A Protocol for Developing Goals, Declarations and the Social Contract

Beginnings

When we think of the beginning of a new school year one of the things that comes to mind is, “What rules will we need for a successful school year?” Through our CARE for Kids training we see the importance of inviting our students to share in the creation of our classroom social contract so that what was before just “the rules” becomes our class agreement.

During those first few days of school, our students may not yet be comfortable enough to share their opinions during CPR—it is relationship building after all—and their opinions being heard is vital to the success of the social contract. Because of this, delaying the development of the social contract itself for a bit may be beneficial. This of course doesn’t mean that we operate without direction until then. These beginning days are vital for the establishment of a sense of calm and order. This is the time you will set the tone and go over important routines and procedures that your team and/or school have developed for a smooth school year. Giving students a few days to become acclimated to the routines and procedures will give them the sense of safety that they need in order to invest in the process of creation of the social contract. If we don’t give them this time, the activity will be superficial. During opening days you will lay the groundwork for the important work to follow.

• Establishing the signal for quiet is something that needs to be shared on the first day of school. However, it does not need to be discussed and should never be negotiated. It is important to be clear on how the signal will be used and exactly how students are to respond. Modeling and practicing this are important during the first days of school.
• Sharing your expectations for group discussions. Even though students will construct the specific guidelines, you will set the parameters for the task. The non-negotiable piece that must be made clear to the students is that the guidelines must support the goals of everyone and that everyone
will have the opportunity to share ideas. If the expectations are stated negatively, reframe it in the positive. For example, “don’t talk while others are talking” may become “listen when others are speaking.” As part of the community, add any guidelines you feel are missing.

- See your CARE for Kids Resource Binder for a list of routines and procedures that need to be taught.
- Conducting CPR every day will prepare students for this valuable routine. Be sure to include all parts of the circle: greeting, sharing, activity and news and announcements. This works as a form of proactive discipline because it meets basic needs that we all have for significance, belonging and fun!
- Use activities from Unit One: Getting Acquainted from The Advisory Book page 139-145. Each CPR 1-13 helps students get to know each other and themselves which provides a foundation for the students in identifying goals and declarations.

CPR (Purpose of Rules)

News and Announcements:

Good morning Community Members!
Today we’re going to talk about the purposes of rules. Think about rules you’ve encountered in and out of school. Some of them probably make sense to you while others may not. One of our community goals in the next few days will be to establish the rules that we will use as we work together this year. Before we do that, we need to think about why we need rules at all.

Let’s have a great day!
(Your signature)

Please record your opinion below with a tally mark:

Rules are necessary Rules are unnecessary

Greetings:

Snowball Greeting (Advisory page 225)

Sharing:

Think, Ink, Pair, Share (Advisory page 231)
Materials: paper, pencils

I see from our entering activity that _____ of you believe that rules are necessary at least in some cases. I’ve spent some time thinking about the rules we have here at school and considering the purposes for those rules.
For our share today, I’d like for you to think of one rule you’ve encountered and the reason that rule was created. Record your thinking on your paper (2-3 min.). Now, beginning with ______, pair with the person to your left to share what each of you has written (5 min.).

Let’s take a few minutes to share our conversations. Who would like to begin? (5 min.) As students share, record the purposes of rules for the class to see. The list may include purposes based on the following:

- creation of a sense of order and predictability
- creation of a climate of respect
- creation of a safe place
- teaching self-control
- development of social awareness and responsibility
- balancing the needs of the group with the needs of individuals

This looks like a good list to guide our thinking when we start to think about the rules we’ll form for ourselves as a community.

Activity:
Simultaneous Clap (Advisory page 255)

When we play games we use rules. These may be written rules, stated rules or rules that develop on their own as we play. As we play Simultaneous Clap, pay attention to the rules we follow. Let’s play. Explain the game and play.

Reflection: What did you notice happening as we played the game? Did we create informal, unspoken rules? How did this affect the game?

Great job working together! Let’s give the person on either side of us a high five!

CPR (Goals and Declarations)

News and Announcements:

Greetings!

It’s a new school year. This is a perfect time to think about what we want to achieve this year. Picture yourself having a successful school year. What do you see? What words come to mind? Choose an adjective from this mental picture that describes you and write it on the chart below.

