

Activators: Classroom Strategies for Engaging Middle and High School Students

Classroom Agreements and Expectations

References

Kohn, A. (2006). *Beyond discipline: From compliance to community*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Frank, L. (2004). *Journey toward the Caring Classroom: Using adventure to create community in the classroom*. Bethany, OK: Wood 'N' Barnes.

For more information about this material and the book which it supports, *Activators: Classroom Strategies for Engaging Middle and High School Students*, please visit <http://www.engagingschools.org/activators>.

Classroom Agreements

We offer two lessons below for co-creating Classroom Agreements with your students to develop a high-performing community of learners. A Classroom Agreement is not a recipe for getting compliance. It is an opportunity to transform the environment by sharing some of the power through honoring students' ideas about what will help them be focused, engaged, and responsible.

Because young people benefit when adults work together to shape a consistent school culture, we recommend that teachers develop Classroom Agreements with students across a particular grade or small learning community. Teachers should decide on a venue for eliciting students' ideas about the Classroom Agreements, for example, in Advisory on the second Tuesday of the semester. A team of teachers and students will then identify patterns across the Classroom Agreements recommended by each class and offer some shared Classroom Agreements to students' for their approval and commitment on a particular day. This will ensure grade-wide consistency.

When it is not possible to craft a set of Classroom Agreements within a grade or a small learning community, we suggest that individual teachers work with their students to develop one set of Classroom Agreements that will support all their classes. This sends a strong signal about the teacher's commitment to this process and avoids having multiple sets of Classroom Agreements.

We have included a sample Classroom Agreement and two lesson options from which to choose to co-create Classroom Agreements with your students. We recognize that it is important to have choice in doing this; building Classroom Agreements with students is a very personal process. If none of these align with your class' style, consider how you could modify one of the options, create a hybrid, or come up with your own way of building Classroom Agreements with students.

Sample Classroom Agreement

We will...

- Let people finish what they have to say before someone else speaks.
- Share the talk space by giving everyone a chance to speak.
- Take care of our own needs. If I have a question, I will ask it. If I need to say something, I will say it productively or so it can be heard.
- Start on time.
- Speak from our own experience. Use "I" statements.
- Be honest and open to different perspectives.
- Support and encourage one another.
- Check things out before we make assumptions

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Classroom Agreements – Lesson One

Agenda

1. Turn and Talk Activator
2. Agenda check
3. Recommendations on Classroom Agreements
4. Closing

Prep List

- Determine a grouping structure and room setup for the option you selected.
- Chart paper or a PowerPoint slide with each class' recommended Classroom Agreements.
- Optional activities are provided for this lesson. See specific materials embedded in the options.

Learning Outcome

Students will offer recommendations around Classroom Agreements that will serve as a guideline for working and learning together.

Opening Turn and Talk Activator

1. Share the following quote: “Community...is a place in which students feel cared about and are encouraged to care about each other. They experience a sense of being valued and respected; the [students] matter to one another and to the teacher. They have come to think in the plural: they feel connected to each other; they are part of an ‘us’.” (Kohn, 1996, p. 13)
2. Turn & Talk: What is Alfie Kohn, the writer, saying to us about being part of a community? Chart their responses on a web that says, “CLASSROOM COMMUNITY.”
3. Quick Jot: Have students identify one thing that someone can say or do that shows they are valued and respected.
4. Have students share their thinking, and chart their responses on a T-chart.

Agenda Check

Today we are going to think about what actions and behaviors will help students in a particular class, grade, or small learning community work and learn together. We are all responsible for how our classes are going to look, sound, and feel when we are in them. So, together, we are going to craft some Classroom Agreements that will support each student in feeling valued, cared for, and respected. After each class makes their recommendations, we're going to identify patterns across all classes and bring them back to you for your final approval.

Activity Options

A Helpful Hint: A few well-discussed agreements will be more lasting and helpful than a long list. After a brainstorm, look for patterns and repetition; strive for consensus on critical wording and key behaviors/actions. For example: It looks like we have several suggestions about listening. How might we combine them into one agreement on listening?

