

Creating Class Agreements and Goals

Purpose: These sample lesson plans offer a process to collaboratively develop agreements and goals and strengthen community in the classroom.

- **Class agreements:** how all members of the group (students and staff) will treat each other
- **Class goals:** how all members of the group will cooperate to achieve something they collectively value

Class Agreements

Time: ~45 minutes

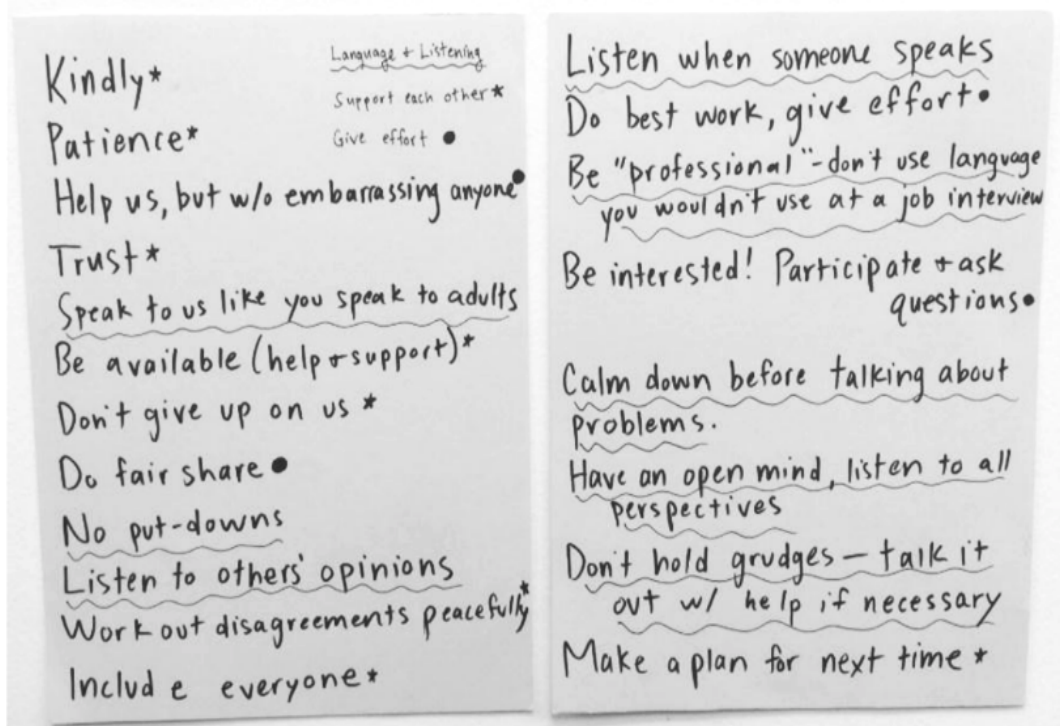
Shared agreements describe how members of the classroom community aspire to treat one another so that everyone feels accepted, respected, and supported to do their best. Taking the time to create agreements, check in on how they are going, and adjust them as needed creates the context for a safe, supportive learning environment.

1. Use or adapt the prompts and questions below to introduce the concept and purpose of class shared agreements. For each prompt, ask students to discuss with a partner first, then signal for attention, restate the question, and ask pairs to share key points from their discussion. Write down themes where everyone can see.
 - *One of the most important parts of being a member of a classroom community is making sure we take care of each other so everyone can learn. That means creating a classroom where everyone feels like they belong. What does it **mean** to feel like you “belong” in a place, or with a group of people?*
 - *What does a sense of belonging and safety **feel** like, physically (in your body) or emotionally (in your feelings)?*
 - *Why is it important that we create a classroom where everyone feels belonging and safety? How does that connect to learning?*
2. In pairs or small groups, ask students to work together to answer the questions below on chart paper, in bullet point format.
 - **What do students need to feel accepted, respected, supported, and safe?**
 - **What should teachers do so that everyone feels this way?**
 - **How should students treat each other so that everyone feels this way?**

- After all groups have had time to write on their posters, give students time to move around the room and visit each poster with the purpose of finding common themes. Ask:

- What did you read on another group's poster that was similar to what your group wrote?*
- What else did you see that stood out to you as really important?*

Capture these themes on the board.



