



IMPLEMENTING CLASS MEETINGS

Creating A Positive Climate through Increased Connection



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Class meetings is a well researched longstanding approach to creating healthy and successful students, connected classrooms, and positive schoolwide climates. The Diversity, Prevention & Intervention Department (DPI) expresses its appreciation towards resource contributors to this class meetings implementation outline:

1. [The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program](#) (OBPP), a proven program, which utilizes Hazelden's Class Meetings That Matter.
2. [The Center for The Collaborative Classroom](#), a nonprofit organization working to improve the school experience of children.
3. [Positive Discipline in the Classroom](#), a research-based classroom management program to build students' sense of community, prepare them for successful living, and increase academic achievement.

WHAT ARE CLASS MEETINGS?

Class meetings are an ongoing prevention and intervention tool designed to enhance students' social and emotional development, while increasing school, teacher and peer connectedness. Meetings create safe, open environments where students feel safe to explore emotions, concerns, and find support. An integral part of the process is learning social and emotional skills. The teacher acts as a facilitator using storytelling, role playing, discussion, and reflection to guide exploration of relevant issues such as bullying, diversity, etc. Effective meetings provide opportunities to connect as a class. As feelings and experiences are shared, boundaries are broken down and students discover they are more alike than different. Research shows class meetings can enhance lifelong prosocial development and academic success for students, while creating a positive school-wide climate. They allow students to grow individually, while the classrooms and school connect as a group.

WHY USE CLASS MEETINGS?



Research indicates class meetings can enhance relationships, increase effective communication and problem solving, while facilitating a positive, caring school climate for learning. Teachers found they proactively addressed potential problems and led to less class disruption. The social and emotional competencies learned prepared students to be productive contributors to the academic experiences as they learned how to:

- express feelings and emotions in constructive ways,
- deal with anger issues and how to calm oneself,
- build the skills needed to be independent problem solvers,
- make and maintain healthy friendships through listening, communicating, taking turns, playing games, and
- trust that their teacher and school staff understands them and are there to help them.

Many teachers have found class meetings make their job much easier because they gain a classroom full of problem-solvers. The many skills students learn during class meetings are practiced throughout the day to create a cooperative classroom atmosphere. Research shows:

- When students feel a sense of belonging and connection at school, academic performance improves, attendance improves, as does social and emotional learning (SEL).
- Class meetings help students develop a sense of responsibility, empathy and self-motivation.
- Class meetings are one of the best ways to gain a sense of belonging at school by enhancing relationships, increasing effective communication, and improving problem solving skills.
- Learn more about the impact of SEL on learning and academics at: [The Collaborative Classroom](#), [Positive Discipline Tools for Teachers](#), and [DPI's SharePoint](#).

HOW ARE CLASS MEETINGS RUN?

YOUR ROLE AS A FACILITATOR

When acting as a facilitator, your role is not to “instruct” the students, but to use the group processes in the development of your students’ SEL skills. This is done by helping the group set (and enforce) ground rules, managing the discussion, keeping the conversation respectful and productive, staying neutral (do not take sides), helping the group look at the issues from many different points of view, helping everyone in the group participate in the dialogue, and taking notes as conversations unfold. Ensure you meet all of these goals by preparing in advance and knowing the discussion materials inside and out.

SCHOOL-WIDE POSITIVE BEHAVIOR PLAN

Build class meetings into your school-wide schedule. A year's worth of engaging, age-appropriate topics conducted meaningfully in weekly class meetings, answers many of your school's needs in creating a School-wide Positive Behavior Plan toward improving school climate, student success, and connectedness.

IMPLEMENTATION SCHEDULE

- Schoolwide: The best practice for implementing class meetings is to do so universally schoolwide. Each class, each teacher should have a specific time set aside each week for a meeting, so all students and staff within the school reap its benefits.
- Weekly: Although the structure of class meeting can vary, ensuring they are conducted at least one class period per week in every classroom will get the most impact in terms of shifting your school and classroom’s culture. For elementary students, it is recommended meetings are held more frequently (multiple times a week or daily). Ensure consistency with the days and times so students can look forward to them. Some schools choose to have the meetings every Monday to set the tone for the week, while others prefer Fridays to review the week and problems that arose.
- Length: The length varies depending on age. For elementary students, 15-30 minutes per meeting is recommended, for secondary 45 minutes to 1 hour is suggested.