Option One: The Being (Middle School)

1. Divide your students into groups of four.
2. Provide each group with a piece of butcher paper and various non-permanent markers.
3. Have them trace onto the butcher paper the body of one group member.
4. Inside of the outline, they should draw or write behaviors that are safe and respectful of self, others, and the classroom community (e.g., sharing, humor, taking turns talking, listening).
5. Outside of the outline, they should draw or write behaviors that could be damaging to students' sense of respect and safety (e.g., put-downs, rolling eyes, prejudice).
6. Post "The Beings" so all students can see them and have groups look at and learn what their peers are thinking.
8. Turn and Talk: What are some behaviors that seem most important to this class in order to make it a safe and respectful learning community? What are some behaviors that seem important to this class to avoid?
9. Elicit responses from some volunteers and circle those behaviors that students highlight as important because they are repeated on the Beings (note: hold on to these for Lesson 2).
10. Debrief: What surprises you? What behaviors might need clarifying? Is anything missing?
11. Ask for a couple volunteers who might be willing to work with you/your team on identifying patterns across classes and crafting suggested language for a shared "Being" across all classes.

Option Two "If I had a movie camera..." (Grade 9/10)

1. Suggested script: Let's imagine that we have a videographer in our class who is going to film us working and learning together and then share it with other groups so they can learn from us. What behaviors and actions would we want to capture on film that would make everyone feel safe, valued, and respected, so they would participate in class?
2. Suggested script: With your partner write on Post-it notes those positive behaviors and actions. Write a separate behavior/action for each Post-it note. Model a response: Letting someone finish what they're saying before we respond.
3. Have each group bring their Post-it notes to a chart titled, "Positive Behaviors and Actions." Ask for a few volunteers to look for patterns and cluster the Post-it notes accordingly.
4. Turn and Talk: What are some behaviors and actions that seem to be most important to this group?

5. Call on a few volunteers to share their responses and chart these up (note: hold on to this chart for Lesson 2).
6. Debrief: What surprises you? What behaviors might need clarifying? Is anything missing?
7. Ask for a couple volunteers who might be willing to work with you/your team on identifying patterns across classes and crafting suggested language for the shared Classroom Agreements.

Option Three: Work Hard, Work Safe, Work Fair, Have Fun (Grades 11/12)

1. Divide the class into equal numbers and assign groups to one of the phrases: Work Hard, Work Safe, Work Fair, Have Fun. Give each group a piece of butcher paper and a marker. Ask groups to write their phrase at the top of the chart paper and then come up with a definition for their phrase to write directly below it.
2. Have each small group present their definition to the group. Invite the whole group to add to or modify the definition so that the group is in agreement.
3. Students should then return to their small groups and identify the behaviors and actions that can be used to support the definitions. Students should list these behaviors and actions on their chart.
4. Small groups will next share these behaviors and actions with the rest of the class.
5. Turn and Talk: What are some behaviors and actions that feel most important to this class?
6. Call on a few volunteers to share their responses.
7. Debrief: What surprises you? What behaviors and actions might need clarification? Is anything missing?
8. Ask for a couple volunteers who might be willing to work with you/your team on identifying patterns across classes and crafting suggested language for the shared Classroom Agreements.

Option Four: What do I need? What can I give? (Grades 11/12)

1. Hand several Post-it notes to each student.
2. Ask students to think about what they *need* in order to feel safe, cared for, respected, and valued. Each idea should be written on a separate note.
3. Ask them about what they can *give* to make their peers feel safe, cared for, respected, and valued. Each idea should be written on a separate Post-it note.
4. Provide Think Time for students to really explore these questions.
5. Create groups of three to four and ask them to share what they wrote on their Post-it notes.
6. Have them discuss their thoughts and combine ideas when appropriate.
7. Have each group share one of their ideas. If an idea has already been shared, they do not need to repeat it.
8. As each idea is shared, record it on chart paper.

9. Debrief: What surprises you? What clarification do you need on the ideas? Are we in agreement with the ideas? Is there anything missing?

10. Ask for a couple volunteers who might be willing to work with you/your team on identifying patterns across classes and crafting suggested language for the shared Classroom Agreements.

Closing

Thank students for their participation. Explain that you will compile patterns across classes and bring a shared set of Classroom Agreements back to students in a follow-up lesson.

