

# Conditions For Learning

## Build Community Through Class Meetings

### Set-Up Your Circle

Practice set-up with students:

- Pair students to move desks carefully and quietly.
- Provide a map so each student knows exactly where to place their chair in the circle.
- Ask students what was done well and what we can be changed to improve the set-up of the meeting.
- Begin the next meeting with what was shared to improve.

### Energizer

Get kids moving, thinking and laughing with a quick Energizer before beginning the meeting. **Tribes** is a wonderful resource for Energizer activities. Go to [www.tribes.com](http://www.tribes.com) and click on Teaching Tools.

### Compliments

Begin with students complimenting an individual or the entire class for a behavior that was supportive, kind, encouraging, etc. "I would like to compliment (person/entire class) for (specific behavior). Student/s respond by saying "Thank you."



## Why Class Meetings?

Everyone wants to belong. As educators, we not only have the task of educating students, but also the responsibility of creating an environment that is inclusive of young people with different ethnic backgrounds, languages, values, socio-economic and academic levels.

A Class Meeting is one of many strategies that helps to strengthen a sense of belonging, provides a consistent vehicle to repair harm, allows students' concerns to be heard, and explicitly teaches students to solve conflict non-violently. By establishing a process for addressing harm, students are more likely to fully invest themselves in the classroom community, take risks, support others, stand up for themselves, speak up and speak out.



## Conflict Resolution

**Tip:** Read issues prior to the meeting so that you, as the facilitator, have an understanding of the conflicts to be resolved.

Establish your ground rules for conflict resolution. Below are a few from my classroom.

- Issues to be resolved must have been submitted in writing prior to the class meeting. A coffee can or shoebox that only you have access to keeps issues confidential.
- Read the significant events and ask the author of the issue if this is still a problem.
- If it is still a problem then ask the person to recount what happened. If not, ask the parties to share how they resolved the problem.
- One person speaks at a time. Remind students that they may hear something they don't agree with and that they must wait - they will get their turn.
- Ask student to use an "I-message" - "I feel \_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_ and I would like you to stop please."
- If necessary, mutually agree to a related consequence. For example, if a pencil was taken, the pencil would be replaced.
- Apologize and if ready, accept the apology.
- **Debrief:** How did we do? What can we do better next time?

## Class Meeting Reflections

Class meetings were initially very uncomfortable for me to facilitate. Honestly, my first attempts at running class meetings were abysmal. As the teacher, I was uneasy about being uncertain and vulnerable.

I had many questions about how to run the meetings. How long do the meetings take? How do I prepare to handle an issue? Where do students write their concerns? What if I can't resolve the issue? Won't students who are not part of the issue be disengaged? How does a meeting begin? How do we know the meeting is over?

As a young teacher I learned that, when asked, many of my colleagues were eager to share their ideas about class meetings with me. Additionally, Dr. Jane Nelsen's book, *Positive Discipline in the Classroom*, was another incredibly helpful resource.

Included in the margin of this newsletter are steps I used to facilitate my meetings. Good luck and be sure to reach out and share your questions and successes with us!

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