CLASSROOM SET-UP

Class meetings need to be held in a way where everyone can see each other, therefore hold them in a circle or semi-circle. Elementary students can use the circle-time arrangement (sitting in a circle on a rug), while secondary students can arrange their desks in a circle or semi-circle. The facilitator needs to be at the same level as the students, on the floor, or in a chair.



Some teachers choose to decorate their class meeting area. After you've determined the purpose of your class meetings, you can create an area that supports your goals. Be sure to design the space so materials are close at hand and students can easily see the props and Ground Rules you'll be using.

Include in your classroom a Suggestion Box, even if it is just a decorated empty Kleenex box. The more democratic and involved your students are in the planning, the more invested they will be in the processes and the outcomes of the meetings. Encourage your students to drop a note whenever they have an idea for a topic, a comment, or a question.

MEETING PURPOSE

Determine the purpose or goal of each class meeting prior to beginning. This will guide your objectives, structure, content, and agenda. All meetings' content and processes must be consciously facilitated in a way that improves classroom and school climate by increasing connectedness and offering opportunities for SEL growth, but classroom needs and emerging issues will dictate purpose. Below are some typical purposes for class meetings:

- **Getting Acquainted or Connecting**

These meetings are all about breaking down barriers and perceived differences. As students and teachers connect, trust is built along with a climate of collaborative learning. When planning connection activities, consider carefully the appropriateness of the activity related to the class's developmental age, maturity, and any history the class members may share. Start with low risk activities (very little potential for students being embarrassed or hurt) and then increase the risk level as the weeks progress and the class demonstrates they can handle more mature processes and content.

- **Focused SEL Skill Development/Targeted Risk and Protective Factors**

These meetings are designed to enhance students' social and emotional development. The objectives and activities help students learn and practice knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. See Additional Resources & Links for lessons on SEL topics and skill development.

- **Problem Solving**

These meetings are used when there is a specific problem or conflict that has arisen. The class works together to come up with solutions to the problem. In these meetings, the first step is to make sure that everyone understands the problem or the challenge and why it is important to the class. Next, the class brainstorms solutions and evaluates possible choices before deciding on the best choice. After implementing the solution, students will follow up to evaluate its effectiveness. The advantage to this format lies in the opportunity to have children participate in a modified form of democracy, learning to listen to others, and to think about meeting the needs of the whole group rather than just individuals. Resources for this method can be found at [Positive Discipline in the Classroom](#) and [Creating Positive Environments through Class Meetings](#).

- **Planning**

These meetings allow the class to engage in cooperative planning of an important event like the Above the Influence March, a field trip, a class project, etc.

- **Morning Meetings**

This format helps students and teachers connect and start the day on a positive note. They are predominantly devoted to social and emotional development. Resources for this method can be found at [The Responsive Classroom](#).

- **Specialized Programs for Class Meetings**

- Bullying Prevention: A great resource for this method is Hazelden's Class Meetings that Matter books as part of the [Olweus Bullying Prevention Program](#).
- Youth Ambassadors: [Ophelia CASS \(Creating A Safe School\) Manual](#) provides helpful ideas for class meetings including lessons and recommendations for using youth ambassadors.



- **Goal-Setting:** These meetings often take a little longer because they focus on identifying, clarifying, and reaching consensus on goals for behavior and/or performance. Be clear with the students from the beginning what the focus of the discussion is and keep them on topic. This process allows students to participate in a modified form of democracy, learning to listen to others, and to think about the needs of the whole group rather than just individuals. DeVries and Zan have written extensively on these benefits, such as *When Children Make Rules* and *Moral Classroom, Moral Children*.
- **Assessing/Evaluating:** These meetings focus on the basic question of, “how well did we do?” They start by asking students to identify positives about their performance, then relate the performance to goals or standards and whether they have been met. Next, areas of improvement are identified by the students. Once the areas of improvement are identified, the meeting can shift to a problem-solving orientation or this can be set up for the next meeting.

TOPICS

There are numerous books and resources online that can script your meetings for the entire year, but they can also be “teacher generated” or “student generated”. It is recommended the students participate in the process and agendas. No matter your choice of topic or problem, ensure you focus on the positives. Make the messages you are sending pro-social and norm healthy behaviors, not unhealthy or anti-social behaviors. For example, although many people are starving around the world, also discuss what efforts countries are making to solving the problem. Or, although SOME students smoke marijuana, anonymous surveys of our students show that MOST don't. Discuss what strategies students may use to remain drug free.