Classroom Agreements – Lesson Two

Agenda

1. Turn and Talk Activator
2. Agenda check
3. Finalizing Classroom Agreements
4. Closing

Prep List

- Chart paper or PowerPoint slide with each class' recommended Classroom Agreements.
- A chart with a shared set of Classroom Agreements or “Being” from Lesson One

Learning Outcome

Students will approve a shared set of Classroom Agreements and commit to making their best effort to live up to these Agreements.

Opening Turn and Talk Activator

1. Display the class' recommended Classroom Agreements/”Beings” from previous lesson.
2. Turn and Talk: What are some predictions you have about what will appear on the shared set of Classroom Expectations from all the classes?
3. Elicit some responses from volunteers.

Agenda Check

Today we are going to approve a shared set of Classroom Agreements that was created from looking at the patterns across all classes and we'll commit to making our best effort to live up to these Classroom Agreements.

Activity

1. Show the shared list of Classroom Agreements/shared “Being.”
2. Ask, “What do you notice? What are you wondering?” (Note: If a particular class feels strongly that something is missing, you can customize the list as needed).
3. Turn and Talk: If we honored these actions and behaviors, what are some of the ways our class might feel? What are some things we could do to support each other to engage in these behaviors/actions?
4. Call on a few volunteers to share their responses with the class.

5. Debrief: If we don't see these actions and behaviors, how might we handle this as a class? What are some ways we could get back on track? Who is responsible for upholding our agreements? Do not let students name you, the teacher, as the sole enforcer.

6. Read each Classroom Agreement aloud and ask students to respond by giving a "thumbs up" sign if they can commit to making their best effort to live up to the agreement, a "thumbs down" if they cannot and a "thumbs sideways" if they are somewhere in between. If there is no consensus, continue to make revisions until all students can give a "thumbs up" to the list of Classroom Agreements (adapted from Frank, 2004).

Closing

- On a Post-it note write a commitment stating how you will support the group agreements. "I commit to..."
- Post Classroom Agreements in room with Post-its surrounding them.

Extension: Keeping Classroom Agreements Alive

Often, educators ask us, "How do we make these Classroom Agreements come alive and stay alive in the classroom?" It is important for students to revisit the Classroom Agreements they co-created on a regular basis to keep them in the forefront of everyone's mind. Reviewing and refreshing them on a routine basis will let students know that you valued their voice in creating them and that you are committed to a safe, caring, and respectful learning environment. Below are a few options to ensure that the Classroom Agreements are front and center. We recommend that you review them on a weekly basis during the first month of school and thereafter you might consider doing so at the beginning of each term, midyear, quarterly, and/or when a student leaves or joins the class.

Option One: Mix and Mingle Activator and whole group

Mix and Mingle: Have pairs discuss the following questions to prepare for thinking with the whole group:

- Which of our agreements have been easier for us?
- Which agreements have we lived up to, but with more difficulty?
- Which of our agreements are we not measuring up to yet? What would help us abide by those agreements more often?
- Is there an agreement that needs to be changed?
- Are there any additional agreements that we should add?

Option Two: Post-it-Up Activator

Turn and Talk: What are some Classroom Agreements the class has been living up to consistently? What are some Classroom Agreements the class has been challenged to live up to consistently? What is some evidence you might use to support your answer? Distribute two

different colored dots or Post-its (green and red, for example) to each student. Ask students to put the green dot next to a group agreement the class is consistently living up to and a red dot next to an agreement the class is challenged to consistently live up to. Debrief: What do you see or notice? So what do you think it means or why does it matter? Now what should we be asking, doing, or trying to understand?

Option Three: Turn and Talk Activator and whole group

Turn and Talk: Think about a time in the last month when you experienced our class as being at its best. What were we doing? What do you think made us function so well? How did you feel about the group? Have the groups discuss in pairs and then share out. Chart the thinking of the group and compare to the Classroom Agreements list. What are your observations? What could each of us do individually or as a group to keep us on the right path? Have pairs make a personal commitment on a Post-it note and share with the class..

Option Four: Individual reflection and whole group

Use the following questions to have students reflect on and build responsibility for supporting the Classroom Agreements. Students will submit their reflections, and you will look for patterns and report out in the next lesson. Discuss with students if adjustments need to be made to the Classroom Agreements. . You might also list the actions individuals have committed to (without the names) and align them with the Classroom Agreements.

