

Students are bombarded by violence on TV, in the movies, social media, news reports, gaming platforms, and for many, in their own lives. Violence can take many forms, including bullying on campus, abuse by family members, dating violence, gang violence, or structural violence. Experiencing and witnessing violence in any form can cause trauma and other mental health concerns. Research has shown that people who experience violence may be more likely to perpetuate violence towards others. Violence can cause feelings of anger, helplessness, hopelessness, and in some cases, lead to thoughts of suicide. Talking with students about the roots and dynamics of violence may help reduce their vulnerability of becoming survivors or perpetrators of violence and increase the likelihood that a student who has experienced or is experiencing violence will reach out for help.

Talking about violence provides all students with information about different types of violence and the signs that someone may be experiencing violence so that they can be an upstander for others. Helping students recognize the warning signs can empower them to offer support to a peer who is struggling and encourage the peer to get the help they need. All students can benefit from learning protective strategies against being a target or survivor of violence such as self-advocacy, respect, healthy relationships, safe and ethical behaviors, and boundaries. Students can also benefit by developing protective strategies to reduce the risk of being a perpetrator of violence such as stress management, conflict resolution, problem-solving, and mindfulness.

Because of their daily interaction with students, teachers can play a key role in helping to identify students who may be witnessing or experiencing violence. By understanding the risk factors and identifying the warning signs, teachers can be aware of changes in a student's behavior or demeanor that may indicate a problem. As mandatory reporters, all teachers are required to report any suspicions or disclosures of abuse according to the school's protocols. In addition, teachers can provide instruction on protective strategies that can help to reduce students' vulnerability to violence.

BEFORE THE LESSON

Review the Rethink Ed Teacher Training on Violence

It is recommended that all school personnel, including support staff, participate in the Preventing Violence training together. All adults on campus should understand the protocols for referring students who may be experiencing violence for further evaluation and support. As mandatory reporters, all teachers are required to report any suspicions or disclosure of any type of violence toward a student as outlined by your school's protocols.

It is also important that every school have procedures and guidelines in place to keep students safe on campus. Share the procedures with the students so that everyone is aware that protocols are in place. Print the procedures and guidelines and keep them handy. If violence occurs in your community or on your campus, provide space for students to talk or write about their feelings. Answer their questions as best as you can, sticking only to the facts. Gently but firmly redirect all conversations that involve rumors or anything except the known facts.

Because everyone is susceptible to experiencing violence, it is important for adults on campus to identify and manage their own feelings about the violence they and/or their students may be witnessing and/or experiencing. Being able to manage their own uncomfortable emotions will allow the adults on campus to model stress management strategies and other tools for addressing conflict in healthy ways.

BEFORE THE LESSON (Continued)

Preview the Lessons

Read the lessons and choose the activities that fit the needs of the students and the time available. If the lesson is being presented in one 50-minute class period, there will probably not be time to complete all the activities. Choose the activities that will be most beneficial for the students.

Note that each grade level lesson provides students with strategies for preventing violence through awareness and education. In addition, each grade level focuses on a specific type of violence and protective strategies for preventing that form of violence. All teachers should have access to all of the violence lessons so they have resources available to meet the needs of their students.

Grade 6 Family Violence

In this lesson students discuss family violence and how healthy families provide for the needs of the students. They also practice the protective strategy of developing a support system to get their needs met within and outside the family.

Grade 7 Harassment

In this lesson students discuss harassment or violence against a person or group because of their gender, race, nationality, age, ability, or sexual orientation. Students identify and challenge their own prejudices.

Grade 8 Roots of Relationship Violence

In this lesson students discuss some of the roots of relationship violence, particularly those stemming from gender roles and stereotypes. They examine how gender stereotypes can negatively impact relationships and challenge these stereotypes.

Grade 9 Relationship Violence

In this lesson students discuss relationship violence by determining what makes up a healthy relationship. Students learn about dating violence and strategies for developing healthy dating relationships. They create an infographic to inform their peers about dating violence.

Grade 10 Sexual Violence

In this lesson students discuss sexual violence, including what sexual violence is and is not. Students learn the importance of consent and work to promote a consent culture on campus.

Grade 11 Collective Violence

In this lesson students learn about collective violence. Students research a type of collective violence and recommend changes to prevent the violence. Students discuss ways to be an upstander against collective violence.

Grade 12 Preventing Violence

In this lesson students talk about violence in their communities (schools, groups, neighborhoods, city, etc.) and work with a group to make a plan to address the violence in their community.

Team Up with the School Counselor

Conversations about violence may be triggering for some students, especially those who may have experienced or witnessed violence. Coordinate with the school counselor (or other mental health care professional) so that they can be present in your classroom during the lesson. Having two trained adults in the class during the lesson allows one to present the lesson and guide the discussion and the activities, while the other observes the students and looks for any warning signs or stress. Having the school counselor available during the lesson also provides students with an opportunity to connect with a person they can go to should they have a concern for themselves or another student. If the counselor is not able to be present during the lesson, make sure that they know when the lesson will be taught so that they are aware of the potential need for support.

BEFORE THE LESSON (Continued)

Consider the Class Setting for the Lesson

It is recommended that the lessons be presented with as few disruptions as possible. Consider displaying a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the classroom door and work with the administration to make sure that announcements, fire drills, and other interruptions are not scheduled during the time of the lesson. Consider playing calming music in the background to help students feel more at ease.

It is recommended that these lessons be taught in a comfortable, in-person classroom setting with two adults present – a trained and caring teacher and a mental health professional, preferably the school counselor or someone who is on campus on a regular basis to provide additional support for the students.

It is not recommended that these lessons be taught in a virtual setting because of the importance of support and follow-up for the students. If teaching the lesson virtually is unavoidable, assign the Student Resources to the Student Center prior to teaching the lesson. Direct students' attention to the resources and read through them at the start of the lesson. If possible, make sure that each student has at least one supportive adult in the home who is aware that the lesson is being presented, has access to the Student Resources, and understands the importance of checking on the student's well-being before, during, and after the lesson.

Inform Students and Families of When the Violence Will Be Discussed

It is important to give students and families advance notice of when the violence lessons will be presented. The Rethink Ed Home Connection letter provides families information about the lessons, along with protective strategies that will be presented to the students. It also encourages families to provide the school staff with any pertinent information that may affect their child's participation in the lesson.

