



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

TAKE-HOME SKILL: CREATE TRUST WITH RESPECTFUL COMMUNICATION AGREEMENTS

"Trust in what you love, continue to do it, and it will take you where you need to go."

—Natalie Goldberg

OVERVIEW

Parents/caregivers learn to create agreements based on trust and collaboration when challenging feelings or conversations arise with their teens.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To help create a safe structure for your teens to express themselves
- To help set expectations and accountability

TIME REQUIRED

- Multiple Sessions

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College

MATERIALS

- Color pens
- Paper

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Understand the importance of trust-building as part of holding ourselves accountable
- Collaborate with parents/caregivers in the creation of guidelines to create space for difficult topic conversations
- Create a goal between the parent/caregiver and the teen of when these agreements will be used

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Open-mindedness
- Perspective-taking
- Fairness
- Teamwork

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Non-judgment
- Open awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Think about a time when you needed to have a difficult conversation with your parents/caregivers but were unable to do it. What did you feel? What kinds of tools do you wish you had had at that moment? How would you like your teen to feel if they are experiencing a similar situation?
- How can you encourage your teen to trust you in this process of trust building norms?

INSTRUCTIONS

OVERVIEW

Trust building is a process between parents/caregivers and teens that takes time. It is important your teen contributes to the trust-building process by sharing their thoughts and feelings. Also, it is important both parent/caregiver and teen share hopes and expectations for this type of trust-building exercise.

- Be intentional about the space where you will be doing this exercise with your teen. For example, it can be a date at the park, after Saturday night dinner, etc. The key is to have a space where there are no disruptions.
- Prepare yourself and your teen by gathering pen and paper.
- Have you and your teen reflect on the following questions on a piece of paper.
 - From my perspective, I define trust as...
 - Why is trust building important for our relationship?
 - What are the benefits of setting these agreements?
- After reflecting on these answers, have each person share their thoughts. Decide who will share first, take notes while the other person speaks, and listen without making interruptions. Then, share what you learned from each other.
- On a piece of paper, work together to create a collaborative definition of trust. After agreeing on the definition, have each person sign the paper and name it as a living contract of your definition of trust.
- Now that a trust definition has been agreed upon, the next step is to create guidelines around how both parties will stay accountable to each other. Together or separately, reflect on the following questions:
 - How should we treat each other?
 - What are our communication expectations from each other? Why should those be the expectations?
 - When a disagreement shows up, how are we going to solve it?
- After the individual or collective reflection, have each person share their thoughts. Decide who will share first, take notes while the other person speaks, and listen without making interruptions. Then, share what you learned from each other.
- Based on the previous reflection, create a document with agreements indicating how you will communicate and your approach to hard conversations. After agreeing on the agreements, have each person sign the paper and name it as a living contract of your trust-building norms.
- Parents/caregivers and teens can continue working on the norms as the teens get older, or if a situation requires ratification or trust is broken.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How did your teen respond to this exercise?
- What worked or didn't work?
- Are there more ways that you can integrate, utilize, or refer to trust in your relationship with your teen?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A [study](#) of 82 Australian adolescents found that a teen's trust in their parents/caregivers was positively correlated with the quality of their communication.

In another [study](#) of 668 pairs of mothers and middle school students from the South Bronx (75% Latino, 25% Black), teens who communicated more frequently with their mother reported that their mother had higher levels of expertise (around a risky behavior), was trustworthy, and was available to them. This frequency of communication, in turn, predicted lower levels of risky behavior.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Trust is foundational to our well-being, helping us to build both healthy [relationships](#) and a healthy [society](#). In general, interpersonal trust is thought to have [three components](#): cognitive, affective (emotional), and behavioral. In other words, we expect that a person will be trustworthy, we feel an emotional connection to them, and we witness them following through on their promises.

[Research](#) suggests that our ability to trust others is formed in our early relationships with parents/caregivers who provide a [“safe haven”](#) and [“secure base”](#) for children to explore the world. As children move into adolescence, their attachment needs begin to [shift](#) more towards peers; however, this does not negate their need for a continued strong relationship with parents/caregivers, part of which is formed through positive communication.

Indeed, studies have found that teens who have good communication with their parents/caregivers have higher levels of [self-worth](#), [life satisfaction](#), [emotional well-being](#), and [prosocial behavior](#). They're also more willing to talk about [challenges](#) with their parents/caregivers, and they're [less likely](#) to engage in risky behaviors.

And, for teens who may struggle to get their homework (and other not-so-fun tasks) done, both trust and good communication with parents/caregivers is associated with lower levels of [procrastination](#).

SOURCE

[Building Collaborative Classroom Norms](#)