



The Starfish Suspension Toolkit

The Starfish Suspension Reset Model

BEFORE

- Pause, Notice, Understand
- Before a decision is made, we create space, even briefly, to understand what is happening.

Relational pause questions:

- What has happened here, beyond the behaviour?
- What might this child be experiencing right now?
- Have we exhausted connection before moving to consequence?
- Who knows this child best, and what would they say?

In practice:

- A short conversation before escalation
- A calm adult stepping in, not stepping over
- A moment of regulation, not immediate removal

This is not about avoiding consequences; it is about making them meaningful.



DURING

Stay Connected.

This is the part most systems miss.

For a child, suspension can feel like:

- rejection
- shame
- confusion
- relief (sometimes)

If we remove the child and the relationship, we increase the likelihood of repetition.

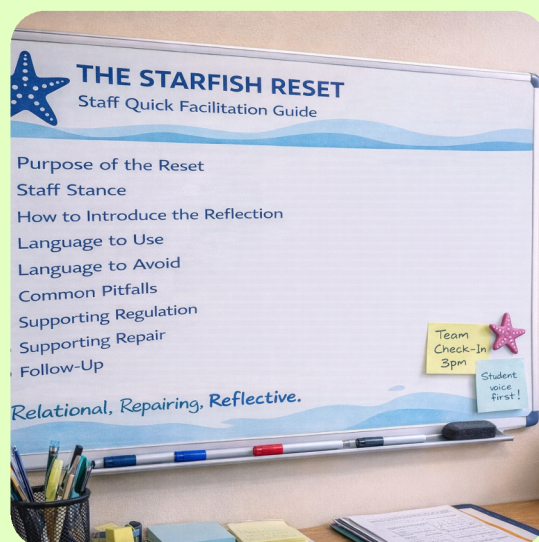
The Starfish approach during suspension:

- A named adult maintains contact
- The message remains clear:
- “You still belong here.”

The child does not disappear from the school community.

In practice:

- A brief check-in call or message
- Clear, calm communication with family
- No silence or emotional withdrawal



THE CONVERSATION

Restore, Don't Rehearse Blame.

The conversation after a suspension shapes what happens next.

Move away from:

“You know why you're here”

“You made a bad choice”

Move towards:

“Talk me through what happened from your perspective”

“What was going on for you in that moment?”

“What do you think was difficult there?”

“What might help next time?”

Key principle:

We are not looking for a perfect answer.

We are building understanding.

RETURN

The Moment That Matters Most

The return to school is where change either begins, or breaks.

The Starfish approach to reintegration:

- A planned, warm welcome
- A named adult meets the child
- A short reset conversation
- Clear, achievable expectations

In practice:

- Greeting the child by name
- Avoiding cold or silent re-entry
- Not revisiting the incident in front of peers
- Offering a fresh start, not a lingering label

The goal is not to remind the child of what went wrong.

It is to help them experience what can go right.

FOR STAFF

Holding the Work

This work is not easy.

It asks adults to remain calm when things feel difficult.

To stay curious when behaviour feels challenging.

To lead with connection when it might feel quicker not to.

Staff need:

- permission to pause
- support from leadership
- space to reflect
- consistency from colleagues

Leadership matters here:

- backing relational decisions
- protecting time for conversations
- modelling calm and clarity
- reinforcing that connection is not weakness



FOR LEADERS

Creating the Conditions.

Relational practice does not sit in policy alone.
It sits in culture.

Leaders create this culture by:

- noticing relational practice in action
- naming and valuing it
- supporting staff through complexity
- holding both standards and humanity

Strong leadership says:

“We will hold the boundary.
And we will hold the child.”



A Starfish Reflection

Before the next decision, a moment to pause:

- What is this child needing right now?
- What will help them stay next time?
- What would repair look like here?

A Final Thought

Suspension is a moment.
It does not need to become a pattern.
Somewhere in your school, a child will return after being removed.
What they meet when they come back will shape what happens next.

In the end, it is not the sanction that changes behaviour.
It is the relationship that follows it.

The Starfish Way

We don't turn the tide all at once.

We stay.

We notice.

We repair.

We try again.

One moment.

One relationship.

One starfish at a time..

