

Ground Rules or Community Agreements

"What guidelines can we agree on now in order to create a learning environment in which we can ask each other anything?" (from the work of Claude Steele)

Steps for Creating Community Agreements

1. **Seek to Create Active Learning (Not "Safe") Space** – reserve “safe space” terminology for trauma-related healing spaces
2. **Recognize Common Pitfalls** – learn from the facilitation literature and share key concepts (e.g. intent vs. impact; centering voices of marginalized people, etc.) with students
3. **Co-Create Agreements/Solicit Student Input** – facilitate brainstorming, revisioning, and prioritizing processes
4. **Define Behaviors** – help move student language from broad concepts (e.g., "Be respectful") to specific behaviors (e.g. what does respect look like? do we listen deeply to things that are harmful?)
5. **Build Consensus** – ask students to agree on each rule, and gain consensus before enacting
6. **Create a Contingency Plan** – collaboratively decide how you will respond when an agreement is breached
7. **Develop Check-In Procedures** – check-in regularly on how well the class is adhering to ground rules
8. **Keep the Ground Rules Visible** – create a shared document or visual that keeps the ground rules visible every class

Sample Community Agreements

- East Bay Meditation Center: [Community Agreements](#)
- University of Michigan, CRLT: [Establishing Ground Rules or Guidelines](#)

Adapted from: Jennifer Stephens & Laura Pipe, [Just Classrooms: Promoting Equity in Teaching](#)