



USE WITH:

Small group or whole class



GRADE LEVEL:

Upper elementary, middle school, or high school



CONTEXT:

Remote friendly

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

Establish Group Norms

Establish norms for how teachers and students will interact and work together in the classroom.

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Description:

Build trust between group members and establish a foundation for further relationship-building activities.

Prep time needed:

5 minutes

Est. time to complete:

20 minutes

Steps:

1. Let students know the purpose of the activity—to build a classroom community where everyone feels safe sharing their opinions and experiences by establishing norms for how everyone wants to be treated within the classroom.
2. Break students into small groups. Within each group, invite each person to share one or two things they want from others in order to feel safe sharing their opinions and experiences. You may ask them to think about a time when they have felt safe being themselves and having real, open conversations in a group. What made it work? Each small group should take notes.
3. After each small group has completed this, they should choose 2 or 3 norms that their group wants to share out with the larger group. Explain that this list will serve as “ground rules” for how the group will work together.
4. Have each group share out the 2 or 3 norms they selected. Encourage groups to pick a new norm if their norm was already shared by a different group. Record what

participants say aloud on one sheet of poster paper or on a board so it is displayed for everyone to see.

5. After all the groups have shared their norms, ask if there are other norms people would like to add to the list that are not included so far and if there are any adjustments that participants would make in order to be able to agree with all of the norms on the list.
6. Conclude by leading a discussion using this reflection question: What could we do as a group to make sure we remember to follow these group norms?

Tips for Educators:

- During group share, record on poster paper rather than a board or digital display in order to keep the group norms present as an artifact within the classroom.
- Especially with younger students, it may be helpful to use yourself as an example before you ask students what they expect of each other. You can make a "My Job/Your Job/Our Job" T-chart, where one column is the duties and responsibilities teachers have to their students, another column is the duties and responsibilities students have as members of a classroom community, and the third column is joint responsibilities.

Inspired by:

1. Henry, D. B. (2008). Changing classroom social settings through attention to norms. In M. Shinn & H. Yoshikawa (Eds.), *Toward positive youth development: Transforming schools and community programs* (pp. 40–57). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195327892.003.0003>