**Teacher Small Group Discussion Guide: Building a Supportive Learning Environment for Middle and High School Students**

**Purpose**

Intended for use by secondary teacher professional learning communities, this tool provides readings, individual and group reflection questions, and activities for small groups to discuss and support each other to implement practices that strengthen learning environments for middle and high school students.

**How to Use This Tool**

Use this tool as a source for materials for discussion and activities for any recurring teacher meeting – whether you are able to dedicate full meetings or just 15 minutes to discuss supportive learning environments. Choose topics that best fit the needs of your group and will work within your time constraints. Activities and discussions can be facilitated by one teacher leader, or your learning community may wish to rotate roles for the facilitation of each topic or activity.

This tool is organized in four stages. It may work best to follow a sequence of topics that begins with stage 1 and ends with stage 4. Schedule time to use this guide regularly over the course of the school year, and select and order topics to build upon one another. Activities marked in **orange** are those that would be most helpful before a school year begins or during the first weeks of school.

[**Stage 1: Create a Professional Learning Community**](#bookmark=id.gjdgxs)**.** Readings and activities to create a safe and supportive professional learning environment for colleagues to discuss the community they are cultivating in their classrooms**.** Teachers who feel appreciated, connected, and supported by their colleagues bring out the best in their students (Beaudoin, 2011). As James Comer (1999) said,“Emotions are contagious. When we feel listened to, taken seriously, appreciated, and respected, we tend to ’pay it forward.’” Spending time to build trust and connection within your professional community will make for richer, more productive discussions and increase the likelihood that best practices will spread.

[**Stage 2: Start with Ourselves.**](#bookmark=id.1fob9te) Effective SEL in secondary schools helps adolescents feel respected and supported by adults and peers (Yeager, 2017). This section guides teachers to start the process of building a respectful and supportive classroom environment by reflecting on their own beliefs, mindsets, biases, actions, strengths, and teaching practices. Topics in this section include:

1. Reflective Practice
2. Vision for a Supportive Classroom Environment
3. Self-Assessment
4. Growth Mindset for Staff
5. Creating Space for Reflection
6. Respecting Each Other and Our Students
7. Becoming an Antiracist Educator
8. Caring for Ourselves

[**Stage 3: Develop Positive Personal Relationships**](#bookmark=id.2et92p0)**.** As your group makes space for reflection and builds trust, you will be in a better position to listen to, appreciate, and [develop positive relationships with students](#bookmark=id.3dy6vkm).“The most powerful weapon available to secondary teachers who want to foster a favorable learning climate is a positive relationship with our students.”(Thompson, 1998). Teachers form these relationships by connecting with and getting to know their students; checking in with them; supporting learners of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities; and creating a sense of belonging and emotional safety. Topics in this section include:

1. Know your Students
2. Connection
3. Affirming Students’ Identities
4. Belonging and Emotional Safety
5. Positive Interactions
6. Using Data to Support All Learners

[**Stage 4: Build a Community of Learners.**](#bookmark=id.tyjcwt) As teachers lay the groundwork by developing mutually respectful and supportive relationships, students begin to see their classroom as a community of learners. By building group cohesion, involving students in developing and refining shared agreements, organizing the environment in a way that promotes interaction and connection, listening to student feedback, and teaching kindness and compassion, students begin to feel a sense of community*.* Topics in this section include:

1. Reflecting on “Community”
2. Co-Defining Respect
3. Shared Classroom Agreements
4. Creating Group Cohesion
5. Student-Centered Classrooms

