

GROUND RULES FOR DISCUSSION

Lesson for Upper Elementary, Middle and High School Students

Purpose:

Prior to engaging in a discussion about the ideas and feelings of young people about a recent incident of violence or hate, it is helpful to create ground rules that promote a safe and supportive atmosphere where youth feel comfortable and where they perceive that their ideas and feelings are accepted and valued.

Materials Needed:

Board/Smart board or chart paper, markers, paper, pens or pencils

Time:

20–30 minutes

Directions:

1. Begin by asking young people to imagine they are playing a game of basketball. Ask them what the game would be like if none of the players bothered to follow the rules. Then ask what it might be like to play the game without any rules.
2. Explain that the topic(s) you will be discussing can be difficult at times because it can evoke many emotions for people. In order to have an honest and meaningful conversation, it will be helpful to think about how to communicate with one another during this discussion.
3. Divide participants into small groups, provide paper to each group and ask groups to choose one member to serve as a recorder of their discussion. Instruct groups to come to consensus on two or three ground rules that they feel would be important when having a discussion. Ask them to write down the proposed ground rules and to discuss all the reasons why they believe this is an important ground rule.
4. Have each small group select one of their proposed ground rules and create a short skit (1–2 minutes) that shows the importance of the ground rule by doing one of the following:
 - Illustrate what could happen without it, or
 - Demonstrate an effective discussion that happens because the rule was followed.
5. Reconvene the whole group and have each small group share their ground rules and perform their skit. As groups share their ground rules, create a composite list on chart paper or the board/smart board.
6. If the following points are not mentioned, stress the importance of respecting one another's opinions, being open to new ideas, having empathy, listening actively and maintaining confidentiality.