



# COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

How to Co-Create a  
Brave & Welcoming  
Space with Students

*Educator Tool*

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# WELCOME!

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In whatever space this finds you, we are so glad you're here. You may be reading this because you believe, like we do, that building safe and supportive spaces is vital work for any educator. At 826 National, creating a welcoming and brave space is a core tenet of our work.

Walk into any 826 chapter, and you will find an environment designed for and by students to feel welcome, write, take risks, be silly, and grow confidence in their voice.

The first week together is the ideal time to begin building a welcoming and brave space with your students. By emphasizing building relationships and establishing a safe space, you signal to your students that you value their identity, their voice, and their work. This guide covers one approach to centering students in the community-building process: co-creating community agreements.

## WELCOMING AND BRAVE SPACE

We provide a space students can call their own where they feel safe to reflect and brave to share their experiences. We strive to ensure that our programs and practices are inclusive and encourage learning from one another.

# COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

Community Agreements give students the opportunity to think about and share their own needs in a classroom. Community Agreements should be created by the students, with the educator guiding the conversation, by the end of the first week of school. You can be an effective facilitator of this activity by asking students reflection-based questions, providing brainstorming activities, and structuring share-out opportunities that accommodate different comfort levels while making space for student-driven conversations.



Voices telling me what to wear  
Voices telling me what to be  
Making decisions for me  
Feeling like I have to put a bag over  
my head to fit into the community

by Isabel, Grade 8, 826 Boston

# HOW TO CO-CREATE COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

## SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Scrap paper and writing utensils
  - 1 of each per student
- Whiteboard, large sheets of paper, or pieces of poster board

Tell students you will be creating a list of community agreements together. These agreements will help to positively shape the experience everyone has in this classroom. However, before they can create agreements for their community, they need to define what community means to them. Ask students questions to guide them into the process, providing personal examples as needed:

- When students hear the word “community,” what do they think of?
- What are examples of communities they’re a part of—such as sports teams or places of worship?
- How do students feel when they are around members of other communities?
- How do we want our community to feel?

As students share out, write their ideas on the board. Organize their thoughts into cohesive definitions and ask students their opinions on those definitions by asking questions: “I see that many of us feel loved when we are with members of our other communities. Is this something we want members of our community to feel?”

Once students have defined tenets of their community, write them on the board in statements that begin with, “In our community...”

# BRAINSTORMING

Next, students will use writing prompts to brainstorm the things that they need from the other members in the community in order to feel safe and brave, and to be successful. Make sure each student has a piece of paper and a writing utensil. Ask students to free-write—or draw—on the following questions for 3-5 minutes. Encourage students to write for the entire time, worrying less about grammar or spelling, and focusing more on their thoughts and ideas.

## Elementary

- Write about a time—or draw a picture of a time—when you experienced kindness. Who was kind to you, what did they do, and how did you feel? Did that person’s kindness inspire you to be kind to someone else?
- Write about a time—or draw a picture of a time—when you felt like you were being brave. How did you feel before you did the brave thing and then after you did the brave thing?
- Write about a time—or draw a picture of a time—when you asked for help. Who did you ask for help, and how did it feel to ask for help?

## Secondary

- Write about a time when you felt successful. What does “success” mean to you, and what happened during this time to make you feel successful?
- Write about a time when you felt brave. What was the situation? How did you feel before you did the brave thing and then after you did the brave thing?
- Write about a time when you felt safe. What does it mean to you to feel safe? What needs to be in place for you to feel safe?

# SHARING OUT

In order to turn students' brainstorming into elements of the Community Agreements, they will need to share some of the stories prompted by their writing. It's important to note that, for some students, this might feel like a very high-risk task. To help alleviate some of these feelings, there are lower risk suggestions below; however, if a student truly doesn't feel like sharing during this activity, they should not be forced to do so. Let students know that feeling comfortable in sharing your own needs is something we are all constantly working on, so this list of Community Agreements is a working document. If they aren't ready to have this kind of conversation today, that is perfectly alright. They can always come to you, at any point in the year, with points they'd like to add.

## Elementary

- Low risk: Students will share their stories or drawings only with you. If you choose this option, you will read students' answers and then return with the general trends that you noticed during the next session.
- Medium risk: Students can share their drawings, without the context of the story, to the whole group. Or, they can give a one-sentence summary of their story to the whole group, instead of reading the whole story verbatim.
- High risk: Ask for volunteers to share their drawings or stories that they wrote about. How did the student feel, after the thing they drew happened?

## Secondary

- Low risk: Students only share their free-write answers with you. If you choose this option, you will read students' answers and then share the general trends that you noticed during the next session.
- Medium risk: Break students into small groups, or ask them to find a partner. In these smaller groups, they can decide to share parts or all of their free-write. Do students notice any trends among their answers? These trends are what will be shared to the whole group, versus the full stories.
- High risk: Students choose one of their free-write answers and share their writing with the full group.

## SHARING OUT CONTINUED

While students are sharing their stories or the trends between themselves and their partners, write their answers on the board. If different similar answers are given, acknowledge the answer and then group it with its match.

Once students have shared out, you will synthesize the information into concrete definitions and turn general statements into specific and measurable behaviors. This process should also be a collaborative effort between you and the students. For example, a phrase like “be respectful” is vague. “Respect” can take many forms, especially in different cultures. Ask students what “respect” looks like in this classroom. Students might also have different interpretations of their needs than the way you are representing them, so stay open to being corrected and asking for suggestions of other wordings.

Once all students agree with the list of Community Agreements they have created, use poster board or a large piece of paper to write them on. Next, invite all students to sign their name at the bottom. Any staff who will work with this group during the year should also sign the document, as a reminder that they are also members of this community. Hang the poster up in a prominent place so that everyone can reference it when needed.

“

We write to have a  
word, to have a voice.”

Aneshia, 826 student



# HOW TO USE COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

Community Agreements are just that—a list of ways a classroom community agrees to treat and be treated by others. When practiced often, Community Agreements provide a framework for building supportive relationships among learners, as well supporting a restorative approach to resolving conflicts. We recommend revisiting your agreements regularly to make space for students to reflect, add, and revise agreements in community.

## Revisit Community Agreements to Support:

- Individual and group reflection
- Resetting community expectations
- Safety of all students before a high-risk activity
- Student agency in addressing and resolving conflicts
- Restorative conversations