Peace!
(Your signature)

Adjectives that describe you having a successful year:
Greeting:
Peace Greeting (Advisory page 222)

Sharing:
To create the conditions for hopeful thinking that is needed in goal setting select a quick read like a picture book on people who have persevered or choose a film clip or tell a story to set the stage. Discuss the characters, what their goals were and how they went about reaching those goals.

Suggested book titles:
Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul
Snowflake Bentley
Uncle Jed’s Barbershop
Salt in His Shoes: Michael Jordan in Pursuit of a Dream

Suggested films for clips:
Stand and Deliver
Hoop Dreams
Akeelah and the Bee

Suggested stories:
Tell students any story that deals with a character who must make a plan to achieve a goal. This could be a story from your own experience or a story from the oral tradition.

Activity:
So far we’ve pictured ourselves being successful this year and discussed how others have set and reached goals. Now it is time to set goals for ourselves for the school year and to formally declare those goals. Each of us will make two declarations—one that is an academic goal and one that is social. For example, an academic goal may be ‘I will improve my math skills this year’ and a social goal may be ‘I will make new friends this year.’ We will create a visual representation of our declarations. You may use illustrations, symbols or text to formally declare your plans for your successful year.

When students have finished, display their declarations in the classroom or bind them together in a class book that will be available for sharing throughout the year.

You’ve done important work today. Setting goals and declaring them to others is the first step toward success. Let’s celebrate with an Alligator Clap.

Extensions:
• Students can use a planning tool to think through and plan the steps they must take to reach their goals.
• Parents and/or guardians can become a part of the process if you choose to ask them what goals they have for their child this year. This could be woven in to open house activities or parent/teacher conferences.
• You may choose to revisit goals and declarations on an ongoing basis for check-in and revision if needed. This could take the form of individual conferences between you and the student or it may simply be a class reflection centered around questions to guide student thinking like: Have you moved toward reaching your goals? What changes, if any, need to be made in order for you to achieve your goals?

CPR (Developing the Social Contract)

News and Announcements:
Good morning, Friends!

This week we’ve considered why rules are needed, we’ve pictured ourselves having a successful school year and we’ve made our declarations that will guide us to that success. Since we are not in this alone—we are a community—we have the help of one another in achieving our goals. We know what each of us is working toward. Today we will develop a social contract that will help us support one another so we can all reach our goals.

I’m glad you’re here!
(Your signature)

Take a What Do You Stand For? survey. Follow the instructions on the sheet; we’ll use these during our share today.

Greeting:
Step-In Greeting (Advisory page 225)

Sharing:
• We’ve been talking about how rules help us work together smoothly and safely. We will develop a social contract to serve as guidelines for our group. This social contract will be developed and agreed to by all our community members. Our goal is to make an agreement that will support our community members as they strive to achieve their declarations for the year.
• The social contract is a description of ideal behaviors. It is concise—only 3-5 guidelines are necessary. It is a document that we will agree to through consensus building that will include everyone. We will have ongoing discussions about amending it as situations arise around what is fair, ethical and healthy for our community.
When you came in this morning you completed a survey about things that are important to you. In a minute, we are going to do a whip share; I’d like for you to choose one of the three character traits you selected to share with the group. Please state the trait you value and why it is important to you.

As students whip share, keep an informal tally of the traits named. Debrief with observations about the top recurring traits and comments. Discuss with students how these traits are to be considered when developing the social contract.

**Activity:**

Materials—post-it notes and 5 sentence strips per group.

Individual Task: Students will have some individual think time before joining a group.

I’m giving each of you three post-it notes. On each post-it write one agreement you believe is important to include in our social contract this year. As you do this, think about the declarations you’ve made for yourself and the traits we agreed were valuable (3-5 min.)

Use Table Top (Advisory page 257) to have students form work groups of 4-5. Each member of the group will share the agreements written on the post-its. As they are shared the group can begin to make some sorting selections; the idea is to put like ideas together. After your group has sorted their ideas discuss how 3-5 agreements can be stated for your group. For example, you may have the following ideas grouped together:

1. Be quiet when others are talking.
2. Don’t talk when the teacher is teaching.
3. Listen to others when they are talking.

Together these could become an agreement to: Listen respectfully to others.

Write each agreement on a sentence strip. Remember to state your agreements in positive language (10 min.)

As groups finish, instruct them to place their sentence strips in a central location where the sorting and combining process can begin. Encourage students to place their strips with others that are similar. When all groups have added their agreement strips, debrief with the class how the strips have been organized; use students’ suggestions to reorganize as necessary until all have been combined into 3-5 guidelines for the class.