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| **Stage One:** **Create a** **Professional Learning Community****Essential Question: *How do we create a safe and supportive learning environment for ourselves?***As you are working toward creating supportive learning environments for students, you need to create a safe environment for learning among your peers. Professional learning occurs best when staff are encouraged to reflect, are willing to be transparent and vulnerable, and are able to challenge themselves intellectually and emotionally. Learning communities should be structured so that colleagues can share best practices as well as needs for support in a trusting, nonjudgmental way. As a group, establish norms or working agreements for creating a safe professional learning environment based on responses to these questions. Once there is agreement, record and reference these norms when you come back together and as often as necessary. 1. *Think of a time you have been part of a close-knit team. What elements were present that made you feel a sense of belonging? How can we capture that?*
2. *What do you most want to gain from being part of this learning community? How should we check in to make sure all our members are getting what they need from our meetings?*
3. *How will we show care for and support one another?*
4. *How can we inspire and motivate each other to keep participating and trying new things?*
5. *How do we address conflict when it arises?*
6. *How will we respond and grow when we notice biases or other harmful mindsets during our discussions?*
7. *How should we document our growth and learning as a community?*

For more guidance on setting up a professional learning community, see these resources:* [Study Groups Foster Schoolwide Learning](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov92/vol50/num03/Study-Groups-Foster-Schoolwide-Learning.aspx) (ASCD)
* [Florida Department of Education PLC Book Study Guide](https://fl01803656.schoolwires.net/cms/lib/FL01803656/Centricity/Domain/13712/PLC-Book-Study-Guidelines.pdf) (Florida Department of Education)
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| **Stage Two:** **Start with Ourselves****Essential Question: *What state must I be in to create the environment my students need?*** |
| **Topic** | **Activities** |
| **Reflective Practice** | Read the article [Reflective Practice for Language Teachers](http://www.reflectiveinquiry.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Reflective-practice-Farrell.pdf) (Farrell, 2018). REFLECT by answering these questions in writing: * *What are some ways you are already cultivating reflective practices with your colleagues? In your teaching?*
* *How can you contribute to making this PLC (study group, etc.) a space for reflective practice?*
* John Dewey said the qualities of open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility are necessary for cultivating a reflective disposition. *How do these show up in your work? What are some ways you may want to strengthen and deepen these qualities?*

With a group, discuss your insights and responses to these questions.  |
| **Vision for a Supportive Classroom Environment** | At the beginning of the year, reflect on what a supportive classroom environment **looks like, sounds like, and feels like. (**e.g., teacher observable behavior, teacher response to students, teacher’s physical, emotional, and mental experience, teacher self-care practices). Share out with your colleagues and summarize on flip chart paper. As a group, discuss: * *What are barriers to making our vision a reality?*
* *Where are you confident in terms of creating a supportive classroom environment? Where are you unsure? What are you learning?*
* *What are the times of the class period, week, or year, when your learning environment is compromised?*
* *What is one action you plan to take to make this vision a reality in your classroom?*
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| **Self-Assessment** | **Personal Reflection.** Complete the [Personal SEL Reflection](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/adult-sel-self-assessment/) to assess your strengths and reflect on the questions below privately. Then, in partners or groups of three, discuss:* *What general themes and patterns did you see?*
* *What are some examples of strengths and challenge areas?*
* *What are some strategies you can put into place to build on strengths and improve on challenge areas?*
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| **Classroom Reflection.** Complete the [SEL in the Classroom Self-Assessment](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/sel-in-the-classroom-self-assessment/) to assess your strengths and areas to develop as you promote SEL through explicit instruction, integration into academic instruction, and a supportive classroom climate. Place a check in the column that indicates the frequency of each indicator. With the group, discuss the results of the ***supportive classroom climate*** section of the assessment. For statements you marked as ”often,” how has it had an impact? For indicators that you rate as “sometimes” or “infrequently,” consider what strategies, resources, or support you may want to use to create a more supportive climate. For indicators you rate as “unsure,” consider what additional information or feedback you want to gather. Repeat this assessment three to four times over the course of the year and discuss your progress with your colleagues.  |
| **Growth Mindset for Staff** | Allow time to read Kim Marshall’s summary of Carol Dweck’s article, [Teachers’ Mindsets: ”Every Student Has Something to Teach Me](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/carol-dweck-on-fixed-and-growth-mindset-thinking-among-teachers/).” Then give about 10 minutes for everyone to take [a mindset test](http://homepages.math.uic.edu/~bshipley/MindsetQuiz.w.scores.pdf). 1. Ask your colleagues to react to the article using these guiding questions:
	* *What was one thing that resonated with you?*
	* *What does the growth mindset look like among adults at our school?*
	* *Did this article motivate you to try something new?*
	* *What would it take for us to adopt a growth mindset schoolwide? What would need to change?*
2. Have each person draft and share a goal for improvement for the school year and plan to check in with each other as the year progresses.
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| **Creating Space for Reflection** | **Mindfulness and Education.** Mindfulness empowers teachers to be conscious and aware amid emotional, physical, and mental disturbances. Mindfulness helps us to maintain composure, compassion, and sensitivity to student needs while maintaining well-being. (Srinivasan, 2019)WATCH Megan Cowan’s video “[Mindful Schools, Compassionate Schools](https://youtu.be/D83VV18Lc5s?list=UUPfDETmabmiBHjNrPPHlF5A)” (13 min) about the movement of mindfulness in education. As a group, discuss: * *Why do you think mindfulness is growing in popularity in education circles?*
* *In what ways do you practice mindfulness?*
* *How are mindfulness and compassion connected?*
* *How does mindful practice help in working with students?*
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| **Mindful Practices for Teachers.** Read [Seven Ways Mindfulness can Help Teachers](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/seven_ways_mindfulness_can_help_teachers) (Jennings, 2015). As a group, discuss:* *How can mindfulness help us in creating supportive environments for our students?*