Take Care of Yourself

It is important for any staff member who is teaching a lesson on violence to prepare themselves by practicing their own stress management and self-care strategies, including identifying and accepting their own emotions, and reaching out for support. Teachers who feel unprepared to teach the lesson should speak to the school administrator to address their needs and/or make arrangements for another staff member to teach the lesson.

DURING THE LESSON

Follow the Lesson Plan

The information about the roots and dynamics of violence and strategies for reducing students' vulnerability to becoming a survivor or perpetrator of violence is presented in the Learn video. The role of the teacher is to guide the students through the lesson.

Keep the Focus on How to Reduce Vulnerability to Violence

The discussion questions and activities are designed to reinforce the importance of developing protective strategies to reduce the students' vulnerability to violence. The discussion questions focus on understanding what violence is, including the roots and dynamics of violence, as well as strategies to speak up against violence.

A class setting is not the place for discussions about students' personal stories of violence. While these stories are important, they may be inappropriate for the setting or upsetting for some students. Should a student begin sharing a personal story, respectfully interrupt the student and thank them for sharing. Gently redirect the discussion to the lesson objective. Provide students with additional outlets for discussing their own stories. Some outlets may include talking with the school counselor, attending a peer-led support group, or reaching out to the student's parents or guardian to discuss the resources available to help the student.

DURING THE LESSON (Continued)

Keep the Focus on How to Reduce Vulnerability to Violence (Continued)

If a student discloses acts of violence they have experienced or witnessed, acknowledge their feelings and ask them if they would like to speak with a counselor. If the student agrees, connect the student with the counselor to continue the discussion in another location. If the student does not want to talk to a counselor, gently explain that the whole-class setting is not the place to address their particular needs. After class, talk with the student. Whether the student will talk with the counselor or not, any incident of child abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, or abandonment must be reported, according to the school's protocol.

Respect Students' Right to Pass

Not all students will want to talk about violence and that is okay. Allow students the right to pass on any discussion or activity. Make note of any student who shows signs of distress or changes in behavior during the lesson. Check in with the student following the lesson. Tell them what was observed, express concern, and offer support. Encourage the student to talk with the school counselor and/or refer the student for further evaluation according to the school's protocol.

Help Students Understand that Violence Can Be Prevented

Keep the focus of the discussion and the activities on helping students to understand that violence can be prevented through awareness and education. While violence can feel overwhelming at times, there are strategies and resources to help students and families get the help they need.

AFTER THE LESSON

Provide Students with the Resources They Need

Be sure that students know who to contact should they want to talk or have additional questions. Ask your administrator for a list of community services and contact information for local agencies that offer support and education around violence. Consider posting names, location, and contact information of people on campus and local community resources who are available to help. Students need to know who and how they can ask for help.

Provide a Safe and Caring Classroom

The best thing that you can do to support students who have experienced violence or may be experiencing violence is to provide a safe and caring classroom where students feel like they belong and are seen and accepted. Carving out space to talk about and accept feelings, as well as ways to manage their feelings will, empower students to meet the challenges they face with growing confidence. Be positive when talking with the student and be sure to let them know that you care about them.

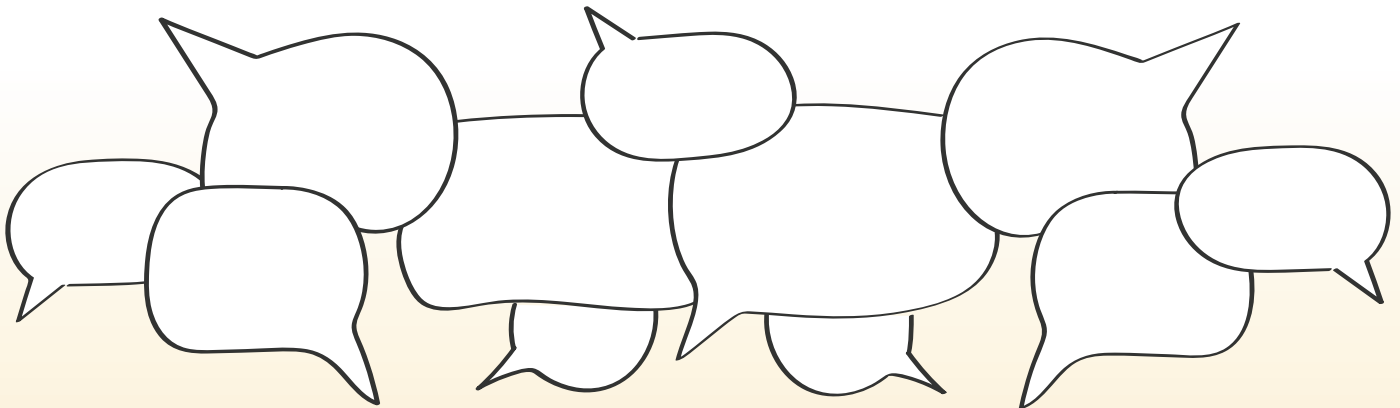
Refer to the Teacher Training materials on Violence or Trauma for additional resources to help students who may have witnessed or experienced violence. The video *Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom* provides tips on how to make the classroom a safe and caring space for all students.

Help Students Develop SEL Skills

Follow the lessons on violence with SEL lessons on identifying emotions, managing stress, accessing a support system, practicing safe and ethical behavior, developing healthy boundaries, and building self-advocacy skills to speak out against violence. SEL skills can boost one's ability to develop the emotional stamina to meet life's challenges. See *Beyond the Lesson* on the last page of the lesson plan for a list of SEL topics and lessons.

CONVERSATIONS WITH INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS

- If a student expresses concerns about another student, thank them for reaching out on behalf of the other student. Listen to the student and determine the next best step. For example, depending on the situation, it may be appropriate to talk to the other student or it may be more appropriate to inform the school counselor. Either way, it is important to report any concern as per the school's protocol.
- If a student exhibits warning signs that indicate the student has experienced or is experiencing violence, talk to the student. Express concern and ask how they are doing. Listen with empathy and without judgement. Validate the student's feelings and let them know there is help available. Offer to go with the student to talk to the school counselor. If the student discloses any acts of violence, as a mandated reporter, you are required to report the incident as per the school's protocol.
- It is okay to ask a student directly if they have experienced or are experiencing violence. Bringing up the subject of violence with the student may provide some relief for the student and encourage them to reach out for support. Be sure that the student knows that they don't need to suffer with the effects of violence on their own. There is help available.
- Remember the role of the teacher is not to diagnose a student's mental health disorder. The role of the teacher and other adults on campus is to notice the signs or symptoms and help the student get the help they need. Refer the student to the school counselor as per the school's protocol and any incident of abuse, neglect, or abandonment as per the school's protocol.
- Have a list of available resources handy. Know who on campus is available to meet with the student. Every school should provide all teachers and staff with the protocol for referring (who and how).



