



How Do We Want Our Class to Be?

This activity is designed to help you work with students to build a shared understanding of how the class should be and orient them to upstander behavior in a way that's fun, easy and participatory.

Start with the first step, and integrate the following steps depending on time and your own classroom goals. (Sometimes it evolves quickly, sometimes it takes many sessions. Take a relaxed view of the process, allowing it to find its own pace, and tweak as needed.)

1. Start the year by developing **rules and norms** for the classroom. One of the most commonly voiced student needs is the need to feel safe (another is the need to have fun). Invite your students to read the following list of agreements and write their names (or yes/no) beside the statements they find appropriate for the class:

So that we can have a class in which everyone feels safe, everyone participates, and everyone accomplishes their personal goals, I agree:

- ✓ _____ *to be on time.*
- ✓ _____ *to try to get to know everyone.*
- ✓ _____ *to listen to other people so that no one is afraid to speak.*
- ✓ _____ *to put other people "up," not "down."*
- ✓ _____ *to try new activities, even if they feel a little uncomfortable at first.*
- ✓ _____ *to switch partners without complaining.*
- ✓ _____ *to suggest ideas for new activities.*
- ✓ _____ *to ask for help when I need it.*
- ✓ _____ *to face problems when they come up and to try to solve them.*

This exercise is offered for free at www.bullybust.org by Center for Social and Emotional Education. Visit CSEE's homepage at www.schoolclimate.org to learn more about our mission and access practical school supports.

✓ _____ to be an upstander.

2. Invite the students to **propose other agreements** they are willing to make and add them to a list displayed on chart paper. They do not discuss them.
3. Survey student opinion of the proposed agreements using a kinesthetic activity such as The Big Wind:

Students stand in a circle. You (or a student facilitator) announce, "The Big Wind moves everyone who agrees to switch partners without complaining..." Students move to a new position in the circle if they agree and stay in place if they do not agree. No comments are allowed. This is an effective way of beginning the critique of the proposed agreements without discussion or controversy.

4. The teacher provides the students with a list of all **the proposed agreements**. Students gather in groups of four to discuss reasons for supporting or not supporting the proposals. The whole group reconvenes and students share why they support or do not support a proposed agreement.

Ground rules for these discussions are: **prepare your response and speak briefly, beginning with "I" not "we" and listen carefully to others.**

5. The teacher repeats Activity 3, asking the students to vote on each proposed agreement using a Fist to Five System:

Five fingers indicate "I completely and enthusiastically support this proposed agreement." One finger indicates "I'm not enthusiastic about this but I can live with it and I will support it." A proposed agreement that receives five, four, three, two or one finger votes from every student is considered accepted by consensus. A "Fist" vote indicates "I can't support this agreement." A proposed agreement that receives even one "Fist" goes into the "Recycle Bin." It is not added to the list of consensual agreements; however any individual may choose to keep to keep that agreement.

The teacher compiles a list of all the agreements for which there is consensus, posts it publicly and gives a copy to each student with the message "The agreement is a living document. It can change as our needs change."

6. The class reflects on the agreement regularly and briefly, understanding that the purpose of the agreement is to help us:

- ✓ *Treat each other well*
- ✓ *Participate actively*
- ✓ *Communicate clearly*
- ✓ *Solve problems.*
- ✓ *Its purpose is not to punish*

These questions help guide the group's reflection on the agreement:

- ✓ *What is an example of how I am keeping the agreement?*
- ✓ *What agreements are hard for me to keep?*
- ✓ *What support will I accept to help me keep the agreements?*
- ✓ *What examples of "keeping the agreements" have I observed among my peers?*
- ✓ *How are we doing as a group? Are these agreements helping us?*
- ✓ *In what ways do we need to modify our agreements? What new agreements do we need to consider?*