

# Activity Guide:

## *Establishing Group Intentions*

### Summary

Intentions are a group's shared answer to the question: *how do we want to be with each other when the conversation gets hard?* Students co-create them, define what they look like in practice, help hold each other accountable to them, and revise as the group evolves.

### Framing Intentions to Students

*"This is where we define the community we want to build. Talking across differences can be tough — deciding how we'll handle those moments now makes them easier later."*

### Four Ways In (longest to shortest)

#### Your Best Group

*Use when you have time and want deep buy-in.*

- Ask: *"Think of a group you've been a part of where you could share even the vulnerable or unpopular parts of yourself. What made that possible?"*
- Capture answers popcorn-style on a board.
- Have students circle the qualities they want here.
- The circled list becomes your intentions.

#### Hopes and Hesitations

*Use when the group might be nervous about the topic.*

- Ask: *"What do you hope for, and what worries you, about talking across differences?"*
- Share in pairs, then as a full group.
- Ask: *"How can we ensure hopes are realized and concerns addressed?"*
- Circle the keywords worth keeping; those become your intentions.

#### Edit a Suggested List

*Use when time is short but you still want student ownership over the intentions list.*

- Give students the simple list from the next section of this guide.
- Ask: *"Does this list work for us? What's missing? What would you change?"*
- Revise live. The edited list is your intentions.

#### Name It in the Moment

*Use for informal, spontaneous conversations.*

- Propose one or two intentions tied to the purpose you have in mind, and confirm:
  - *"What if we focus on understanding each other first? Does that work for everyone?"*
  - *"Can we agree that everyone leaves feeling heard?"*
  - *"Let's hold on judgment to keep this conversation productive. Sound good?"*

## Suggested Intentions

Speak for yourself.  
Stay curious.  
Give others the benefit of the doubt.  
Challenge ideas respectfully.  
Honor confidentiality.  
Participate in the way that works for you.

## Before You Move On: The Three C's

1. **Concrete** – Define what each intention looks like in action. Ask: *“How will we know we’re doing this?”* Clarify vague terms like “respect” by defining specific actions.
2. **Consensus** – Get a visible “yes” from the group. Ask: *“Does this work for everyone? Any concerns?”* Confirm with a thumbs-up or similar signal.
3. **Confidentiality** – Always include confidentiality on the list and clarify its meaning. It’s key to making honest sharing possible.

## Keeping Intentions Alive

Intentions should be a “living list,” not a poster you talked about once. Here’s how you keep the list alive:

- **Make it Visible** – Post the list on the class homepage, syllabus, or display it in the meeting space.
- **Check in On It** – Ask: *“How are we doing with our intentions? What’s working? What needs work?”*
- **Practice Noting Before** – Before discussions, have each person pick an intention they’d like to focus on. Ask: *“Which group intention will you focus on upholding today?”*
- **Invite Revisions After** – After a dialogue, ask: *“Anything to add to or change about our list based on this conversation?”*

**Note:** If you prefer calling them something else, focus on terms like “**agreements**,” “**norms**,” or “**shared goals**” rather than binding terms like “rules” or “contract.” Intentions are aspirational – they guide how we talk, knowing dialogue gets messy and perfection isn’t the point.