Constructive
Dialogue
Institute

Co-Creating Resilient Group Norms

Summary

Norms are explicit standards that describe both *what* students can expect to experience in a group learning space, and *how* they should expect to participate in that space. Through norm-setting, students can take part in creating the types of respectful and honest conversations they want to have. Norms should be resilient – while every member of the group should agree to uphold them, they should also be treated as a living document that will be revisited and revised as necessary.

Outcomes

- Participants will create a shared document that describes a respectful and challenging learning environment
- Participants will practice sharing their own needs and considering others' needs

Details

For Who?	Any age
How Long?	A one-time meeting can go through the norms process in 5 minutes, while a group that will be together for a semester or school year should take 45-60 minutes for norm-setting, and plan to revisit the conversation multiple times as needed.
Supplies Needed	- Chart paper and markers [in person] - JamBoard or shared Google Doc [virtual]

Suggested Language for Instructor Framing

"This is an activity on defining the type of community we want to create together."

Detailed Agenda

Instructions

1. **Start with a basic list of suggested norms.** We'd suggest using the following list to kick things off:

Suggested Norms

- Communicate your perspective thoughtfully and with the intention of being understood.
- Give others the benefit of the doubt: listen with curiosity first, rather than judgment.
- Speak for yourself – use "I" statements.
- Embrace discomfort as an essential part of the learning process.
- Honor confidentiality – others' stories are only theirs to tell.
- Participation is always voluntary – you can "pass" if you don't want to share.

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2. **Solicit student feedback.** This could happen in the full group or through small group conversations followed by a full-group share-out.
   a. Ask: *"Is there anything about this list that you would like to add, revise, or remove? Which norms need further discussion or clarification?"*
3. **Revise and refine the list, then test for agreement.** Consider group additions and changes together, and add them to the norms list started above.
   a. Ask: *"Does everyone agree with these norms? Is anyone concerned about their ability to uphold these norms?"*
4. **Make the norms visible.** Post them to the class homepage, syllabus, or have them hanging on the classroom wall.

Suggested Language for Instructor Wrap-Up

"Whenever you feel norms need to be revised or revisited, feel free to bring them back to the group's attention. This will help us all sustain the community we want to be a part of."

> **Tip:** Setting norms is not a one-off, box-checked activity. They should be resilient – while every member of the group should agree to uphold them, they should also be treated as a living document to be revisited and revised as necessary. Make it a habit to check-in on norms – either at the end of class every so often, through a feedback form, or after (or during) a difficult conversation. These short check-ins let students know that the instructor takes the norms seriously.

Instructor Considerations

K-12 Adaptations

Start with an existing list so that students have something to sink their teeth into, as suggested above. Ask them what they'd add, leave out, change, or items they have questions about.

Higher Education / Adult PD Adaptations

Amongst young adult or adult groups, consider generating norms from scratch. Ask students to think about a group of any kind that they've been a part of in the past where they felt they could be themselves, including voicing their stance on a potentially controversial topic.

Ask them: what are the *elements* of that group that made it so welcoming? Have participants brainstorm words that represent the group qualities they observed, and let them discuss what sorts of elements or qualities they'd like to see in *this* group. Final group qualities should be written up and agreed upon, like the original exercise above.