- When have I been at my best in class? What specifically have I done to support the group agreements?
- When I am not at my best, what am I doing? At those times, what Classroom Agreements am I struggling with and how am I affecting others?
- What Classroom Agreements do I want to focus on and what two actions could I take to contribute positively to the classroom community?

Classroom Expectations

As we describe in *Activators*, communicating Classroom Expectations encourages teachers to go public with the beliefs they hold for what their students are capable of doing and achieving. It can also offer an important opportunity to invite student voice into your course around what young people need for the classroom to be a high-performing community of learners. By aligning students' perspectives with the Classroom Expectations, teachers build commitment to these hopes and aspirations they hold for their students. In crafting Classroom Expectations we suggest using language that is student-friendly, normalizes challenges and is inclusive in nature (“we”) to communicate that teachers are part of the community of learners and hold the same beliefs for themselves as for their students. Below we offer a two-part lesson for finding out students' ideas (several options are provided) and showing how these connect with your Classroom Expectations.

Reflecting on Classroom Expectations

Just as with Classroom Agreements, in order for the Classroom Expectations to be a living document that guides the ways students work and learn together, it is critical to regularly have students reflect on the extent to which the class is living up to them. Any of the options offered for this purpose with Classroom Agreements can be modified for reflecting on Classroom Expectations.

Sample List of Classroom Expectations:

- I expect all of us to try to do our best and be our best.
- All of us can be successful learners in this class. We all have what it takes to do well.
- We all make mistakes and we can learn from them.
- Sometimes we might make poor choices. And, I'm confident we can recover and get back on track.
- Working with each other collaboratively is important to me.. It's something we will spend a lot of time doing, and I expect and am confident that everyone will get pretty good at it.
- I expect all of us to treat each other with respect and decency.
- There will be times when we'll feel challenged and struggle a bit. That's normal and we'll get through it.
- I'm counting on everyone to encourage and support each other.

Classroom Expectations – Lesson One

Agenda

1. Turn and Talk Activator
2. Agenda Check
3. Classroom Vision
4. Closing

Prep List

- Determine a grouping structure and room setup for the option you selected
- Questionnaires or chart paper and markers for Rotation Station Activator Option
- Post-its
- A PowerPoint slide with patterns from students' classroom vision and your Classroom Expectations
- This lesson has two parts. Optional activities are provided for this lesson. See specific materials embedded in the options

Learning Outcome

- Students will offer input around their vision for a safe and supportive classroom where they can be challenged to make their best effort and support others.

Opening Turn and Talk Activator

1. Turn and Talk: What are some things that make a classroom a safe and supportive space where you can be challenged to make your best effort as well as support others?
2. Call on some volunteers to share their responses.

Agenda Check

Today I want to find out your vision of a classroom that will be a safe and supportive learning environment for your classmates and you.

Activity Options

Option One: Turn and Talk and whole group

1. Ask students to fill out a questionnaire that includes some of the following questions:
 - What are some hopes you bring with you to this class?
 - In what ways do you like to be challenged?

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- What are some things you can do to be successful in this class?
 - What are some things you can do to support other students to do their best in this class?
 - What are some things I can do to support your success in this class?
 - When you're struggling, what are some things I can do to help you get back on track?
 - What are some things that make a classroom a safe space where you can be honest and open, where you can say what's on your mind?
2. Turn and Talk: Share two of your responses with your partner.
 3. Debrief: What's something your partner said that stood out to you? What's something that you and your partner both said?

Option Two: Rotations Stations Activator

1. Post the following questions on chart paper around the room
 - What are some hopes you bring with you to this class?
 - In what ways do you like to be challenged?
 - What are some things you can do to be successful in this class?
 - What are some things you can do to support other students to do their best in this class?
 - What are some things the teacher can do to support your success in this class?
 - When you're struggling, what are some things a teacher can do to help you get back on track?
 - What are some things that make a classroom a safe space where you can be honest and open, where you can say what's on your mind?
2. Rotation Stations Activator: Divide the class into small groups, give each one a different colored magic marker and ask each group to stand in front of a different question. Give students 3 minutes at each station to brainstorm responses to the question before moving on to the next station. As students move to the next chart, they can put a □ next to responses they agree with as well as a ? next to any they have questions about.
3. Debrief: What do you notice? What are some things you're wondering about? What are some things many of you agreed on?

