

# The Harder Kind of Accountability

*Responsibility, repair, relationships, and what happens after something goes wrong.*

## After accountability has been assigned, what still needs to be repaired?

Use this conversation to examine whether your current approach holds both high standards and high support - and whether it creates a pathway back into responsible participation.

### 1 WHAT HAPPENED - AND WHO WAS AFFECTED?

Can we name the harm clearly without rushing to blame, excuses, or premature solutions? Whose experience may be missing?

### 2 WHAT DOES ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIRE?

Are we asking only what consequence applies, or also what responsibility the person who caused harm needs to take?

### 3 ARE STANDARDS AND SUPPORT BOTH HIGH?

Where might we be rescuing, controlling, neglecting, or genuinely holding expectations and support together?

### 4 WHAT NEEDS REPAIR?

What happened to trust, safety, dignity, learning, or relationships? What can realistically be repaired - and what cannot?

### 5 IS THE PROCESS SAFE AND VOLUNTARY?

Are people being pressured to forgive, reconcile, or participate before they are ready? What safeguards are required?

### 6 WHAT WOULD RESPONSIBLE RE-ENTRY LOOK LIKE?

What would need to become true for someone to return to the community differently - with trust rebuilt through action, not simply promises?

## BEFORE YOU LEAVE

One standard or boundary we need to protect

One relationship or harm that still needs attention

One condition for responsible re-entry we need to clarify

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*The goal is not less accountability. It is better accountability.*

# Change the Questions After Something Goes Wrong

*A 20-30 minute restorative leadership protocol for moving from consequence to responsibility and repair.*

**Use alongside required safety, policy, legal, and formal disciplinary processes - not instead of them.**

## 1 HARM

What happened? What boundary, agreement, or relationship was affected? What needs to be made safe before anything else happens?

## 2 IMPACT

Who was affected and how? What did the incident change for students, staff, learning, safety, dignity, or trust?

## 3 RESPONSIBILITY

What does the person who caused harm need to own? What part is theirs - without excuses, humiliation, or making someone else responsible for the repair?

## 4 REPAIR

What can realistically be repaired? What action, acknowledgement, restitution, or changed behaviour would demonstrate responsibility?

## 5 RE-ENTRY

What would responsible return look like? What needs to be different, what support is required, and what will rebuild trust over time?

## A FINAL SAFEGUARD

*Reparation is not the same as reconciliation. Reconciliation is a formal process to establish safety.*

# HIGH STANDARDS + HIGH SUPPORT

*Where accountability leads to growth, repair, and stronger relationships.*

HIGH SUPPORT



## RESCUE

High support  
Low standards

- Protects from consequences.
- Rescues without building responsibility.



## RESTORATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

High support  
High standards

- Holds people accountable.
- Addresses harm. Repairs.
- Builds capacity.
- Restores relationships.



## NEGLECT

Low support  
Low standards

- Disconnects and disengages.
- Low expectations.
- Harm is ignored.



## CONTROL

Low support  
High standards

- Relies on power and punishment.
- Compliance without connection.
- Fear replaces responsibility.

LOW SUPPORT

LOW STANDARDS

HIGH STANDARDS

*The goal is not less accountability.  
It is better accountability.*



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High standards.  
High support.  
Stronger communities.

# WHAT HAPPENS TO THE HARM?

*Restorative practice is a pathway, not a single conversation.*



1

## HARM

Something happens.  
A rule is broken.  
Trust is affected.



Name what happened.  
Ensure safety.



2

## IMPACT

Who was affected and how?  
What was the impact?



Listen to those affected.  
Understand the true impact.



3

## RESPONSIBILITY

Who is responsible for what happened?  
What part do they play?



Accept responsibility.  
Take ownership without excuses.



4

## REPAIR

What needs to happen to repair the harm?



Make amends.  
Do what is needed to repair harm.



5

## RE-ENTRY

How can the person return to the community responsibly?



Rebuild trust.  
Re-enter differently.  
Move forward together.

*Restoration is not erasing the past.  
It is creating a different future.*



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Responsibility.  
Repair.  
Reconnection.  
Better futures.

# What Does Current Research Say About Restorative Practice?

*Five findings for educational leaders about culture, implementation, accountability, and repair*

Current research is encouraging, but it does not support treating restorative practice as a quick disciplinary technique. The strongest theme across recent studies is that implementation quality matters: relationships, leadership, staff buy-in, training, time, local systems, and clarity about what restoration is for all shape the result.

## 1 Restorative practice is cultural, not merely procedural.

Recent school-leader and teacher research emphasizes that restorative practice becomes durable when relationships, adult attitudes, expectations, policy, and everyday interactions change together.

*Source: Moran et al. (2024); Moran, Walsh, & Sloan (2025)*

## 2 Implementation quality is part of the intervention.

A 2025 mixed-methods study of 493 educators and 4,805 students found wide variation in practice use and identified leadership expectations, local discipline systems, and organizational conditions as important implementation factors.

*Source: Dhaliwal et al. (2025)*

## 3 The outcomes are promising - and context still matters.

A 2025 systematic review of 13 studies reported positive patterns for school climate, violence reduction, emotional wellbeing, empathy, cohesion, and social skills, while cautioning that the evidence base remains heterogeneous and geographically concentrated.

*Source: Alonso-Rodriguez et al. (2025)*

## 4 Restorative justice is a practice, not a program.

Research with restorative coordinators highlights the difference between isolated, top-down programming and collaborative practice embedded in the culture - especially when equity is a goal.

*Source: Lustick et al. (2024)*

## 5 Sustained implementation requires organizational capacity.

A 2026 mixed-methods study found that staff buy-in, ongoing training and consultation, school-community coordination, and sufficient time were central to sustaining restorative approaches.

*Source: Her et al. (2026)*

## WHAT THE RESEARCH SUGGESTS

- Relationships must exist before they can be restored.
- High standards and high support can coexist.
- Restorative practice requires leadership modelling and organizational coherence.
- Consequences and restoration are not mutually exclusive.
- Safety, voluntariness, and the needs of those harmed remain central.

*Restorative practice asks not only what happens to the person - but what happens to the harm.*

# What Restorative Leadership Requires

*Accountability is stronger when boundaries, support, truth, responsibility, and repair are held together.*

## CREATE CONDITIONS FOR

- Strong relationships before conflict occurs.
- Clear standards, safety expectations, and boundaries.
- Processes that let people understand impact and take responsibility.
- Support for the person harmed without forcing forgiveness or reconciliation.
- Re-entry plans that rebuild trust through changed behaviour over time.

## WATCH FOR THE HAZARDS

- Calling a conversation restorative when no real accountability follows.
- Rescuing people from consequences in the name of compassion.
- Using punishment alone and leaving the harm untouched.
- Pressuring harmed people to participate, forgive, or move on too quickly.
- Expecting students to be restorative inside a punitive adult culture.

## QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

- 1 Where have consequence and accountability become interchangeable?
- 2 Whose experience does our current process centre?
- 3 How restorative are our practices with adults?
- 4 What does responsible re-entry look like here?

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