RESTORATIVE PRACTICES: CORE ELEMENTS

1) OBSERVATION

What actually happened (no judgement, no motive)

Definition

An observation describes what someone could see or hear on CCTV.

It avoids opinions, exaggeration, labels, or assumed intent.

Key question:

“What would a camera or recording pick up?”

❌ Not an observation (judgement / assumption)

- “He was taking the piss”
- “She was being disrespectful”
- “He was trying to provoke me”
- “Staff are always on my case”

✅ Observation (facts only)

- “Music was played in the cell after lights out on three nights.”
- “The person stepped in front of me in the queue.”
- “The officer raised their voice and told me to return to my cell.”
- “My property was taken from my pad without permission.”

2) FEELINGS

How it felt inside (not what someone else did)

Definition

Feelings describe internal emotional states, not accusations or interpretations of others' behaviour.

Key question:

"If I remove the other person from the sentence, does it still make sense?"

❌ Not feelings (these blame others)

- "Disrespected"
- "Intimidated"
- "Ignored"
- "Belittled"

(These describe what someone else did, not how you felt.)

✅ Feelings

- Angry
- Anxious
- Afraid
- Frustrated
- Overwhelmed
- Exhausted
- Unsafe

Prison example: "When the music stayed on, I felt angry and exhausted."

3) NEEDS

What was missing that caused the feeling

Definition

Needs are universal human requirements, not strategies or demands.

They explain why the feeling made sense.

Key question:

“What was I needing that I wasn’t getting?”

❌ Not needs (these are strategies or solutions)

- “I needed him to turn it off”
- “I needed staff to move him”
- “I needed my own cell”

✅ Needs (underneath the strategy)

- Sleep
- Safety
- Respect
- Fairness
- Calm
- Predictability
- Dignity
- Control over environment

Prison example: “I felt angry because I needed sleep and quiet.”

4) REQUESTS

What you're asking for now (not a demand)

Definition

A request is a specific, realistic action that could meet the need.

It must be something the other person can say no to or negotiate.

Key question:

"Am I asking, or am I ordering?"

❌ Demands

- "You need to stop that."
- "You're not allowed to do that again."
- "Make sure this never happens again."

✅ Requests

- "Would you be willing to use headphones after lights out?"
- "If this happens again, could you speak to staff instead of confronting me?"
- "Can we agree quiet hours after 11pm?"

Prison example: "Would you be willing to keep music off after lights out so I can sleep?"

🔁 Putting it all together

Observation:

"Music was played in the cell after lights out on three nights."

Feeling:

"I felt angry and exhausted…"

Need:

"…because I needed sleep and quiet."

Request:

"Would you be willing to use headphones after 11pm?"

Key takeaway

Observations stop arguments. **Needs** explain behaviour. **Requests** prevent repeat incidents.