Creating a Calm Campus Space

Stress, anxiety, and trauma can get in the way of a student's ability to focus, learn, and interact with others. Creating a calm space on campus for students to retreat to when they are feeling overwhelmed can help to de-escalate emotional situations and provide students a place to self-regulate their emotions. Providing students with space to attend to their emotional needs will help students develop stress management skills and feel supported at school.

Invite student input as you create the calm space. Consider hosting a focus group for interested students or using a survey to gather information. While the calm space will look different on every campus, depending on the physical space, the needs of the students, and the resources available, the following suggestions can help to create a warm and welcoming calm space for students to use.

Find a quiet place.

The location of the calm space will be different on every campus. Some suggestions include a corner of the library, a section of the counselor's office, or a free classroom.

If possible, the space should be free of general foot traffic and outside noise.

Although students should be allowed some privacy, they also should be in view of the attending adult.

Make the space inviting and comfortable.

Provide comfortable furniture, including pillows, beanbags, and active seating that allow students to rock or sway. Keep decorations simple and calming and, if possible, use dim lighting in the space. Provide a whiteboard or bulletin board for students to add inspirational quotes and sayings to. Invite students to collaborate in the design of the space.

Consider naming the space something that relates to the students on your campus. For example, name the space using the school mascot, such as the Ram Retreat or the Cougar Corner.

Include calming tools such as calming music, Guided Visualizations, Calming Cards, or Breathing Cards.

Place calming sensory objects in the space. Some suggestions include:

- a zen garden
- fidget spinners
- whiteboards, paper, with pencils and markers for doodling or journaling
- coloring books and crayons/colored pencils
- slime/silly putty
- diffuser with essential oils such as lavender or lemon balm
- noise-canceling headphones



Set clear expectations for the calm space.

Determine how the space will be monitored. Some schools may assign the calm space to the duty roster. Other schools may recruit parent volunteers to monitor the space.

Consider when and how students can use the calm space. Some schools might allow teachers to provide students with passes to the calm spaces. Other schools might require a pass from a school counselor to use the space.

Determine a suggested amount of time students can spend in the calm space before returning to their usual schedule. Provide a timer for the students. Students needing additional time may have the option to check in with the school counselor to determine together reasonable adjustments to the determined amount of time.

Post a list of acceptable uses and activities allowed in the calm space and provide the necessary tools or equipment. While students should be allowed to come and sit quietly, some students may benefit from some suggested activities such as doing a puzzle, listening to music, doodling, journaling, etc.

Post information for the school counselor, helplines, and community resources that students may contact if they need additional support.

When introducing the calm space to the students, be sure to explain the purpose of the space and the benefits of taking time to calm one's emotions. Help all students to understand that this is a calm space that they can choose to retreat to when they are feeling overwhelmed. If possible, schedule tours of the calm space prior to its opening and/or schedule a ribbon-cutting opening to the space.

Note to Administrators

- **Make the calm space on your campus a priority. Assign a school counselor or other invested staff member to lead in the development of the calm space.**
- **Make room in the budget to furnish the space and/or seek donations from school and community members.**
- **Promote the space to your staff and students.**

Note to School Counselors

- **Make your presence known in the calm space whenever possible. Becoming a familiar face on campus, not just in the counselor's office, will help students see you as a resource for managing their anxiety.**
- **Lead in the development of the calm space. Provide resources that you have that will help this space be effective on your campus.**

Note to Teachers

- **The calm space is designed to provide an opportunity for students to advocate for themselves and independently choose to self-regulate. Your support of the calm space will help to promote the space and encourage students to use this space effectively.**
- **Don't call attention to or deny a student from using the calm space. If a student is using the space inappropriately, speak to them individually to try to get to the root of the issue.**
- **If you think a student may benefit from some time to calm themselves, don't tell a student to go to the calm space. Instead, ask if they would like to go, allowing the student to make their own choice.**

Strategies for Community Circles

Community Circles are an integral part of creating a safe and caring classroom where all members of the class experience a sense of belonging and a belief that their presence matters. A Community Circle provides a place to connect where all members of a classroom can be seen, heard, and respected.

PURPOSE

Community Circles serve a range of purposes, including building trust and connection among class members, checking in on the wellbeing of all members, addressing conflict and harm, and modeling and practicing social and emotional learning (SEL) skills.

In some classrooms, circle gatherings may be used for taking attendance, sharing the day's schedule and announcements. While these activities are worthwhile, they are typically teacher-directed activities. In order to create a safe and caring classroom, Community Circles must provide a place where all members have an equal voice. During a Community Circle, the role of the teacher is the same as the other members of the community of learners.

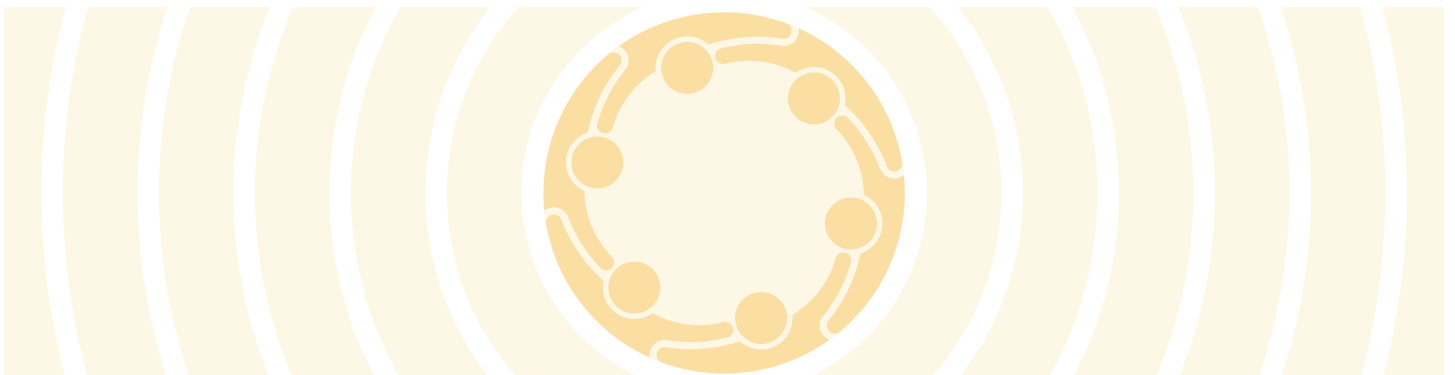
It is recommended that Community Circles become a regular classroom practice in order to establish trust and connection and to check in on the wellbeing of each member. These circle gatherings may include fun questions or topics to discuss, such as asking students to share:

