**Punishment or Healing? A Comparative Study of Retributive and Restorative Approaches in Juvenile Justice Systems**

Persuasive Communication

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Professor

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**Thesis Statement**

1. Generate a thesis statement for your persuasive essay.

a. Using the OGS Forum Paper Template, complete the following:

i. Enter your essay title on the title page and the first page of the essay.

Complete the rest of the title page.

ii. Use the Thesis Statement Generator to draft a thesis statement.

Use only the “generate example” to view several examples of a

well-written thesis statement.

iii. On the Thesis Statement page, enter a clear, concise thesis

statement of the argumentative position.

iv. In the body of the paper, write a three-paragraph description of the

topic that includes the basic logic behind your argument.

v. In the Works Cited section, enter a minimum of 11 references relevant to

your topic. Include no more than two books; the remaining references

should be for journal articles from a minimum of four different academic

journals. Use only primary research articles with a majority of them

published within the past 5 years. Include references to both support

(additive) and counter (variant) your argument.

b. Professor will check for quality of content and word-count requirements. Grade

assigned will be Credit or No Credit (CR/NC).

**Thesis Statement**

While retributive justice often continues cycles of harm and recidivism, restorative justice nurtures healing, accountability, and long-term positive outcomes, despite some claims that lenient approaches fail to hold youth accountable.

Serving juvenile offenders for the past thirteen years, I have witnessed the harsh realities of retributive justice and its overwhelming impact on youth. It is a myth that punishing illegal activity by itself will discourage it. Most of the juveniles we serve are products of their environments that are filled with abuse, trauma, and neglect. Bound in chains for security purposes, by the time they are booked into our juvenile detention center, they are left helpless and hopeless, reinforcing their sense of being irredeemable and unworthy of change. After brief stays in detention, some of them re-offend, finding themselves back in our facilities several times, their anger and frustration mounting every time. The system often ignores the root causes of their behavior. Therefore, these children grow more firmly anchored in their criminal identities, causing more harm than good. This is not justice—it is a broken system that continues to prolong itself.

From a biblical perspective, we see a different type of justice that strives to bring healing and restoration rather than punishment. Most of the encounters that Jesus had were with people society rejected; however, in his eyes, the focus was on redemption rather than criticism. If we think about the story regarding the woman caught in adultery found in John 8:1–11, what Jesus said to her was pretty astonishing. He refused to condemn her but offered a path to change by telling the woman, *"Go and sin no more."* He knew who she was and what she had done, but still chose to restore her. Restorative justice is all about offering young offenders the opportunity to make things right, heal from the damage they have done to others and their community, and reconcile with victims. It is not about ignoring accountability but rethinking what true accountability looks like. Restorative justice teaches these kids that, despite what society might say, they are not defined by their mistakes and that there is always a path forward, no matter how deep their wounds or bad their actions are. It enables growth and healing rather than only serving to condemn the past.

Since they give the human connection that many of these young people need, mentorship programs are a powerful tool in the restorative process. I have seen young men and women transform after being granted the opportunity to be mentored by someone genuinely passionate and caring. Mentors provide another type of responsibility based on relationship, trust, and mutual respect. Instead of taking time to tell a youth what he’s done wrong, mentors are lights in darkness to a child, guiding him toward recognizing his capacity for change. I will never forget a young man coming in and out of our detention center. He had the most severe charges and was deemed a violent offender. He eventually turned his life around after we started a mentorship program, and he was paired with a mentor who shared his faith and values. Through the mentor’s constant love, support, and encouragement, this young man gained the confidence to make better decisions, eventually found steady employment, and remained out of trouble. He is no longer on parole. Retributive justice cannot produce the kind of responsibility this one can. Like the restoring techniques, mentoring programs provide a forum for hope and transformation. The biblical principle of mentorship is seen in the relationship between Paul and Timothy (1 Timothy 1:2), where a more experienced individual guides a younger one toward growth and maturity. This approach—grounded in relationship, accountability, and transformation—is what truly breaks the cycle of recidivism and offers youth a chance at a different future.

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