Before choosing a topic for a class meeting ask yourself, what behaviors am I seeing in my classroom, in the hallways, or in the community? Is there a skill my students could use more practice with? Below are some potential sources for lesson topics:

- Newspaper articles or current events.
- Lessons from [DPI's SharePoint](#) based on the class's needs. For example, the Be the 1 Bullying Prevention Program lessons, We Are Broward Immigrant Safe Place Plan lessons, Think B4U Post Internet Safety lessons, etc.
- Topics chosen from the Suggestion Box in your classroom.
- Self-regulation such as expressing emotions appropriately, calming down, or self-control.
- Friendship skills such as taking turns, sharing, or listening.
- Empathy such as caring about others, thinking of others before ourselves, or helping others.
- Bullying such as how to stop it or how to recognize it.
- Conflict resolution such as problem solving skills.
- Respect such as recognizing differences, appreciation, acceptance, kindness, and love.
- Cooperation and responsibility towards oneself, others, in the classroom, and school.
- Basic needs versus wants.
- Books can be used to guide meetings. They are powerful tools in expressing what is sometimes difficult to explain. Have your school's Prevention Liaison sign up to borrow a set of SEL related books for your classroom at [DPI's SharePoint](#).

USING ROLE PLAYS

Role plays are one of the best ways to learn and retain information and skills, but sadly are one of the least frequently used teaching methods. It's essential to use role plays frequently with class meetings. The basic process behind creating a role play is as follows:

1. Before you begin, decide ahead of time the purpose or goals of the role play and keep the topic age appropriate. To develop empathy, have students step into the “shoes” of another in the role play. Avoid having participants role play aggression whenever possible. Instead, start the role play after the aggressive act has taken place or have the facilitator play the role of the aggressor.
2. Explain the purpose of role play and the responsibility of each participant. Emphasize that role playing helps them generate solutions to a problem or explore unfamiliar situations. The purpose is to be educational, experimental, fun, informative, intentional, and practical. Assign roles to participants or ask for volunteers. Clearly state each person's character and their role.



3. Prepare the audience and remind them to be attentive to behaviors. They will be asked to provide feedback. It may be helpful to assign specific audience members key elements to look for (aggressor, target, bystander, upstander, non-verbal communication, signs of aggression, making it right, etc.) Choose elements that match the goals of the role play. If participants are not quite sure of what is expected, the facilitator should provide guidance and demonstration. Never ask students to do something you would not be comfortable doing yourself.
4. Present the role play for the audience. Consider presenting multiple options based on the same premise.
5. Process the role play to provide participants the opportunity to discuss how it felt and what they were thinking while in the various roles. This is the time where youth draw meaning from the role play experience and make connections to their own lives. Ensure you have created processing questions in advance.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- Set a regular schedule for the meetings and share it with your students.
- Plan to conduct a class meeting at least once per week.
- Recognize change happens in increments and it will take time and repetition to train your students before they fully understand the process and expectations and can be effective participants in classroom meetings. Without training and practice, they will resort to the “skills” they have used previously - blaming, name calling, avoiding accountability, etc.
- Communicate regularly with other teachers to find what is working in their classrooms.
- Always be face to face in a circle or semi-circle at their level during the meeting.
- Include genuine compliments and appreciation. Encourage students to do the same.
- Catch students demonstrating the behaviors and character traits you are discussing.
- Role model the behaviors you expect your students to exhibit.
- Encourage the appreciation of differences.
- As long as no one is being hurt or disrespected, it’s OK to agree to disagree.
- Teach and model respectful communication skills, such as “I messages”.
- When problem solving, spend most of the time focusing on solutions.
- Use role-playing and brainstorming frequently.
- Before you begin, have an agenda with known objectives.
- Expect interruptions and the tendency for some students to monopolize, while others shy away from sharing. Make sure to include everyone by referencing ground rules allowing everyone a chance to speak. You can also pass a “talking stick”, but allow a “pass policy”.
- Remember your role is not to teach curriculum, but to facilitate, lead, and role model, while keeping everyone safe and heard respectfully.
- Use continuous improvement. Monitor progress, evaluate your efforts, and make changes for improvement as needed. Include students in the process.
- Switch between large and small group activities, keeping the meetings interesting and allowing opportunities for students to pair with whom they might not normally socialize.
- Try to include families and parents in the process, the level of involvement and effort by families, staff, and students in the school meetings help increase success and longevity.
- Integrate meeting messages across curriculum.
- In classes where the students are old enough, have students eventually lead the meetings.
- Sometimes meetings will focus on sharing feelings and listening, not brainstorming for solutions. Clarify with students when that is the request, to discuss without “fixing”. It still builds community and not all problems can be easily solved. If a student is looking for solutions, allow the student to choose the solution he/she thinks would be the most helpful.
- Self-disclosure on your part should be limited and age appropriate. Let the students be the ones sharing.
- Remember that retaining classroom control and meeting expediency are not more important than teaching life skills.