Select a strategy from the article and try it for one month. Reconvene and reflect on your experience with your peers:* *How did this practice change how I understand my emotions?*
* *How did this practice change how I communicate with my students?*
* *How did this practice help me in working with a student I find challenging?*
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| **Partner for Accountability.** Connect with a colleague who wants to develop a regular mindful practice. Use the [Mindful Teachers website](http://www.mindfulteachers.org/p/mindfulness-resources.html) to find strategies, tools, and techniques. Set up a time weekly to check in, share techniques, and encourage each other.  |
| **Respecting Each Other and Our Students** | **Supporting Each Other.** Read [Respect: Where do we Start?](https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/respect-where-do-we-start)(Beaudoin, 2011).Then in groups of two or three, discuss:* *How does your mood affect your students?*
* *What is the impact of “problem-saturated conversations”?*
* *What are the dangers of cliques and how do we avoid them?*
* *How do I bring personal biases to my work? How do I benefit from the power based on my role as a teacher and/or race?*
* *If I can use power, does that mean I should? How can I use my power to positively impact my students and classroom? What are my students’ perceptions of power?*
* *What are some ways that we can promote staff well-being?*
* *How can we cultivate a culture of appreciation among our staff?*

As a full group, share responses to the final two questions. As a group, choose a strategy from CASEL’s tool [Strategies for Building a Staff Culture of Appreciation](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/tool-strategies-for-building-a-staff-culture-of-appreciation/) (or one of your own) that you all could commit to.  |
| **Building Relational Trust.**  Read [Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for School Reform](https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/trust-in-schools-a-core-resource-for-school-reform) (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). If data related to levels of relational trust are available for your school (for example, from a school climate survey), bring the most recent data to the meeting. As a group, discuss:* *Does the data (if available) on relational trust at our school match your experience? Why or why not?*
* *Does the social dynamic among adults at our school benefit our school and student performance or detract from it?*
* *Think about a current or former colleague with whom you have a trusting relationship. What interactions can you recall that led to that feeling of trust?*
* *Do the interactions among adults in our school community model the kinds of respectful interactions we would like to see among students?*
* *What are some starting points for improvement at our school?*
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| **Student Perspective on Respect.** Have a colleague read the following quote from a 15-year-old student: “*They actually listen to me here. The teachers care about what I think and feel. They want me to be part of making this school even better. Like when they realized there's much more bullying going on here than they knew. Now they're really trying to do something about it.”*Now have someone read this quote from a 16-year-old student: “*They don't care what I think. All they care about are the tests. There aren't even stalls in the bathroom.”*As a group, discuss: * *Which student feels respected? Why?*
* *What teacher behaviors/actions are likely happening in the school of the first student compared to that of the second student?*
* *What other teacher behaviors demonstrate respect?*
* *What other factors might contribute to students’ perspectives on respect at our school? How might the students here define respect?*
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| **Defining and Demonstrating Respect.** Read the following statements about respect: 1. “Respect refers to the experience of being taken seriously.”
2. “Acting respectfully reflects appreciative feelings for another person or group.”
3. Respect “is not something that one can imitate, but something one must embody…. It is only in the individual acts of respect that the quality becomes actual.” Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000)

