exchange active listening with each other to free themselves from the emotional harm caused by past hurtful experiences.

The Re-evaluation Counseling Community is made up of people who are committed to participate in and support RC Community activities and follow its Guidelines. It is a global network of local RC Communities, groups, classes, and peer counselors. The functioning of the RC Community is guided by Guidelines developed over the past fifty years and updated regularly.

Participating in some RC-based activities available inside or outside of the RC Community does not make one a member of the Re-evaluation Counseling Community. Membership is open to people who are willing to take responsibility for things going well in the RC community. People who like RC are welcome to begin the process of becoming a member of the RC Community by gaining enough theory, practice, and understanding to agree to follow our Guidelines.

Many co-counselors apply what they have learned in RC in their families and their work. The RC Community does not control or oversee activities outside of the RC Community, including those that use some RC ideas, unless they are projects of the RC Community. The process for becoming a project of the RC Community is stated in our Guidelines.

What about confidentiality?

RC holds confidentiality to be of paramount importance, stressing it in all activities, and regularly reminding each other about it. This applies to one-on-one sessions as well as any sessions that take place in a group setting. For most of us, trust is a key to creating a safe environment to express concerns about the hard times we go through in life.

What is restimulation?

After we go through a painful experience, we cannot always quickly leave the distressed feelings from that experience behind us. Sometimes they stay with us for hours or days or even longer. Even after we seem to have gotten over such feelings, they can reappear suddenly. This can happen when they are “triggered” by a particular circumstance. For example, having to speak to a large group of people can bring up intense feelings of embarrassment from times, often long ago, when we were embarrassed in front of a group. This can happen around many different circumstances and feelings: embarrassment, fear, grief, irritation. These could come from many different kinds of earlier stressful circumstances, including times when one was targeted by racism, sexism, homophobia, and other oppressions. In Re-evaluation Counseling, this reappearance of these feelings is called restimulation. In RC, we have come to recognize that the reappearance of these old painful feelings can cloud our judgment about current situations.

Is RC Therapy?

No. RC is not therapy or psychotherapy. Therapy is typically defined as treatment or rehabilitation provided by a professional, often in the context of a medical model focused on treating various forms of mental health disorders. RC, in contrast, offers peer support focused on wellness, self-awareness, and connecting with others with shared identities and experiences. Peer listening can be a part of a process of healing from the effects of systemic oppressions such as racism and sexism.

How is Re-evaluation Counseling used to fight oppression?

Many people oppose oppression and want to take steps to end it. RC starts from the assumption that all forms of societal oppression are wrong, that nobody deserves to be oppressed, and that it is possible to completely eliminate all forms of oppression. In RC, people participate in the equal exchange of listening time to tell their stories, to heal the emotional damage and confusions caused by oppression, and to decide for themselves how they will fight against oppression as an individual and as a member of any groups they are part of or directly support.

How is RC useful to social and racial justice groups?

Many progressive movements are derailed by divisions among people and when targeted by divide-and-conquer strategies. The targeting and blaming of oppressed groups for society's systemic ills undermines unity, as does the unworkability of "call-out culture." One of the best ways to find or re-establish unity is to "walk a mile in someone else's shoes"—to listen deeply to others' experiences, especially people whose life experiences are very different. RC listening tools can effectively foster unity and advance progressive goals by improving communication and overcoming divisions caused by oppression. Ending systemic oppressions, such as racism, sexism, classism, and LGBTQ+ oppression, and their effects on our minds and relationships, is a key goal of the RC community. Many people engaged in social justice movements have been attracted to RC because of the progressive, humanist, self-help philosophy, and the fact that RC aims to be accessible to anyone through low-cost or no-cost programs.

Social justice workers, including leaders, sometimes face periods of burnout and discouragement. RC has offered them a place to look at and talk about their experiences and regain their hope and confidence. Our key practice—the equal exchange of active listening time between peers—has played a useful role in many organizations, academic institutions, government agencies, youth development and adult education programs, and corporations addressing racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, the destruction of Native peoples, and other forms of societal oppression.

What is RC's position on LGBTQ+ liberation?

Justice and respect for all people is essential to creating a more humane world. RC takes a firm stance against the oppression of LGBTQ+ people. We stand against the brutal treatment of

transgender and non-binary people, and for a world where all people are respected and valued. People have the right to think and make decisions for themselves, and RC encourages everyone to do that—questioning all of our own individual assumptions, especially around issues of oppression and liberation. RC is committed to supporting people who identify as LGBTQ+ to use the tools of active listening to heal from the effects of this and other oppressions and supporting others to become more effective allies against the oppression.

How can people of color (*People of the Global Majority) heal from the effects of racism and internalized racism?

People, especially those who have been targeted by oppression, need safe places to talk openly about the effects of racism and efforts to end it. Many People of the Global Majority* use RC tools to free themselves from the emotional harm caused by racism and other oppressions. By telling the stories of how racism has affected their lives, what has happened to them and their people, individuals can heal from the pain inflicted by racism. They take turns listening to each other share their experiences fully, not holding back their emotions. As a result, the painful feelings begin to dissipate and people feel more powerful to continue to address racism, whether individually, in institutions or systematically in society.

In 1999 the Re-evaluation Counseling Communities decided that the elimination of racism was a central piece of its work. RC has pursued this ever since. Examples of RC's efforts in this area can be found at [United to End Racism](#).

*In RC we refer to People of the Global Majority instead of people of color. The peoples of African, Asia, and the Pacific Islands, and South, Central and Caribbean America, and those descended from them, and Indigenous people are over 80% of the global population. These people also occupy most of the global land mass. Using the term “Global Majority and Indigenous (GMI)” for these people acknowledges their majority status in the world and interrupts how the dominant (US. and European) culture assigns them a minority status.

How can white people heal from the effects of racism?

Humans long for a world where everyone can flourish. No one wants their own well-being to come at the expense of others. White people can actively eliminate the effects of racism from their thinking and behavior and fight alongside people of color against white supremacy, white domination and control in regard to individual, institutional, and systemic racism. RC creates the conditions for white people to heal from damage done to them by the racism in our society—including how it divides white people from each other. This happens by telling stories of how white people witnessed and acquired racist thinking and behavior, without having to hide the emotional effect of this. White people support each other in a confidential environment. This exchange of active listening with other white people is based on a hopeful perspective that sees good in every human being and envisions what we all would be like in the absence of racism.

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