Option Three: Mix and Mingle and whole group

1. Ask students to fill out a questionnaire that includes some of the following questions:
 - What are some hopes you bring with you to this class?
 - In what ways do you like to be challenged?

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- What are some things you can do to be successful in this class?
 - What are some things you can do to support other students to do their best in this class?
 - What are some things the teacher can do to support your success in this class?
 - When you're struggling, what are some things a teacher can do to help you get back on track?
 - What are some things that make a classroom a safe space where you can be honest and open, where you can say what's on your mind?
2. Use a Mix and Mingle Activator to have students move around the room and share their responses to three-five of the above questions.
 3. Debrief: What are some things you heard that stood out to you? What are some patterns you noticed in your classmates' responses? What are some things you want to remember to do based upon what you heard?

Closing

Thank students for their participation and collect questionnaires. Explain that you will compile patterns from students' responses in all your classes and bring these back to students in a follow-up lesson.

Classroom Expectations – Lesson Two

Agenda

1. Turn and Talk Activator
2. Agenda check
3. Classroom Expectations
4. Closing

Prep List

- Post-its
- A PowerPoint slide with patterns from students' classroom vision and your Classroom Expectations
- Classroom Expectations chart

Learning Outcome

- Students will understand the alignment between their vision for a safe and supportive classroom and the Classroom Expectations.

Opening Turn and Talk Activator

1. Turn and Talk: What are some things you think of when you hear the word “expectations?”
2. Call on a few volunteers to share out responses.

Agenda Check

Today I want to offer some Classroom Expectations that align with your vision for a safe and supportive classroom community.

Activity

1. Acknowledge students' responses and make connections to the definition for Classroom Expectations, which are beliefs you hold for what students are capable of doing and achieving. Offer an example by saying one of your Classroom Expectations out loud as a belief statement, for example, I believe and am confident that everyone will get pretty good at working collaboratively.
2. Explain that you reviewed all your class' responses to either the questionnaire or Rotation Stations Activator about a vision they have for a safe and supportive classroom and that you have aligned patterns from these responses with your Classroom Expectations. Show students a chart on a PowerPoint slide that demonstrates this alignment for example:

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Here's what you said...	Here's what I'll do...	And I hold these Classroom Expectations...
<p>You want your classmates to help you when you're confused or stuck.</p>	<p>I'll create a lot of opportunities for you to work with your classmates in pairs and small groups.</p> <p>I'll incorporate a "3 Before Me" procedure where you're encouraged to ask a classmate for clarifications about instructions before you approach me.</p>	<p>Example:</p> <p>I'm counting on everyone to encourage and support one another.</p>
<p>You want your classmates to do their fair share of the work when you do group work.</p>	<p>Example: I'll offer roles that everyone take on to help the group work collaboratively.</p> <p>I'll give you opportunities to practice working collaboratively and I'll offer immediate, specific feedback about how you're doing.</p>	<p>Working with each other collaboratively is important to me. It's something we will spend a lot of time doing, and I expect and am confident everyone will get pretty good at it.</p>
<p>You don't want classmates or the teacher to make fun of you when you make mistakes.</p>	<p>I'll acknowledge when I make mistakes and tell you what I learned from them.</p> <p>I'll thank you for making mistakes since they provide learning opportunities for all of us.</p>	<p>We all make mistakes and can learn from them.</p>

3. Debrief: what questions do you have about these Classroom Expectations?

Closing:

On a Post-it, One way I commit to living up to a Classroom Expectation...

Post Classroom Expectations in room with Post-its surrounding them.

Extension

Unpacking Classroom Expectations

In order for students to have a deep understanding of Classroom Expectations, we recommend you support students in unpacking each one by asking what the Classroom Expectation looks and sound like. Using a Rotation Station Activator and posting T-charts with “Looks Like and Sounds Like” under each Classroom Expectation will help students collaborate to create concrete, positive descriptors for each one:

Classroom Expectation: I expect all of us to treat each other with respect and decency.	
Looks like...	Sounds like...
Example: Making eye contact when someone is speaking	Example: One voice during whole group conversations.