As a group, discuss which statement resonates with you the most. *What would you change about any of these quotes?* Then come up with a group definition of respect among your colleagues. With a colleague, discuss what individual acts of respect you have shown your students. *Which ones will you continue and what are new actions you would like to try?*From: [Creating a Climate of Respect (ASCD Study Guide).](http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept11/vol69/num01/Creating-a-Climate-of-Respect.aspx)  |
| **Becoming an Anti-racist Educator** | **Introducing Antiracism.** Choose one or both of the following articles to read before the discussion:[How to be an Antiracist Educator](http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education-update/oct19/vol61/num10/How-to-Be-an-Antiracist-Educator.aspx) (Simmons, 2019) or view [Simmons’ video summary](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UM3Lfk751cg)[What Anti-racist Teachers Do Differently](https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2020/06/how-be-anti-racist-teacher/613138/) (McKamey, 2020) Pair the article with a reading discussion protocol such as [The Final Word](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/final_word_0.pdf) or the [Four “A”s Text Protocol](https://www.nsrfharmony.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/4_a_text_0.pdf) from the National School Reform Faculty. |
| **Race and Racial Identity.** The Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture has published a guide to [Talking About Race](https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race) with a special section for educators. This site could be the source for a whole separate professional learning community! Here is one possible starting point:Skim through the page on [Race and Racial Identity](https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/race-and-racial-identity) to choose a reading, video, and discussion prompts that are a best fit for the group. Outcomes of the discussion should be:* A clear understanding of racial identity—one’s own identity as well as factors that impact students’ racial identity development.
* A shared understanding that the concept of “colorblindness” is not realistic or useful in challenging racism.
* Recognition of ways that interpersonal, institutional, and structural racism are operating in the school community and commitment to notice and challenge it.
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| **Challenge Beliefs and Biases.** Use this professional learning activity from Teaching Tolerance and the Greater Good Science Center—[Common Beliefs Survey: Teaching Racially and Ethnically Diverse Students](https://ggie.berkeley.edu/practice/common-beliefs-survey-teaching-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-students/). In this activity, individuals will reflect on their beliefs and then critically examine commonly held beliefs about how to meet the learning needs of racially and ethnically diverse students. |
| **Caring for Ourselves** | Visit [www.selfcompassion.org](https://self-compassion.org/) (the site of a leading researcher of self-compassion, Kristin Neff).Select one of the **self-compassion exercises** described there to do at work or at home. Reconvene and reflect with colleagues about what it feels like to have greater levels of compassion toward oneself and how that level affects their feelings and behaviors at school and at home.Try doing the same activity with your students.  |

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| **Stage Three:** **Develop Positive Personal Relationships****Essential Question: *How can I know my students and make them feel known?*** |
| **Topic** | **Activity** |
| **Know your Students** | **Strategies for Beginning and Throughout the Year.** Read pp. 43-51 of [Chapter Four](https://engagingschools.org/chapter-4-engaged-classrooms-form/) of *Engaged Classrooms: The Art and Craft of Reaching and Teaching All Learners* (free online upon request from [Engaging Schools](https://engagingschools.org/)), and [Six Strategies for Building Better Student Relationships](https://www.edutopia.org/article/6-strategies-building-better-student-relationships).Discuss: * *What strategies are highlighted for helping* ***you*** *to know your students?*
* *What strategies are highlighted to help* ***your students*** *feel known?*
* *Why is it so important to get your students’ names right?*
* *Why is it important to greet your students every day?*
* *Why is it important to collect contact profile data for your students?*