- one positive/one negative thought about a topic (i.e. Rose / Thorn or Glow / Grow),
- two adjectives to describe how they're feeling,
- their favorite movie, book, activity, etc., or
- a memorable childhood event.

Once community has been established, these circles can be a safe place to process and/or resolve:

- misunderstandings or arguments between students or groups of students,
- experiences of inequity or exclusion among students or groups of students,
- exciting, challenging, or difficult events,
- confusion about an assignment or class agreement that warrants a discussion, or
- questions or curiosities around a lesson or topic of study.

In addition, Community Circles can provide a restorative alternative to punishment when a member of the class has broken an agreement or caused harm. Instead of resorting to punishment, which can isolate and marginalize students, often disproportionately impacting Black and Indigenous students and students of color, restorative practices treat harmful behavior as an opportunity for learning.



PRINCIPLES

A Community Circle is an intentional space where members grow and change through self-awareness, social connection, empathy, conflict resolution, and restorative justice. In order to be a safe place for all members, Community Circles embrace some common principles.

Principle 1: A Community of Learners

The Community Circle challenges the tradition that places the teacher as the holder of all knowledge in the classroom. Instead the Community Circle is a place where every member is recognized for having knowledge to share. All members, including teacher and students, see themselves as learners, taking both the responsibility for their own learning and pride in their contribution to the learning of others.

Principle 2: Value of Individuals

While the Community Circle is committed to the collective growth and development of all its members, it simultaneously embraces the inherent worth of each individual. Diversity is celebrated as each member is welcomed and supported in their own journey toward understanding their unique abilities and challenges.

Principle 3: Core Values

The Community Circle is a place to honor, practice, and support core values, including connection, trust, honesty, respect, confidentiality, and authenticity. Each member of the community has a responsibility to uphold these values with compassion toward themselves and others.

Principle 4: Space to Grapple

The Community Circle is a safe space for navigating difficult conversations, embracing discomfort, and moving beyond discomfort to experience social and emotional growth as all members. Community Circles allow for contradiction, complexity, and nuance, recognizing that not all conversations end in agreement. The Community Circle strives to ensure that every member feels seen, heard, understood, and respected.

Principle 5: Common Goal to Restore and Transform

Instances of harm in the classroom must be addressed when they arise and approached with care and compassion. When conflict or harm occurs among class members, Community Circles provide a place for all members to share their experience so that a fuller picture can emerge. The Community Circle is a place where all members seek to restore relationships and grow as individuals.



PRACTICES

The Circle

Establishing a meeting place and a routine for gathering in a circle is essential for building community. The circle formation, with every member at the same level, allows anyone at any point of the circle to be the focal point or the speaker. The circle formation also allows the role of speaker to shift easily from one speaker to the next.

Primary teachers may already have a circle established on a rug. Other classes may need to determine a quick and simple routine for moving chairs, desks, or bodies into a circle. Providing personal space for each member, using carpet squares, dots or other markers on the carpet, chairs, or desks is important for all members to feel included. The teacher and other adults should be seated as members of the circle. In the case of a community member requiring sitting accommodations, an effort should be made to organize all members at the same level.

Agreements

Agreements are standards that all members agree to in order to communicate effectively and respectfully in the Community Circle. All members of the community collaborate in creating agreements and assume the responsibility of following and maintaining those agreements with one another. The agreements should be fluid and changeable, able to be added to or changed as needed. Agreements may extend to all classroom interactions but are especially important to establish and adhere to during the Community Circle.

One way to allow all members to participate in the creation of the circle agreements is to ask students to think about how they would like to be treated as members of a community of learners. Make a list of the students' responses. Use the students' language as much as possible. Once the list is exhausted, ask students to group similar responses together and work together to agree on language that all members are comfortable with. Consensus must be reached before an agreement can be established. Invite students who are struggling with a proposed agreement to suggest an alternate agreement until all members agree.

Once the initial agreements are determined, they should be made visible to all members during a Community Circle. Consider inviting interested students to work together to create posters or a bulletin board, highlighting the community agreements.

When first introducing the Community Circle, it may be helpful to review the agreements at the beginning of each circle. Revisit the agreements as needed. Encourage all group members to take responsibility for adhering to the agreements and, when necessary, gently reminding others to do the same.

Talking Piece

A talking piece can be a helpful tool to aid the discussions in the Community Circle. A talking piece can help to establish and direct focus to the speaker as the speaker changes during a discussion.

A talking piece may be anything – feather, stick, rock, etc. – that can easily be passed from one member to another. Some classes choose an item based on a classroom theme or subject (i.e. a magnifying glass in a science class or a stuffed octopus in class with an ocean theme). Other classes keep a basket of talking pieces and allow a piece to be chosen prior to the circle discussion.

SUGGESTED FORMAT

Because all Community Circles serve different purposes, they also may have different components. The following is a sample format that may be adapted to meet needs of the circle and the community.

Intention

Setting an intention for each Community Circle helps to set expectations for the circle for everyone. The intention can be set by any member of the community. Empower all members to request a Community Circle to talk about anything that they feel needs to be addressed by all class members. The intention should be stated at the start of the circle by the member setting the intention.