GROUND RULES

Create ground rules during the first class meeting. Use DPI's Class Meetings #1 script and ensure you follow best practices. It is located in [DPI's Sharepoint](#) along with script #2 and #3.

Ground Rules lay the foundation for trusting and successful classroom meetings. Create them with your class and enforce them calmly and consistently. Depending on when you begin your class meetings, your classroom may have already established many of these Ground Rules. Keep them posted and reference them year-round. Provide time in future meetings to discuss any rules students are having difficulty following. Review the importance of the rules and discuss how they can take responsibility for following them.

Ensure the following rules are included:

- **Everyone is respected.** You might need to clarify, what does that look like, sound like, feel like? Class meetings are safe, open environments. Students should feel comfortable sharing their experiences and viewpoints on any topic being addressed. Meetings need to be free of name calling, ridicule, finger pointing, monopolization, and intimidation. Point out that words such as "weird", "gay", and "dumb" may feel like they don't carry the same weight as racial or gender slurs, however, they still alienate, exclude and hurt. Name-calling is never harmless.
- **Class meetings are confidential.** Personal information, feelings, and situations should be respected as confidential and limited for discussion only within class meetings. But we can't MAKE anyone not tell our secrets, so don't use names when mentioning problems or discussing personal issues, particularly when they aren't yours. Instead say, "I know someone who" or "people".
- **You are a Mandated Reporter.** Make this point immediately following the confidentiality rule. If you are told anyone is being hurt, or hurting someone else, YOU WILL TELL as a mandated reporter. If a student wants to tell you a problem without it being reported, suggest they use, "I know someone who".
- **Have a "pass policy"** if someone is not ready for their turn to speak.
- **All ideas are welcome.** Class meetings are solution seeking opportunities and there will be lots of brainstorming. We accept all ideas and keep it positive. While some class meetings are aimed at problem solving or mediation, they are not just gripe sessions. The focus of a meeting should not be on complaining about a problem, but on seeking a positive solution.
- **We can agree to disagree.** As long as no one is being hurt or disrespected, it's OK to agree to disagree. We respect our differences and don't expect to all feel, look, sound, think the same.

HANDLING DISCLOSURES

As it states in the Ground Rules, you are a Mandated Reporter. When a student discloses to you they are being hurt, are hurting others, or may harm themselves, follow all mandated reporting and threat assessment procedures. If the concern is threat of harm to self, follow threat assessment protocols and do not leave that student alone. Take them to an administrator or your school's counselor. Keep in mind if a student discloses they are gay, this is confidential, and you may not tell the parent(s) or other staff unless there is a safety concern or there is a legitimate educational reason. If a student starts to disclose something during a class meeting that you suspect might need reporting, ask that student to speak to you after the meeting privately. If you suspect, witness or are told of any acts of violence or bullying, immediately tell your school administrators. Always follow up on any reports of threats to safety or bullying. If you witness bullying, use the 6 Step On-the-Spot intervention for bullying taught in the Broward Schools annual staff anti-bullying training module and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. Follow up with a report to your administrator.

CLASS MEETING TEMPLATE



PREPARATION IN ADVANCE

Meeting Purpose/Topic

- Determining the purpose of the meeting. Will it be a planning or decision making meeting, a skill teaching meeting, or a problem solving meeting?
- The purpose guides the choice of topic. There are limitless topics suitable for class meetings.

Length of Meeting

- The length will be determined by the age and experience of students, as well as the purpose and topic.

Materials Needed

Student Objectives

- Choose the objectives and skills to focus on with your students. Ensure at least one is measurable and determine what data will be used to ascertain whether the objectives have been met.

INTRODUCTION/DISCUSSION

Greet Students/Reference Posted Ground Rules/Genuine Praise

- Form a circle for the class meeting with your students. Join them so you are at eye level and part of it.
- Greet your students and have them greet each other by name. There are many greeting activities, including handshaking, singing, clapping and greeting in different languages.
- Reference the posted Ground Rules.
- Offer any genuine compliments and appreciations, either about how they formed up, interacted so far, or in recognition of students having met goals during the week from previous meetings.

Introduce the Topic (video, image, question, quote, story)

- Introduce the topic and set the stage for the lesson.
- Try to get their attention and sensitize them to the subject with a story, video, image, question, or quote.
- Introduce any new vocabulary or concepts.