Select one or two strategies from the resources above (e.g., learning students’ names, greetings, collecting student profile data, featuring student photos and student work) to try with your students.Reconvene and reflect:* *How did it go?*
* *What went well?*
* *What could be improved?*
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| **Connection** | **Seeing Ourselves in Others.** Read[How to Change Your Life in One Second Flat](https://thriveglobal.com/stories/4-questions-we-unconsciously-ask-near-constantly/) (Schafler, 2017).Discuss how Maya Angelou’s four questions resonate with your experience in personal and/or professional relationships: * *Do you see me?*
* *Do you care that I’m here?*
* *Am I enough for you, or do you need me to be better in some way?*
* *Can I tell that I’m special to you by the way you look at me?*

Think about what your answers would be if a student asked you these questions. Then share which question is the easiest for you to respond to affirmatively. Which is the most difficult?Discuss what you need to do for your students in order to create a sense of safety and connection in the classroom.  |
| **Teacher-Student Relationships.** Watch these [videos from high school students](http://www.howyouthlearn.org/SEL_studentvoices.html) who share thoughts and experiences on the interplay between emotions and academics in the schools they attend. As you are listening, jot down notes about what each of the five students says about the power of teacher-student relationships. With your colleagues, discuss:* *Why is a personal and emotional connection to your students so important?*
* *What has been your own experience of this?*
* *How do teachers benefit, along with students, from good relationships?*
* *How does your upbringing facilitate or hinder your ability to build positive relationships with your students?*
* *What else might get in the way of building strong and positive teacher-student relationships?*

(Adapted from <http://www.howyouthlearn.org/SEL_studentvoices.html>)  |
| **Affirming Students’ Identities** | Teachers who affirm students’ identities communicate in ways that show they genuinely care for and respect each student, and that they believe all students’ knowledge, life experiences, and culture are assets to the classroom community. Students thrive when teachers know them well and affirm their individual and diverse identities (Steele and Cohn-Vargas, 2013, in Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). With your colleagues, discuss: * *How do we create an environment, activities, and interactions that affirm students’ diverse identities and cultures?*
* *How do we share and learn about each other’s lives and backgrounds?*
* *How might we include students as co-constructors of affirming learning environments?*

Select either of the following activities to use with students: * Lesson One and Lesson Two from Facing History’s [Back to School Toolkit](https://www.facinghistory.org/back-to-school/teaching-toolkit/) on building classroom community.
* [Sample Circle Protocol](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/community-building-circles/) on “Getting to Know Each Other” (For teachers with circle facilitation experience)