Warm Up

Prior to beginning the discussion, invite all group members to focus on the intention. The purpose of the warm-up is to prepare all group members to be fully present during the Community Circle. Depending on the intention, the Community Circle may begin by:

- answering a silly or inspiring question,
- taking a few deep breaths,
- noticing the emotions in the body,
- freezing and melting into a calm mindset, or
- sharing a quote,
- wiggling or stretching the body,
- tensing and relaxing different parts of the body,
- listening to music, podcast, or visualization

Discussion

During the discussion, the group addresses the intention. Open discussions can build trust and lead to surprising learning moments. The role of the teacher during Community Circles is to participate as a member of circle and avoid correcting misconceptions or guiding the conversation. Instead all members should be allowed to work through concepts amongst themselves. Allowing all members to grapple with the topics without intervention by the teacher can help set the expectation that there is not always one easy or correct answer. The only time that teacher intervention is appropriate is to intervene when something harmful, such as racism, sexism, or homophobia comes up. Interrupting harmful statement by calling members in, rather than calling them out, models for students strategies to interrupt harmful attitudes wherever they occur. Some ways to call members in include posing questions such as:

- What was your intention when you said that?
- How might your words be misunderstood by someone else?
- What assumptions are you making about _____ ?
- How might your words affect someone else?

Closing

The group member who set the intention should also initiate the closing and suggest a way to close the circle. A closing may include:

- a summary of what was discussed,
- thanking each member for their participation,
- asking each member to share one takeaway from the discussion,
- a closing activity such as shake it off or rose, bud, thorn,
- reciting or listening to an inspirational song, poem, statement,
- noticing and accepting the emotions that may have surfaced during the discussion, or
- taking a moment of silence to reflect on the discussion.

ADDITIONAL STRATEGIES

Encourage all members to have patience during a Community Circle. Not all Community Circles will flow smoothly. It takes time to build trust and it takes practice to develop the communication skills to have transforming discussions. The following are some additional strategies that may help to facilitate a Community Circle discussions:

- Encourage members of the group to use nonverbal motions like thumbs up, thumbs down, and thumbs sideways or the American Sign Language motions for applause or thank you to engage in the conversation without speaking or interrupting the speaker.
- Consider setting a timer for some conversations to allow equal time for members to speak.
- Encourage respect for all members' right to pass. Remind all members that trust takes time to build, and no one should feel pressured to share until they feel comfortable doing so.
- Consider providing a signal that cues members that it is time for the Community Circle. For example, the community may use a clapping rhythm or a song to move in and out of each circle time.
- Be mindful of the attention span of the members of the Community Circle and bring the circle to a close as determined by the time you have available or the interest of the members.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING SKILLS

The Community Circle should be a time of authentic and equitable sharing among all members of the group. Community Circles are a useful compliment to Rethink Ed SEL lessons, as they provide an organic environment for students to practice the SEL skills that they are learning. Communities Circles can provide a space for practicing:

- active and reflective listening skills,
- listening with curiosity,
- non-judgmental listening,
- using the 'I-message',
- communicating through body language,
- empathy and compassion to better connect with another person's experience,
- self-control while waiting to speak,
- identifying and managing emotions that come up in a difficult conversation,
- self-advocacy to get needs met ,
- taking turns,
- speaking from personal experience,
- apologizing, forgiving, and shifting behavior,
- embracing discomfort as a sign of learning, and
- standing against racist, sexist, homophobic, or other harmful language.

While the Community Circle is a great time to model these skills, it is not the time to provide instruction on these skills. Instead, make a mental note of the interactions of the members of the group and use that information to inform you about the social and emotional skills that may be helpful to teach and/or reinforced in your class. During an explicit lesson on an SEL skill, it can be helpful to call out healthy communication that you noticed during a Community Circle. For example, calling attention to students who used the 'I-message' during a discussion or a student who showed self-advocacy to get their needs met.



Strategies for Effective Class Discussions



Discussions are an excellent teaching tool to stimulate students' thinking and lead them to new insights and understanding. Whether the content of the discussion is social or academic in nature, effective discussions can provide teachers with immediate and on-going assessment of students' knowledge and understanding.

Discussions are used throughout the Rethink SEL student curriculum to provide an opportunity for students to talk about the key concepts and strategies and reflect on their own learning.

Teacher Role

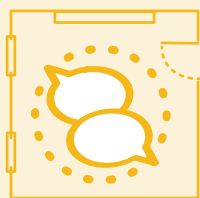


The role of the teacher in discussions cannot be overstated, especially with young students, at the beginning of the year, or with students who are new to discussions. As the students progress in their ability to engage in transformative discussions, the leadership for discussions, including the questions to be discussed, should be released to the students. The following are some ways to make the discussions in your classroom more effective.



Create a Safe and Caring Classroom

Research shows that students' affective needs must be met in order to learn. Students need to feel safe in order to participate actively in discussions. They need to feel like what they have to say matters and that they won't be judged for errors or differing opinions. Refer to the *Creating a Trauma-Sensitive Classroom* video and Teacher Resources available in the Rethink Ed SEL Training Series for suggestions on making your classroom a place where students feel safe and cared for.



Organize the Classroom to Support Discussion

The best discussions involve communication between students, not just between teacher and students. To make this possible, arrange the seating so that students can see each other, such as in a circle or semicircle. For many classes, especially in the elementary grade, organizing desks in cooperative groups also promotes effective discussions.



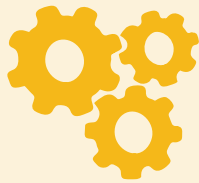
Have a Clear Purpose for the Discussion

Good discussions have a purpose and the purpose should be known. If the purpose of the discussion is a quick check for understanding, let students know that up front. In the case of the discussions that follow the SEL videos, consider writing the objective of the lesson on the board prior to showing the video. Displaying discussion questions and setting a time frame for the discussion can also help keep everyone on topic.



Ask Good Questions

Good discussions begin with good questions. While knowledge and comprehension questions have a place in discussions, true learning occurs at the applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating levels as we ask our students to use their knowledge and understanding. The discussion questions in the Rethink Ed SEL lessons have been written with Bloom's Taxonomy in mind, but you as the teacher know your students and know best how to move the questions to the place where the discussion can change your students' lives.



Encourage Students' Thoughtful Responses

Here are a few tips to encourage thoughtful responses and active participation in classroom discussions.