Discuss the Topic (brief, clarifying questions, sharing)

- Choose in advance questions on your topic that define the topic, personalize it, and extend it. Briefly facilitate a discussion of what this topic means to them, by either sharing in the circle or partnering.
- Talk about the students' hopes for the meeting.

GROUP ACTIVITY/STUDENT INTERACTION

Community or Skill Building Activity (role play, pair and share, problem solving)

- All participate in the social and emotional skill building activity, which fosters group cohesion. Frequently include role playing. Other options include extended discussion, solution brainstorming, cooperative learning groups, or creating a project. Ensure the activity connects to the purpose/goals for this meeting.
- Provide directions so the students know what they need to do to successfully complete the activity.

REFLECTION/WRAP UP/NEXT STEPS

Reflect on the Activity

- After the activity, reform the circle and pose reflection questions. Answer in rounds. Students need time to reflect upon what they have learned.

Wrap-Up/Teacher Summary

- Recap the highlights of the meeting and activity, synthesizing what they have learned or shared.

Next Steps/Action Plan

- Discuss with students what they can do to put the strategies and ideas addressed in this meeting into practice. If there are any next steps, provide agreed upon timelines.
- Preview the next meeting.
- Celebrate what your class has accomplished.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & LINKS

- [Anti-Defamation League](#): Curriculum and materials related to many SEL and diversity topics.
- [Center for the Collaborative Classroom](#): A nonprofit organization which improves the school experience of children across the globe by providing teachers with engaging curricula and ongoing professional learning that support the academic as well as the social and emotional development of the students we all serve.
- [The Cornerstone for Teachers](#), Angela Watson.
- [Creating Positive Environments through Class Meetings](#).
- DPI's Classroom Meetings Staff Training: For schools wishing to implement class meetings schoolwide, DPI offers a brief "how to" training. It trains schools on how to establish and maintain systemic schoolwide classroom meetings to improve school climate, as well as student to student and teacher to student connectedness. Call 754-321-1655 for more information.
- [DPI's Free Resource List](#).
- [DPI's SharePoint](#).
- [Everyday Democracy](#): Provides resources such as downloadable handouts, lessons, activities, discussion guides, tips, and stories to use in your community change efforts.
- [GLSEN](#): Materials and videos related to LGBT support, No Name Calling Week, and Mix It Up Day.
- [Inside the Collaborative Classroom](#): Free resources and videos focused on SEL, offering practical support for building and maintaining a collaborative classroom. View the [First Eight Weeks Class Meetings](#).
- [It's a Good Thing](#): In this essay from *Rethinking Schools*, author Steven Wolk suggests teachers use class meetings as a democratic way to help students express their values.
- [James M. Bennet's High School](#): Contains a strong list of discussion topics.
- [LEAPS](#): Register to access lesson plans and interactive multi-modality assessment tools.
- [Mix It Up at Lunch Day](#): National observance campaign (last Tuesday each October,) encouraging students to identify, question and cross social boundaries by asking students to connect with someone new. Downloadable curricula, classroom activities, and posters.
- [Morning Meeting from The Responsive Classroom](#): These meetings are almost entirely devoted to social and emotional development, but academic review can be incorporated as well.
- [Olweus Bullying Prevention Program](#) (OBPP): *Class Meetings That Matter* books are part of OBPP (cost associated) and provide instructions on holding class meetings to build a positive classroom climate; identify feelings; communicate; assess bullying hot spots; improve peer relationships; and respect differences. It contains enough scripted meetings for approximately a year.
- [Ophelia Project Creating a Safe School \(CASS\) Manual](#).
- [Positive Discipline in the Classroom](#) (developed by Jane Nelsen and Lynn Lott): A research-based classroom management program (cost associated) that empowers teachers with skills to build their students' sense of community, prepare them for successful living, and increase academic achievement. View a [free sample](#).
- [Proud To Be Primary](#).
- [The Responsive Classroom](#): Helps teachers create environments where social and academic learning thrive. Books on the topic sold, but free printables are also available.
- [Sanford Harmony](#): A social-emotional (SEL) teaching program cultivating strong classroom relationships between students. Incorporate specialized teaching strategies into classroom activities to reduce bullying by developing student skills to: communicate, cooperate, connect, embrace diversity, and resolve conflict.
- [Teachers Pay Teachers](#).
- [Teaching Tolerance](#): Lessons and videos such as *Building Community, Day by Day*.



