

Community Agreements:

Fostering Open Communication in Shared Spaces

At PGED, we explore topics that can be sensitive or challenging to discuss in group settings. To help create a supportive environment, we often use community agreements. You may have seen community agreements included in our resources and programs. Let's explore what they are and how they can help foster open communication.

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS?

Community agreements help shape a “brave space”—a space where everyone feels welcome and respected, no matter their identity or background. In classrooms, these agreements set clear expectations for communication and interaction. They typically include what respectful discourse looks like, guidelines for participation, and practices to make sure all voices are heard.

CO-CREATING AGREEMENTS

Community agreements should reflect the opinions and perspectives of your group. Therefore, the best agreements are co-created with everyone involved. While PGED often provides sample agreements for our resources, we encourage group leaders to create them with their participants as a culture-building practice for their shared space.

For instance, a teacher could start the school year by making agreements with their students. They might initiate this process by asking a question like,

“What ground rules should we set so everyone feels welcome to participate in our conversations?”

“What classroom rules would make everyone feel comfortable sharing their ideas with the group?”

“What do you think is the most important thing we can do to create a supportive environment for everyone in this class?”



Give everyone a chance to reflect and share—this can be done out loud, anonymously with note cards, or using an online board.

If you already have agreements (or “ground rules,” “norms,” etc.) that work for you, feel free to stick with or adapt them. Use what best fits the culture you're aiming to cultivate.

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METHODS FOR CREATING COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

1) Brainstorm

Create a Google Doc (or some other collaborative writing tool) for students to write their ideas. Once everyone has had a chance to write in the Doc, have them add a star to their favorite agreements. The highest-rated agreements are then accepted.

2) Vote

Present a list of options and have students vote for their top choices.

3) Sign-On

Co-write agreements on a poster board. Everyone signs their name to demonstrate their support once the list is finished.

4) Source Ideas

Use [sample agreements from PGED](#) or another trusted educational resource as a starting point for brainstorming your own.

KEEPING AGREEMENTS ALIVE

Once your group has created its agreements, refer back to them regularly, especially during discussions or group work.

This helps keep everyone accountable for sticking to the agreements.

However, feel free to adjust them as needed. The agreements can be a “living resource” for your shared space. Just be sure to engage the group in another co-creative activity if revisions are needed.

ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES

If you would prefer not to use community agreements, that’s okay. To decide whether you want to try using them in your shared space, consider reading [an alternative perspective](#).

NEED INSPIRATION?

Take a look at these additional resources about community agreements.

Developing Community Agreements
by National Equity Project

Community Agreements Guide
by The New School

Writing Classroom Contracts
by Facing History & Ourselves

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SAMPLE AGREEMENTS USED BY PGED

1

Speak honestly and from your own experience

Share your truth by drawing from your personal experiences and perspectives instead of making generalizations. This helps create an authentic, respectful dialogue.

2

Own the impact of your words

Acknowledge that what you say can affect others, regardless of your intention. Take responsibility for how your words may be received and be open to feedback.

3

Listen to understand (not to respond)

Give your full attention to others, aiming to grasp their meaning before thinking about your reply. This fosters empathy and deeper connections.

4

Focus on learning (not debating)

Approach conversations with curiosity and a goal to expand your understanding, rather than trying to win an argument. This shifts the space from competition to growth.

5

Embrace the capacity to change your opinions

Be open to new information or perspectives that might reshape your views. Recognize that growth often involves evolving your beliefs.

6

Pass the 'mic'

Make space for others to share by stepping back when you've spoken. This ensures diverse voices are included and valued.

7

Challenge by choice

Engage at the level that feels right for you, choosing whether or how much to participate in certain discussions. Respect your own boundaries while honoring others' choices to contribute.