Reconvene and reflect:* *What was the planning process like?*
* *What was your experience facilitating this lesson/circle?*
* *What did your students say about identity?*
* *What is something you plan to do as a result of the lesson/circle?*
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| **Belonging and Emotional Safety** | Watch the audio slideshow, [This is My Place](http://www.howyouthlearn.org/SEL_studentvoices.html) (4 min.) in which middle schoolers at School of the Future in New York City give examples of how everyday interactions between students, peers, and adults affect how they learn in the classroom. As a group, discuss:* *How do teachers make students feel at home in their school?*
* *What do teachers do that motivates students to learn?*
* *What do teachers do to encourage students to keep trying even when they struggle?*
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| **Positive Interactions** | **Positive Reframing** is when you take negative characteristics (e.g., “disrespectful,” “oppositional” or “unmotivated”) to describe a student or a student’s behavior and replace them with positive characteristics. With your colleagues, list all the negative terms you’ve used or heard others used to describe a student. Now see how many positive characteristics you can substitute for each. Discuss with your colleagues: *How does changing a label affect your attitude and behavior toward that student?”*Consider creating a group norm regarding use of positive language to describe students. |
| **Value-Added Feedback** is when a teacher shares a specific, concrete observation of what a student does and names the asset that enabled the student to do it. For example, “*I noticed that you wanted to hear everyone’s opinion in your group before making a decision. You really demonstrated your capacity to work cooperatively in your small group*.” ([Engaged Classrooms](https://engagingschools.org/store/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=18&products_id=106), p. 51) With your colleagues, develop statements like the one above that you can use with students that reinforce skills that will help them to *express empathy, resolve conflicts, repair harm, self-reflect, and self-regulate.*Discuss:* *How can value-added feedback be used in the classroom to reinforce positive behaviors?*
* *How can we respond to negative behavior in a way that is positive, discreet, developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive, and restorative?*
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| [**Micro-affirmations**](https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/16/12/accentuate-positive)(Pittinsky, 2016) are simple, small, yet overtly positive and welcoming interactions between students of different races, ethnicities, genders, and abilities (e.g., nodding and making eye contact with students while they’re talking, referring to every student by name, openly giving praise for a wide range of actions). Microaffirmation should be genuine and not used to modify behaviors. Brainstorm as many micro-affirmations as you can think of to create welcoming and positive interactions in your classroom. *Which of these actions can we implement in our classrooms that will develop greater levels of kindness and compassion?* Identify three to four students who you think would benefit from value-added feedback or micro-affirmations and make an effort to use them throughout the week. Reconvene and reflect:* *How did it go?*
* *What went well?*
* *What could be improved?*
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| **Using Data to Support All Learners** | **Student Perceptions of Classroom Climate.** Administer the [student survey](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/student-survey-how-i-feel-about-my-classroom-and-school/) to your class and review responses individually with an equity lens [using this protocol](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/sel-data-reflection-protocol/). Write a reflection based on these questions: * *How do your students perceive relationships within your classroom?*
* *How do they perceive their relationship with you and/or other teachers?*
* *Do students feel they are being treated kindly and fairly?*
* *Do they feel a sense of belonging in your classroom? At school?*

With a partner, share your data and reflections.  |
| **School Metrics.** Review aggregated school data related to office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. [Use this protocol to examine data from an equity lens](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/sel-data-reflection-protocol/) and with an asset-focused perspective. Write a reflection based on the protocol and these questions: * *Are there any patterns or trends by demographic group? (e.g. gender, race, students with IEPs)*
* *Are there any clues as to whether discipline is applied to students equitably at our school? What do you think students would say about this?*
* *How might biases and assumptions be contributing to our school’s discipline data?*

Present your analysis to your colleagues. Brainstorm as a group:* *What practices or policies might we need to change to eliminate inequities?*
* *How might inequitable discipline practices be harming our students?*
* *What kind of support can we offer students who are struggling?*
* *What strategies seem to work best for students who have repeated disciplinary incidents? (*Ask those who know the students to add their perspective.)
* *What are at least three daily practices we can all agree to implement to reduce disciplinary incidents or apply discipline practices more equitably?*
* *How might we reach out to students to get their input regarding change in practice?*

Think of one student who seems most disconnected from you and the class or presents challenging behavior. Commit to providing a saturated dose of encouragement using five actions in five days, using strategies learned in the [**Develop Positive Personal Relationships**](#bookmark=id.2et92p0)section of this guide. Reconvene and reflect:* *How did it go?*
* *What went well?*
* *What could be improved?*
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| **Stage Four:** **Build a Community of Learners****Essential Question: *How do I foster a sense of community in my classroom?*** |
| **Topic** | **Activities** |
| **Reflecting on “Community”** | Plan and teach one of the following to your students:* A lesson from Facing History’s [back-to-school one week unit](https://www.facinghistory.org/back-to-school/teaching-toolkit/)
* [Sample Circle Protocol](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/community-building-circles/) on “Building Community in Our Classroom” (For teachers with circle facilitation experience)