- Ask a question and wait. If this is hard for you, count to a least 5 in your head before calling on a student to respond.
- Ask a question and encourage students to discuss with a partner or in small groups before discussing with the whole class. This allows everyone a chance to be heard and also gives quieter students time to articulate their thoughts.
- Use a structure for including everyone in the discussion. For example, write students' names on popsicle sticks and draw sticks randomly until all students' names have been drawn or provide students with 3 tokens and collect one token each time the student responds with the expectation that everyone uses all their tokens.
- For sensitive topics, allow students to respond anonymously by providing notecards or slips of paper for the students to write their responses. Read the responses aloud, organizing similar responses together.
- Positively reinforce students' responses by showing interest. For example:
 - make eye contact with the student
 - use the student's name
 - restate the student's response
 - ask for feedback to be sure that you understand
 - write their ideas on the board
 - make connections between students' responses
 - use non-verbal communication such as smiling and nodding



Bring the Discussion to a Close

Announce with the discussion is ending and ask if there are any final comments or questions. Summarize the key ideas of themes of the discussion.

Guidelines for Class Discussions



Whether the discussion is academic or social, such as a class meeting, it is important to establish some basic guidelines and review them as needed. These guidelines should be part of the overall culture in your classroom that provides a safe and caring place where all students feel part of a community of learners. Consider having older students come up with their own set of guidelines based off of these general guidelines.



Participate

Set the expectation that everyone participates in the discussion. This comes naturally in safe and caring classrooms where all students feel like their contributions matter. If this becomes an issue in your class, consider how you can build a closer community of learners and/or use some additional structures that include everyone in the discussion.



Actively Listen to Others

Model active listening for your students and explicitly teach your students active listening strategies. Actively listening also limits side conversations as everyone should be listening to the person speaking.



Be Open-Minded

It's important to help students see discussions as part of the learning process, by focusing on the quality of questions. When discussions are viewed as part of the learning process, students are more apt to accept differing opinions or alternative ways of thinking. Being open-minded allows learners to change their thinking as they learn new information or new perspectives. Being open-minded also promotes respect for differing opinions of others.



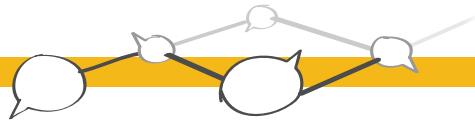
Stay on Topic

It's easy for discussions to move in a different direction, and sometimes that's okay. But typically the most effective discussions stay on topic so as to meet the objective of the discussion. Writing the objective of the discussion on the board, can help keep the discussion on topic.



Be Respectful

This is a summative guideline that is defined by the preceding guidelines and should be part of the class culture. But it may at times be important to remind student to keep the focus on the content, rather than on personalities.



Discussions structures are helpful for organizing and structuring class discussions. There are many different discussion strategies and many variations on each structure. Structures are helpful when learning to lead discussions or teaching students to participate in discussions. The following is a list of some basic discussion structures that can be adapted to fit various discussions, grade levels, and teaching styles.



Class Meeting

Class Meetings

There are two common uses for a class meeting. One is a general gathering initiated by the teacher to check in with the physical, emotional, and social health of the students. In elementary classrooms these meetings may be used to take attendance, make announcements, review the schedule, and set a positive tone for the day. These meetings help to build community and provide the teacher with information about the readiness of their students to learn.

The other type of class meeting is initiated by the teacher or students with the focus on solving a problem. These meetings usually arise out of the frustration of the teacher, a student, or a group of students. Often these meetings focus on a social problem that students work together to resolve.



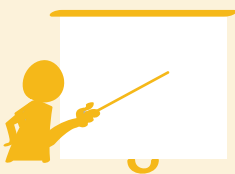
Think, Pair, Share

This strategy allows everyone time to think and a chance to respond. Too often because of the natural need for reinforcement, teachers call on the first student to raise their hand, leaving the rest of the class unengaged. A couple of variations of this format include Turn and Talk and Popcorn Share. Turn and talk can be used to allow students to share their preferences or opinions. Popcorn Share is used to quickly elicit short (often one word) responses from all of the students.



Active Response

The Active Response strategy can be used to quickly determine the students' understanding of a concept during whole group instruction or discussion. The teacher poses a question, provides time for students to think, and then signals the students to reveal their responses. Active responses include thumbs up/ thumbs down; stand/sit; holding up fingers to indicate a preference; response cards, or individual white boards.



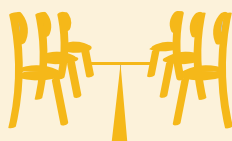
Socratic Seminar

This discussion structure is used to go deeper into understanding a text or a topic. The defining key of the Socratic Seminar is the use of evidence to support an opinion. All participants are asked to refer to the text, the video, or an outside source to support their contribution.



Fishbowl

Students are seated in a circle with two students in the center. The two students in the middle have a conversation or role play a situation using a specific skill. The students on the outside circle observe and take notes about the interaction. When the students in the center are finished, the other students share their observations and provide feedback.



Philosophical Chairs

This discussion structure can be used to debate an issue. A statement is read and students move to one side of the room depending on whether they agree or disagree with the statement. Groups discuss reasons for their opinions and take turns defending their positions.



Pyramid Discussions

Pyramid discussions start with a rich question to discuss or an opinion that needs to be ranked or 'settled'. Have the students share in pairs, then have pairs form groups of 4 to discuss. Then have the groups of 4 form groups of 8, and then 16, until the class as a whole is discussing the topic and reaching a consensus.



Structures to Promote Participation

Particularly in classes with young students or students who are new to discussions, it may be helpful to provide structures to ensure that everyone participates. Some structures that promote participation include:

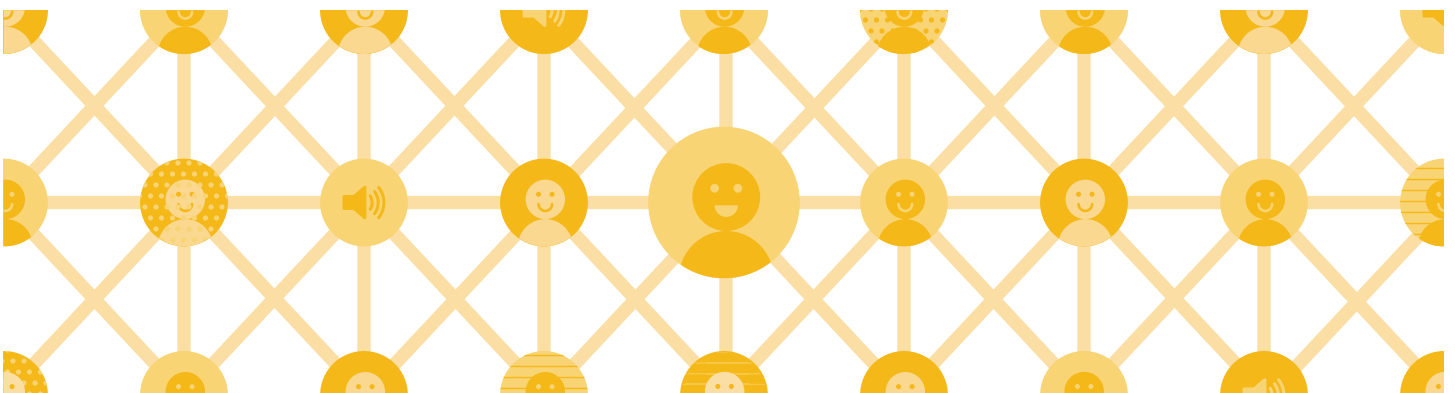
- A Talking Tool (Talking Stick or other item) is passed from one speaker to the next without returning to a speaker until everyone has had a chance to speak.
- Popsicle Sticks with each student's name are placed in cup. The teacher randomly draws sticks, calling on the student whose name is on the stick to talk or respond to a question.
- Class Rosters can be used to check off names of students who participate in discussions and participation points can be given for extra incentive.
- Three Tokens are given to each student at the beginning of the class period. Each time the student participates in the discussion the turn in a token. The goal is for everyone to turn in all three tokens. This also helps the talkative student be more selective about what they use their tokens to share.

Strategies for the Virtual Classroom

Whether you find yourself teaching online by choice or by default, the following strategies will provide suggestions for teaching the Rethink Ed lessons in your virtual classroom. Strategies are provided for presenting information, engaging students in rich and impactful discussions, and facilitating group work for practicing key skills.

General Strategies

- Meet with your Professional Learning Community (PLC) or grade level group to become familiar with your Learning Management Software (LMS) and the particular needs of your students. Once you are familiar with the protocols of your system, it will be easier to adapt the Rethink Ed lessons.
- Take time to teach students how to use the LMS that you will be using, including how to navigate the system and how to find and post assignments, as well as behavioral expectations for the virtual classroom.
- Address the technical needs of your students, including their access to devices and internet connection in order to participate in your virtual classroom. Work with your district and school administrators to ensure that all students have reliable access.
- Review the entire lesson, including the overview, objectives, and vocabulary. Choose the activities that fit your time constraints and the needs of your students. Determine how you will structure the lesson for your virtual classroom. Research has shown that attention drops more quickly in a virtual setting, so provide students with shorter lessons and/or more breaks.
- Address the affective needs of your students. Not all students will be comfortable in a virtual class meeting environment. While checking in with your students is important, respect that some students may feel uncomfortable showing themselves in their home environment or may find it difficult to find a quiet location for class. Allow students to choose preset backgrounds available on your LMS or to attend the class meeting in audio mode only.
- Build community within your virtual classroom. Create a space where students feel safe and cared for. This may include beginning and/or ending your class meetings with an activity to check in with how students are feeling or planning fun, social events for students to interact with each other and help you to connect with students on a personal level.



Presenting Information

The Learn part of each lesson begins with a video that presents the objective and strategies for meeting the objective. In addition, many of the Practice and Dive Deeper activities provide a short video, PowerPoint slides, or audio file to support the learning objective. Here are some options for presenting this information in your virtual classroom.

Share Your Screen

Present the information synchronously in your virtual classroom, using the screen share option. Cue the video, slides, or audio files to your computer before class. During a class meeting, play the video or show the slides with your shared screen. Using the screen share feature allows you to answer questions and discuss the information in real time.

Use Individual Devices

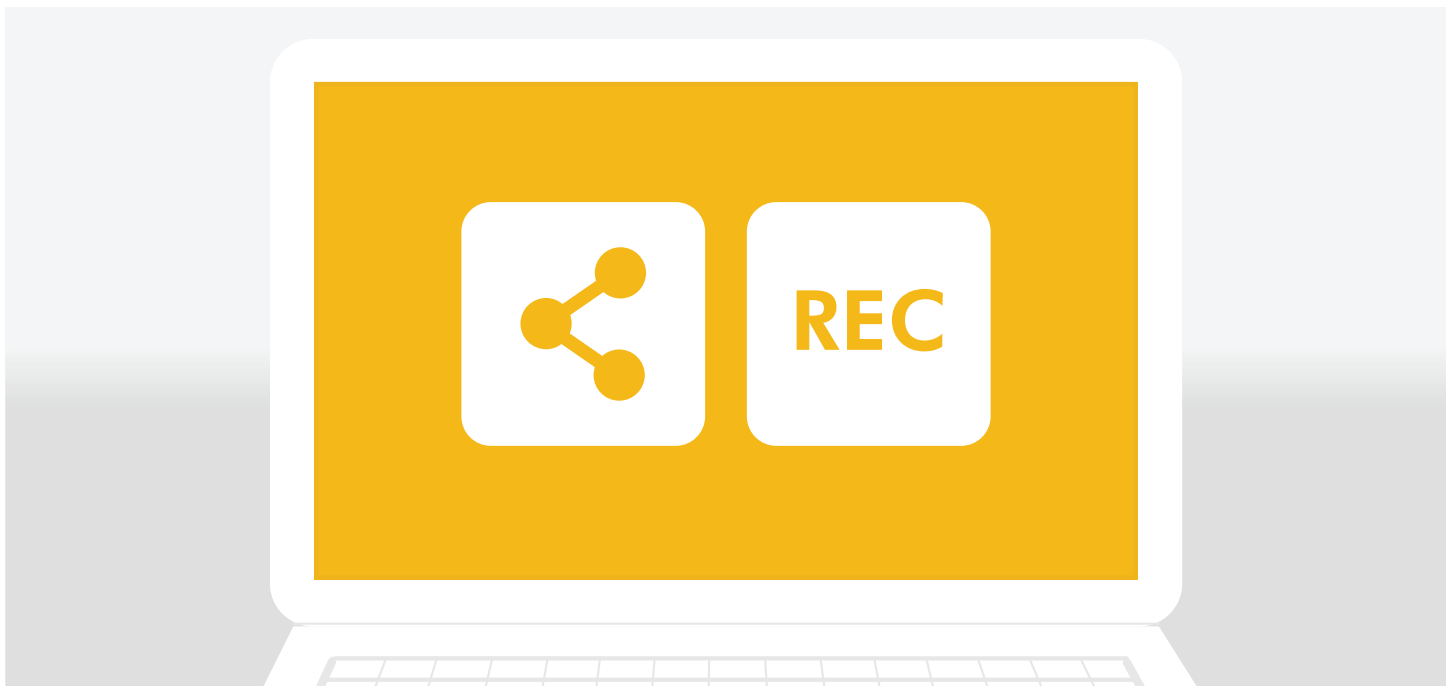
Assign the video, slides, or audio files to the Rethink Ed SEL and Mental Health Student Center, along with any corresponding materials. Have the students watch or listen on their individual devices, during a class meeting. Mute the class and provide time for students to review the materials. Then, unmute and discuss.