Use the attached consensus building process so that all students have an opportunity to provide input and to be heard. It is important that this process is followed rather than defaulting to “a vote.” When consensus has been reached a final version of the social contract should be published and posted. This work could be ritualized by asking community members to sign the agreement.
We now have our own Social Contract, an agreement which will guide us all year long as we work to achieve our individual goals. I promise, as the adult leader in this room, to respect this contract and do everything I can to keep us safe, happy and successful.

Extensions:

• Development of a team social contract has advantages as students move from room to room on a team. This contract could be developed by gathering representatives from each class together to complete the initial work; as part of this work, the representatives would gather feedback from their class members for sharing and development of the contract. It is important, however, that there is a general assembly that follows in which the team social contract is read and signed.

• Development of a school-wide social contract is a possibility. This may include the adoption of the guidelines developed for common areas. The representative model would be followed. It is vital that all community members feel that they’ve been heard in the process. If you choose to do this, it is important that all reservations are heard and addressed until the whole group can reach consensus.

Next Steps:
Modeling and practicing the social contracts that have been developed is critical. Remember: assume nothing; teach everything.
What Do You Stand For?

Circle three character traits that you most desire to be known for. Next to each trait you circle write why it is important to you.

Courage
Friendship
Honesty
Tolerance
Justice
Imagination
Wisdom
Fairness
Integrity
Responsibility
Caring
Assertiveness
Confidence
Honor
Empathy
Kindness
Self-Control
Cooperation
Building Consensus

When a group is working to build community, all important decisions that affect the whole group should be made by consensus. Creating a Social Contract, deciding on a solution to a class issue, or making decisions about where to go for an end-of-the-year field trip—are all decisions that would be best made via consensus to ensure that all voices are heard and respected.

The Process
To make a decision using consensus:

1. Propose the question or issue clearly and check for understanding. All group members must be clear about what is being discussed, because after consensus they will all be bound by the decision about how to handle the issue.
2. Let everyone who wishes to, speak to the question or issue and offer solutions. Some students may speak more than others because they know more about or have a greater interest in the topic.
3. When you get down to a few possible solutions, you may wish to take a straw (nonbinding) vote to see which solutions are generally the most popular. Eventually you will narrow down to one solution that seems to satisfy most people.
4. State the proposed solution and ask students to show their level of commitment. Three thumbs works well for this:

   - Thumb up means “I agree and fully support the decision.”
   - Thumb sideways means “I am not in total agreement, but can live with the decision.”
   - Thumb down means “I do not agree and need to be heard.”

Consensus requires that all group members give either a thumbs up or sideways. If even one person is thumb down, more discussion must ensue.

When the group is struggling to come to agreement
When individuals or subgroups are unwilling to consent to a proposal, students will likely suggest that the group votes instead of using consensus to decide. Remind them that communities are inclusive and as a community you are unwilling to leave anybody behind.

Here are some suggestions when the group is stuck and not making progress.
✓ Ask: What do we need to change or add to the proposed decisions so we can all live with the solution?
✓ Stop the process and take a break. We need to take a break and will continue with our discussion tomorrow.
✓ Suggest that those who do not like the solution speak one-to-one with a person who does support it, so they can see each other’s point of view.
✓ Look for new insight. We need to study our decision some more. Tonight, think about or discuss with someone new solutions or changes we can make so everybody can agree.

Remember…
Consensus is organic in that the final decision may be different from what anybody expected. It requires dialogue, empathy, and understanding by all parties involved.

Consensus considers all viewpoints. It welcomes diversity. A decision created with consensus is less likely to create resentment or factions that undermine it.

Consensus encourages the viewpoints of all those who have an interest in the topic. The group must work to acknowledge that on any given topic there are a variety of legitimate views and the work of the group is to come up with a solution that all group members can live with.

Consensus does not mean that each person is 100% satisfied with the decision presented. It requires that the entire group be willing to accept or consent to the decision. The decision will most likely require compromise—community usually does.

Most students do not have much experience with consensus and need to be taught how to dialogue and compromise, a valuable life skill. It is best to practice consensus first on decisions that are less controversial, such as what food to have at a party, behaviors required during the morning break, or times when the pencil sharpener can be used. These will prepare students for more controversial decisions.