Reconvene and reflect:* *What was the planning process like for the lesson or circle?*
* *How was your experience facilitating this lesson or circle?*
* *What did your students experience and what is their perspective on “community”?*
* *What is something that you plan to do as a result of this conversation?*
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| **Co-Defining Respect** | Plan and facilitate a circle with your students using the [Sample Circle Protoco](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/community-building-circles/)[l](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gjapsPmhL_hLeClmllYmsrjwWhVp42dv5qX9M6GVhIo/edit) “Supporting Each Other” (For teachers with circle facilitation experience) Reconvene and reflect:* *What was the planning process like?*
* *How was your experience facilitating this circle?*
* *What did your students say about respect and mutual support?*
* *What is something that you plan to do as a result of the circle?*
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| **Shared Classroom Agreements** | Have students create shared classroom agreements using this  [sample lesson plan](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/sample-lesson-plan-generating-classroom-shared-agreements/).Reflect on the process: * *How did it go? Why do you think that is?*
* *What do students think will be the most beneficial agreement? Why?*
* *How will you keep these agreements current and “alive” for your students? How will you revisit them?*
* *What will you do if a student doesn’t follow through with an agreement?*
* *Why is it important to involve students in helping to develop and reinforce these agreements?*
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| **Creating Group Cohesion** | Read pp. 52-56 in [Chapter Four](https://engagingschools.org/chapter-4-engaged-classrooms-form/) of *Engaged Classrooms: The Art and Craft of Reaching and Teaching All Learners* (free online upon request from [Engaging Schools](https://engagingschools.org/)) .Discuss as a group: * *Why is group cohesion so important in student learning?*
* *What strategies are highlighted for building this cohesion?*
* *What structures are highlighted for maintaining this cohesion?*
* *What are other strategies and structures that you have tried related for:*
	+ *Grouping students?*
	+ *Rituals for welcoming and closing class?*
	+ *Physically setting up your space to promote a sense of community*?

Select a new strategy for building group cohesion in your class, such as beginning the week with a classroom meeting, starting the class with an [inclusive welcome](https://signaturepractices.casel.org/welcome/), [planning a circle](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/community-building-circles/), [pairing up students](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/partner-clocks/), or ending the period with an [intentional close](https://signaturepractices.casel.org/closing/). Reconvene and reflect:* *How did it go?*
* *What went well?*
* *What could be improved?*
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| **Student Centered Classrooms** | **Student Feedback.** Read [Chapter Four](https://engagingschools.org/chapter-4-engaged-classrooms-form/) of *Engaged Classrooms: The Art and Craft of Reaching and Teaching All Learners* (free online upon request from [Engaging Schools](https://engagingschools.org/)), pp. 56-57Discuss as a group:* *Why is it important to invite student feedback?*
* *How do students know, follow, initiate, and provide input and feedback on our regular classroom routines and procedures?*
* *What are ways you can gather student feedback? (Group process, course feedback, appreciative feedback, recognitions, pluses and wishes)*

Administer the [Student Survey tool](https://schoolguide.casel.org/resource/student-survey-how-i-feel-about-my-classroom-and-school/) to your students.Reconvene and reflect:* *What did you learn from the survey? What is one thing that surprised you? Why?*
* *What is one challenge you are facing in your classroom community? What is one step you can take to support students?*
* *How is your classroom culture supporting or detracting from learning? Why?*
* *How do you promote team building? Classroom pride?*
* *What is one small step you can take now to respond to this feedback?*
 |
| **Student Decision-Making.** Examine the [Students at the Center Framework](https://studentsatthecenterhub.org/interactive-framework/) and [examples of student-centered practices](https://studentsatthecenterhub.org/resource/moving-the-field-forward/). As a group, discuss:* *How does a student-centered classroom help to create community?*
* *How do we allow students to make decisions about the* ***why****,* ***what****, and* ***how*** *of their classroom so that their learning experiences promote meaning, engagement, and community?*
* *How do we give students the opportunity to lead?*

Use the free tool [Copilot-Elevate](https://www.perts.net/elevate) from PERTS to customize a short survey to learn how students are experiencing school, review results to see how experiences are promoting or hindering equitable learning, learn new practices to try with students, and track improvement over time. |