



## NORM CO-CREATION

*"Students acquire a sense of significance from doing significant things, from being active participants in their own education."*

— Carlette Jackson Hardin

### OVERVIEW

Students collaborate on the development of classroom norms while exploring the role of norms from multiple perspectives.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- When setting new norms or revising existing ones
- To encourage student ownership in creating and maintaining a positive classroom environment
- Before engaging in a controversial classroom discussion

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 20-40 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- College

#### MATERIALS

- Paper
- Pencil/pen/marker
- Projector (Optional)
- Screen (Optional)
- Index cards (Optional)
- 2 plastic straws (Optional)

- Card deck (Optional)
- Tokens (Optional)

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Work together to decide on a set of classroom norms
- Think critically about how norms work
- Entertain multiple perspectives

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

What norms would you like to see in your classroom? Do these norms privilege your values over your students' in any way? For example, if being assertive and speaking up is a norm that you think is important, are there students in your class where their cultural background might influence them to think differently? Is it possible to honor differences like these in a way where none are viewed from a deficit lens?

### INSTRUCTIONS

Consider starting the class with a "Do Now" activity on the importance of norms.

- **Sample "Do Now" activity #1 (free response):** Students can write on and answer the following questions on a sheet of paper:
  - Write down your favorite sport or game. Pick 3 rules that you would take away from the sport or game. How would the game be different? Would it be easier or harder to play? More or less enjoyable? Why?
  - Think of classes you have had that you have enjoyed being in, and those you were uncomfortable being in. Write down 5 reasons, or things about the class, that made that class enjoyable, and 5 reasons that made that class uncomfortable.

- **Sample “Do Now” activity #2 (picture projection):** Project the picture below. Ask students to answer: What do you see in this picture? How sure are you? How do you know? What else can it be? What might someone else be seeing?



- Have them share their answers and reflect on how the same thing can be seen in different ways. Ask what they think the artist intended for them to see. Make the point that you can't always be sure about what you are seeing and hearing, so it's important to follow up before making judgments.
- **Sample “Do Now” activity #3 (group activity):** Break students into small groups, provide students with several index cards, 2 plastic straws, a deck of cards, tokens of some kind, and a pen, pencil, or marker (or other common objects you may have available in the classroom). Students are provided with the instructions to: “Develop your own game in a group with rules the group agrees on.” After 5 minutes check in with the groups and have them process what it was like to develop rules, or if a group had difficulty deciding on norms, what made it difficult to come to a consensus or to develop rules. Through developing a game, groups can begin to understand that the nature of a game or activity, and how it's enjoyed, is tied to its norms. For example, Monopoly, wouldn't be Monopoly, without the rules and norms that give a framework and help define its identity. Having students participate in creating their own game with norms emphasizes that behaviors like participation, learning, and respect are important because they proactively provide clarity, direction, and an environment of engagement.

**Divide your classroom.** Divide the class into smaller sub-groups of three to five individuals.

**Create a list.** Ask each sub-group to make a short list of desirable and undesirable classroom behaviors. Provide 3-5 minutes for each group to make their lists.

**Share lists** and work towards consensus. Encourage each group to share their lists and work to achieve consensus. Talk about the rationale behind each rule and how it impacts the well-being of students in the class. Contrasting viewpoints are encouraged. Norms may also be structured in a list of "shoulds" and "should nots" for classes needing more guidance.

**Decide** on the classroom norms and responses to norm breaking: Work with students to engage in perspective-taking by asking how breaking a norm might affect others in the class and why the person breaking the norm might have done so. Facilitate a conversation on how to respond if a student departs from the norms.

#### Sample norms for a class:

1. Be a respectful listener by paying attention to the speaker and avoid interrupting, yelling, and name-calling.
2. Treat your classmates the way you would like to be treated.
3. If you're talking too much, let someone speak. If you haven't contributed at all, speak up—your opinion is important!
4. Work to understand other points of view. Ask yourself, "Why might they have that opinion?"
5. Be a builder of ideas! Think how you might be able to contribute to someone else's idea.
6. Respect one another even through disagreement. If you disagree, think about asking a question to try and understand the other student's perspective.
7. Everyone is a teacher and learner: keep your mind open.
8. (For some schools) Turn your phone off or have on silent.
9. When feeling strong emotions, address them using different techniques like drawing or writing them, practice expressing them using an "I feel" statement, or taking 5 deep breaths.

### REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Did all students seem engaged in generating and deciding on norms for the classroom? If not, how might you encourage students to balance participation within their groups next time?
- Have you noticed a difference in how well students follow the set norms?
- Did any cultural differences show up in this practice? If so, how were they handled?

### THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

#### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A [review](#) of effective practices for developing classroom norms along with other [research](#) suggests that when students are involved in the process of setting classroom norms, they show a greater understanding of and respect for such norms. Making students [feel heard, valued, and respected](#), helps students see the classroom as a fair environment in which they can grow and succeed.

Furthermore, such involvement also seems to enhance [students' ability](#) to present their opinions, respect the opinions of others, assess conflicting views, negotiate, compromise, and find common ground—skills that will allow students to engage more effectively in the larger society.

#### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Classroom norms can influence student [participation as well as their behavior](#) towards other students. The current practice is meant to encourage students to be respectful and curious,

question their own preconceptions and ideas and those of their classmates in the process of developing norms—all skills that can foster positive relationships and communication in the classroom. Classroom norms help teachers to nurture inclusive and equitable learning environments and experiences.

## SOURCE

This practice was developed by [Rutgers Social-Emotional and Character Development \(SECD\) Lab](#) as part of their Students Taking Action Together (STAT) project.