



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

# PeacePoints

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## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

### • Social Justice necessitates:

- Equity
- Harmony
- Participation
- Access

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# What do we mean by “social justice”?

Social injustice exists because there are deeply rooted structural injustices that exist within every culture.

Structural injustices are social structures, practices, and norms that lead to disproportionate social suffering for categories of people or communities. Social injustice acts to maintain the status of a privileged group, guaranteeing that an underclass can be oppressed by others in socially acceptable ways. Unintentional injustices occur when individuals are complicit in silently allowing oppressive unjust policies and practices. Several concepts are embraced in notions of

social justice. One is maintenance of equal rights and fundamental liberties including individual justice and the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities to those with the greatest need. Harmony, the notion of promoting the common good of individuals and groups, is another essential social justice



concept. Access is a principle of social justice that includes

notions of fairness for the common good that are based on the ability of people to access the knowledge, power, resources, and services that are crucial to realizing a standard of living that allows for self-actualization and self-determination. Participation is another important social justice principle that refers to the right of every person in society to participate in and/or be consulted on decisions that affect their lives as well as other persons in their environment. Justice affects both the personal, social and political domains of human existence.

# Public Health and Social Justice

How are social justice and public health related? Some people suggest that the definition most frequently applied to social justice – the fair distribution of society’s benefits, responsibilities and their consequences – should be considered a core competency

of the public health care system. This is a particularly important and pressing consideration in a country where there are such disparities in health care delivery, mental health care delivery, and throughout the justice system. As we gain

increasing knowledge about the social determinants of health and longevity, the need to incorporate this knowledge at policy, management, and research levels becomes more urgent.

## Early Development of Fair Play



The sense of what justice means begins to develop in early childhood. At about eighteen months of age, children first exhibit prosocial altruistic behaviors – reaching out and wanting to help and offering comfort. As anyone knows who has been around young children, during the second or third year of life, children become very concerned about issues of fairness, although their initial concern is with being

treated fairly – the beginnings of a sense of justice. Children begin to protest against unfair treatment as early as one year of age. Around age four, they become capable of learning how to treat others fairly. By age 9, children are capable of making very subtle discriminations between intentional acts and accidental acts that shape their responses to a perpetrator’s actions. In this way, gradually and in

interaction with significant others in their social environment, children learn how to modulate and manage their normal desires for retaliatory vengeance and channel these desires into socially acceptable behavior. Children certainly compete with each other, but they also learn how to cooperate with each other as a fundamental social strategy, even when adults aren’t around to tell them what to do.

*Justice is truth in  
action*  
Benjamin  
Disraeli, 1851,

## Just World Theory

Life for human beings is so frightening that we create meaning to keep us away from what has been described as “existential terror”. The “belief in a just world,” refers to the assumptions we make about the manageability, predictability, and order in the world around us. Loss of this sense of basic fairness

arouses overwhelming anxiety that inhibits or arrests normal functioning. Experiences with the family and social environment form a person’s mature sense of justice. Trauma, particularly interpersonal trauma, and most particularly that experienced at the hands of one’s family members, often shatters this

fundamental conceptual notion of a “just world” and may call into question central ideas about what is fair and not fair. Widespread beliefs that “people get what they deserve” often leads to a denial of tragedy and widespread social injustice.

## Turning Bystanders to Helpers

In social behavior, early intervention and prevention of social injustice works best. As bystanders become increasingly passive in the face of abusive behavior, action becomes increasingly difficult. Interestingly however, all it takes is for one bystander in a group to take

some sort of positive action against injustice and others will follow. There is a five-stage process by which bystanders turn into helpers. In the first stage, bystanders notice that something is amiss. Second, they interpret the situation as one in which people need help.

In the third critical stage, they assume responsibility to offer that help, while in the fourth stage they choose a form of help, and finally, they implement that help. It frequently takes only one person willing to help to turn other bystanders into helpers themselves.



