# Group Agreements

## Co-Regulation Strategies Tip Sheet

**Group agreements are a student-created tool for establishing classroom culture. In the process of defining the values they want to use with each other (and you), students experience what it means to be intentional about creating safe, supportive relationships. As useful as the agreements are for guiding classroom behavior, the process of creating them is just as important. By defining the agreements, students feel ownership and hold each other more accountable to the values they've chosen.**

**Use "values," not "rules".** Words are powerful. Calling the group agreements "rules" or "norms" implies a power dynamic of an enforcer and a follower. In this strategy, students enter into an agreement about the values that will guide the group. It's your role to support them through the process.

**Establish agreements early.** Ideally, facilitators help students create group agreements during their first class together. This sets the tone for how all classes will operate and establishes you as a supportive adult.

**Support the brainstorming process.** To start, ask students how they would like to interact with each other or what values are important to create a positive learning environment. Prepare a few questions to spur thoughts and discussion, such as: "What makes you feel you can trust someone? What makes you feel appreciated or listened to?" Ensure that the first ideas or values on the brainstorming list come from students, so it's clear the agreements are theirs and not another set of rules imposed on them by an adult. Trust students to establish the agreement list and give them enough time and support to generate their ideas. Often, people define or experience values differently. Make sure you explore what values look like in action. For example, a value like respect might look like one student speaking at a time, listening to others, being honest, or being nonjudgmental. Ask students to get concrete about the actions that demonstrate a value.

**Supplement missing values.** After students produce their list of values and practices, ask them about adding anything you think is important but missing, like confidentiality. Your contribution helps to fill gaps and demonstrate that you are part of the group!

**Agree, display, and replay.** Ask students to commit to the final agreements in an observable way, such as raising hands to vote on adopting or signing the agreement. Once adopted, post agreements in a visible spot to remind the group of their shared values and encourage accountability.

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