

UTAH CIVILITY AND COMMUNITY

Who Is Welcome Here? & What Is My Responsibility to Create A Caring Community for Others?



**Utah Civility Initiative
School Activity**

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Implementing a Class Meeting or Learning Circle for Elementary Students

Have students in the class participate in a class meeting to discuss ideas about friendship and creating a welcoming community for others in the class and in the school. The teacher can have students sit in a circle while leading the discussion and to capture ideas on chart-pack paper or on the blackboard as students discuss and problem-solve.

(Note: The teacher should set out guidelines before the discussion and ask students to listen respectfully to one another's ideas. The teacher may also want to make the class meeting a regularly scheduled part of the week — to celebrate accomplishments, summarize learning, discuss problems, weigh in on class policy, build a sense of community, etc. Also, as students watch the teacher model a class meeting process, the teacher may want to eventually have individual students lead the conversation when appropriate.)

SOME QUESTIONS STUDENTS COULD DISCUSS:

- What is a friend?
- What are some things everyone worries about when they come to school? What do we all need when we come to school?
- What would we see, hear and feel if our class was a place where everyone could feel safe to learn, and feel part of a caring, respectful community?
- What could we do as a class to make everyone feel welcome in this class and in this school? How can we best be a friend to others? How does being a good friend help me grow as a person?

The teacher could also have students consider creating a **touchstone**, or classroom motto, such as “the Emerson Way.” *(A touchstone is a standard, measure, model or pattern for the qualities of a thing or by which a judgment is made.)* Students could make a poster with their best ideas for creating a caring, welcoming community for everyone in the class and in the school through their ideas, or through their class touchstone or motto *(with some explanation of behaviors they would commit to modeling and suggested by the touchstone or motto.)* They could then have a signing ceremony or at a later date.

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Implementing a Student Forum or Town Meeting for Secondary Students

Have a cross-section of students in the school community participate in a student forum or town meeting by moving from table to table for a series of conversations around the topic, “Who is Welcome Here, and What is My Responsibility to Create a Caring Community for Others?” *(Or, all students could participate in a school wide student forum in each of their advisory homerooms, or during an extended block period to set the tone for the new school year.)*

Have each new welcome conversation posted on a flipchart at the front of the room. Have a flipchart and markers at each table for students to capture ideas as well. Remind students to identify one person as the recorder in each round of fifteen-minute conversations to record ideas. *(To create a variety of different groupings as the conversations progress, and to hear a range of perspectives, have a few students from each table move to the next table at the conclusion of each conversation. Have a variety of ways to identify who moves — two students who sat in particular seats, students born in winter, any student born out of state, etc.)* The teacher will signal the start and finish of each conversation with a bell, wind chimes, etc. Before students move on to a new conversation hear a sample of responses from each table to the whole group.

WHO IS WELCOME HERE? CONVERSATIONS:

Conversations #1: “In our school community, who is welcome here?”

Conversation #2: “Tell about a time that you felt welcome.” “Tell about a time that you didn’t feel welcome.”

Conversation #3: “How do we show that everyone is welcome?” “What does welcome ‘look like’?” “What does it ‘look like’ in English class? Does it look different in P.E.?” “What does it ‘look like’ on the playing field, in the hallways, or in the cafeteria?”

Conversation #4: “What else could we do as a school to promote caring, respect and civility?” “What is my own commitment to welcoming others?”

At the conclusion of the final conversation, have students synthesize and summarize their thinking on the questions: “**What else could we do as a school to promote caring, respect and civility?**” and “**What is my own commitment to civility and to welcoming others?**” and write their ideas down on chart-pack paper. Ask each group to make a three-minute presentation to the whole group that captures their three best ideas, and what would make the biggest difference.

The teacher can track each of the group's top three ideas at the front of the room, (*on chart pack paper, blackboard, smart board, etc.*) making check marks by ideas that are repeated more than once. At the end of the presentations, students can discuss and narrow down the list to the top three best ideas they can commit to and that would make the biggest difference in the school. Students could then have a signing ceremony and either sign the document at the conclusion of the forum, or have students in the class create a new, artistic document with the classes' commitment written on it, and space for all class members to sign at a later date.

This class activity could become a school wide activity as student representatives from each class could meet together at a later date to present their class' constitution to others and hammer out a school wide constitution that all students could commit to, based on their class constitutions. All students could participate in a signing ceremony at a later date, with the final, signed document posted in a prominent place in the school.

The discussion could also be connected to the statewide civility project as a final step, with students passing on the civility cards to others they know in the community with an explanation of why civility matters, why it starts with creating a welcoming community for everyone, and how to get involved.

Take the Civility Pledge:

I pledge my commitment to personal reflection and assessment of my conduct as I strive to do my part to build a more civil society – one in which each person is respected and public and political discourse are aimed at the betterment of our communities, our state and our nation.

I will respect other's rights to hold different opinions; strive to understand differing perspectives; avoid rhetoric that humiliates and belittles others; speak out against incivility and act to promote respect for all people.

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