# Restorative Justice



In the practice of *restorative justice*, rather than retributive justice, the focus is on the restoration of relationship as well as individual and social healing. The first question addressed is “Who has been hurt?” Once this is established,

the next consideration is “What are the needs of the victims, the offenders, and the community?” The final question is “What are the obligations and whose are they?” Under these kinds of guidelines, the aim of justice is to meet needs and promote healing, not to punish, although punishment, including imprisonment, can be recommended if it can be demonstrated to serve the purposes of the three involved parties – the victim, the

perpetrator, and the social group. This is not an approach that can be reduced to a simple dichotomy of “liberal” vs. “conservative” or “soft” vs. “hard” on crime. It requires a radical shift in the basic assumptions upon which we define what justice *is* and how is justice to be best obtained. Restoring integrity to the entire community becomes a central concern of justice practice.

*“cease to do evil,  
learn to do good;  
seek justice,  
rescue the  
oppressed, defend  
the orphan, plead  
for the widow”*

**Isaiah, 1: 16-17.**

## Religious Roots of Social Justice

The pursuit of social justice has long been considered the bedrock of religious beliefs and practices. Central to Judaism has been an ethics of responsibility and the notion of “*tikkum olam*” or “repairing the world.” Islam has long been concerned with human equality and a sense of collective responsibility.

Catholic social teachings have historically been focused on issues relating to the collective welfare of humanity with a particular concern for the poorest members of society. Social justice issues – of poverty, race, and social inequities – have been the province of Protestant religious belief

throughout much of U.S. history. What has been called the “Second Great Awakening” in American Protestantism is strongly associated with the abolitionist movement while the “Third Great Awakening” led to settlement houses and the notion that poverty should and must be ameliorated.

cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the

## Types of Justice

Three kinds of justice need to be addressed in social situations. All are aspects of overall fairness that tend to interact with each other. *Distributive justice* deals with how resources are allocated and what some get and others do not. *Procedural justice* refers to the means by which allocation of rewards –

and punishments – occur. This form of justice establishes principles that govern decision making processes. *Interactional justice* refers to how one person treats another: if he or she appropriately shares information (informational justice) and treats the other with respect and dignity. Maintaining a just

environment has been shown to profoundly affect organizational function in a number of key ways. Justice builds trust and commitment. All three components (distributive, procedural, and interactional) predict trust and trust predicts organizational commitment.





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We believe that a human society can evolve to be nonviolent and socially just. By creating sanctuary in our society, the personal, social, economic and multigenerational wounds caused by sustained exposure to violence can be healed for the public health & welfare. We are committed to a journey of discovery through policy, practice, training, research and dialogue to create a roadmap for social growth and change and to build a shared movement that is inclusive, multidisciplinary, participatory and respectful of differences.

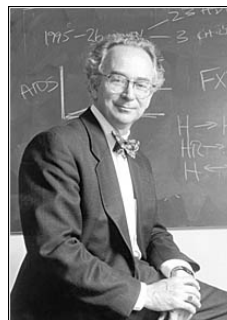
**toward a nonviolent and socially just society**



## Jonathan Mann, Advocate for Public Health & Social Justice

Viewing health care as an issue central to social justice and a basic human right resonates with the beliefs and practices of Dr. Jonathan Mann, the founder of the Drexel University School of Public Health as well as the founder of the health and human rights movement. Before his tragic death in a plane crash in 1998, Dr. Mann wrote that *“the future of public health and the future of human rights have now become—to a previously unanticipated degree—mutually interdependent. Progress in the new public health, based on awareness that societal factors determine, more than anything else, who lives and who dies, of what and*

*when, requires further development of human rights analysis and methods of action. Similarly contemporary human rights, seeking to understand how to advance human well being in diverse real-life settings, need to draw upon a more sophisticated understanding of health, health status and health realities.”* In



these days of seemingly ridiculous debates over “death panels” and fears of “rationing” the seminal question that he considered the most vital question for public health still rings out: *“what are these essential conditions in which people can best achieve the highest possible level of physical, mental, and social well-being? If not medical care—its availability and quality—then what?”*