

Developing Group Agreements

In addition to building authentic relationships with and between your students, as mentioned in “Managing Student Behavior: The 4P’s,” it is essential that children understand the behavior that is expected of them. Involving students in the process of identifying helpful behaviors allows them to express their own goals and expectations of one another and understand the rationale for these expectations. This increases their level of investment in following the expectations set by the class. One method to establish group expectations with students is to develop Group Agreements. This is best done with a class that you will be working with in an ongoing way or if you’ll be with a group for an extended period of time. Follow these steps with your students:

1. Explain the purpose of agreements: *Let’s talk about how we’ll work together. To start, how do you want to feel when you’re here?* Record students’ ideas on chart paper or a whiteboard. Feel free to add your own ideas to this list. Here are some examples: safe, welcome, happy, relaxed, proud, excited, etc.
2. *Thank you! Next, let’s brainstorm: What can we do to make people feel that way?* Brainstorm together. This list might include these actions: helping others, including others, using kind words, etc.
3. *Now we’ve talked about how we’ll treat each other. Let’s also talk about how we can treat the garden and classroom. The plants and animals in the garden are also alive, and we’re going to be their caretakers. What can we do to keep them healthy and growing? The classroom is our shared learning space. What can we do to make it a comfortable place to learn?* Brainstorm together.

This list will probably include some site-specific things but will often include some or all of the following.

When we are in the classroom

- Clean up after yourself.
- Be respectful of materials that are not yours.

When we are in the garden

- Walk on the paths, not the beds.
- Only harvest ripe foods and only when you’re going to eat them (or when the leader says it’s time).
- If you find a beneficial insect, let it live.
- If you find a harmful insect, follow the group protocol. This is something else that will be site- and group-specific.

Record your group agreements, and post them in a place where you can refer to them as necessary throughout your time with that group of students.