In this example, students described how they thought students and staff should interact and resolve problems, then identified three main themes: language and listening, supporting each other, and giving effort.

- As a class, group similar ideas and narrow their brainstorm to five to seven statements that capture what students have identified as important. Take the time to get the words just right, asking:

- We want everyone to feel like this is something they can commit to, so if you wouldn't be willing to sign onto this, let's make an adjustment so it works better for you. Does anyone have a suggestion for how to write this differently?*

Before students come back together the next day, make a large poster with the finalized classroom shared agreements, leaving space for students to add their signatures.



Continuing from the same example, the themes the class identified were summarized in these statements. Students then had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions, add details, and adjust them until everyone was ready to sign on.

5. The following day, review the shared agreements using the questions below.

- *We made these agreements about how we want to treat each other in our class this year. [Read the agreements.] Does this capture what we talked about? [Make minor adjustments, if necessary.]*
- *What might it look like when we follow this agreement today? What should a person who walks into our classroom see, hear, and experience?*
- *If you realize that, for whatever reason, you are not following an agreement, or someone else is not following an agreement, what should we do?*

Invite all students to sign the poster, then hang it prominently in the classroom. Let students know you'll be referring to them regularly, and they are welcome to do the same. Conclude, saying something like, "By signing them we are all saying that we will try our best to live by them, and that even if we make mistakes we will keep trying. I will check in with you regularly to see how we all are doing."

Class Goals

Time: ~45 minutes

A class goal shows students how their success is linked, and it can build collective self-efficacy and a culture of mutual support. A class goal requires cooperation to achieve and should be structured in a way that all students are capable of contributing equally so that it is an inclusive experience.

For example, these goals are, in most cases, equally accessible for all students. They will need to rely on cooperation to accomplish them, and any student could gently support a peer along the way:

- Our class will win the “cleanest table” award in the cafeteria.
- Our class will plan and lead a schoolwide assembly in February.
- Our class will collectively read 100 books by the end of the year.
- Our class will produce and promote a five-episode podcast this year.

Goals that focus on individual achievement, such as “All students will earn 85 percent or better on the test,” or “all students will raise \$50 for our school fundraiser,” are not class goals because they do not rely on cooperation and are not equally motivating to all students (some may see the target as easy to achieve and others may see it as very difficult). The goal is to build a sense of community achievement in which all students can both provide support and receive it.

Strategy 1: Set a goal for collective achievement

1. As a class, brainstorm ideas for a goal. For example, students may decide that they want to collectively read 100 books or learn 50 new vocabulary words. Guide them as necessary to ensure suggestions are realistic and inclusive. Gather these on chart paper.
2. Take a class vote on goals, reminding students that this is just the first one of the year. There will be opportunities to work on others!
3. Discuss how to celebrate when the goal is accomplished and how they can support one another along the way so that everyone feels empowered to contribute (weekly book talks to recommend good books, vocabulary flashcards, etc.).
4. Check in and track progress along the way to keep students motivated.
5. Celebrate when you reach the goal!

Strategy 2: Collaborative problem-solving through goal setting

At times, your class may confront challenges that require students and teachers to do things differently. For example, your class may be consistently late for lunch or leave the room a mess after hands-on activities. This is an excellent time to “huddle up” around goal setting. Have students come together in a circle and try this:

1. Tell students the problem as you see it or provide students an opportunity to share if they themselves identified an issue. Briefly touch on why this is an issue to build social awareness (e.g., The lunch staff works really hard to make sure everyone has time to eat. When we are late to lunch, we throw off their schedule).
2. Ask students to pair up and discuss why the problem happens (Is there enough transition time? Are the routines clear?) and a possible solution.
3. Bring students back together and ask them to share out as a class. Respect students' responses by keeping an inquiry stance. You could say, "That's interesting. Tell me why you think that." Right now, you are just brainstorming.
4. As a class, determine one or two strategies to implement and decide when you will come back together to see how the class is doing.
5. Check in and track progress along the way to keep students motivated.
6. Celebrate when you reach the goal!

This is an excellent time to help students develop relationships skills. You may have them brainstorm and role-play strategies for keeping one another accountable to the goal. Examples include offering to help a student pack up to get to lunch on time or gently reminding one another about where class materials are stored. This is also a great time to get students thinking about how personal skills (staying organized, communicating) can help the class achieve shared goals.