Engage Students Asynchronously

Assign the video, slides, or audio files to the Student Center. Have the students view or listen independently. Encourage the students to respond to questions and/or ask questions on your class discussion board or ask the student to come prepared to discuss at your next class meeting.

Pre-record Additional Information

Although most of the strategies and key information for the Rethink Ed SEL and Mental Health lessons are presented in the Learn video, consider pre-recording any additional information such as instructions for completing an activity or reading from a passage of a literature book, picture book, or news article and posting it to your virtual classroom for students to view on their own time to supplement or stand in for synchronous instruction. Then come together to discuss, complete additional activities, or reflect on the information provided.



Hosting Discussions

Engaging students in rich and impactful discussions is an essential part of the Rethink Ed lessons. Discussions are an excellent way to stimulate students' thinking and lead them to insights and understanding.

Discussions During a Class Meeting

Post Questions Prior to the Discussion

Provide students with the questions that will be discussed prior to the class meeting or encourage students to post their own questions in the chat feature during a class meeting.

Host Discussions with Smaller Groups of Students

Divide your class into smaller groups for discussion, using the meeting room feature. Consider asking a volunteer to take notes of the discussion on a shared document that can be viewed by students in other groups. Encourage students to review and comment on the discussions from other groups.

Provide Structures for Student Response during a Class Meeting

To make sure that all students' voices are heard during a virtual class discussion, consider setting a time limit per response. Some of the following structures can also be used to provide an opportunity for all students to share.

Quick Checks: Post a prompt in the chat to use as a warm-up, to check for understanding, or for a quick reflection. Have students respond using the chat and/or reaction features.

Students can also respond using a personal whiteboard or writing on a sheet of paper and holding up their response during a class discussion.

Active Response: If your LMS chat feature has a reaction feature, encourage students to respond using smiley faces, hand claps, and thumbs up. Or teach students a few responses using American Sign Language, such as applause or I don't understand. Students can also use these strategies to respond to other students' responses.

Popcorn Share: Ask each student to respond with one word or a short phrase.

Pass the Popcorn: Call on a student to respond. When the student has finished their response, have them call on a classmate to respond.

Raise Hand: Teach students to use the 'raise hand' feature. This avoids students talking over each other and allows every student to have a chance to share.

Spider Discussions: Share a discussion question prior to the class meeting and ask students to prepare a written response. During the class meeting, ask one student to share their response. Encourage other students to agree, disagree, or build on the response, adding reasons for their statement. Encourage all students to respond. As students respond, track the flow of the conversation, drawing lines between names, and the responses. After the discussion, show students the 'web' of conversation.

Discussions on a Class Discussion Board

Provide students with discussion questions and encourage them to respond to one or more of them on the discussion board. Provide suggestions for responding to their classmates such as:

Compliment – I like ...

Connect – I also ...

Comment – I agree/disagree with... because

Question – I wonder...

Completing Activities and Projects

Rethink Ed lessons provide a variety of activities to help students practice and develop key SEL skills and protective strategies. Many of these activities are designed to be completed in small group, although some can be adapted to be used as a class.

Individual Student Written Responses

Here are some different strategies for using activities to respond individually. Choose the strategy that works best for the activity and for your virtual classroom.

- Assign written activities to the Student Center for students to complete online.
- For activities that do not have activity pages, assign the activity and provide instruction for student to take a photo or write a description of the completed activity and post to your class discussion board or online classroom.
- Post a prompt into your class discussion board for students to respond to.

Small Group Activities

Most LMS provide an option to share links to allow students to meet in small groups. Learn the protocol for your particular system.

- Take time to talk about the expectations of working in groups and supporting one another. Display the *Tips for Online Group Work* Student Resource and talk about strategies for helping students manage their time and work effectively with their group.
- Assign roles (or have groups assign roles) to each student in the group so everyone contributes and feels responsibility for their role.
- Assign the *Tips for Online Group Work* Student Resource to the Student Center to review during the small group work.
- Join students' meetings to check on their progress, answer questions, and help students problem solve.

Skits and Scenarios

Assign groups of students to a meeting room to discuss scenarios and/or prepare skits. If scenarios are provided in the lesson materials, assign them to the Student Center for students to view. Schedule a class meeting to allow students to present their skits.

Stations

Assign any resources or activity pages for the stations to the Student Center for students to view. Organize groups of students into meeting rooms to discuss the content and add to the shared document. Then have students 'rotate' by using the link to the next "station" (activity/website/document). At each station students can work together to discuss and engage with the station. Schedule time to meet in your virtual classroom to reflect as a class.

You can also post station activities into the chat box, the class discussion board, or a shared platform and have students post their ideas and make comments.

Projects

Some Rethink Ed activities are projects, requiring additional time and/or preparation beyond a typical class period. Assign the project to the Student Center. Organize students into small groups and assign each group to a meeting room to discuss the project. Check in with small groups to determine their progress, answer questions, and help students problem solve.

Tips for Online Group Work



KNOW THE GOAL

Make sure that everyone in the group knows the goal.

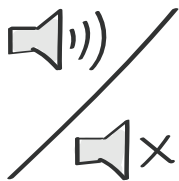
- Write the goal where everyone can see it, such as the chat box.
- Refer to the goal throughout the activity.



KNOW THE NEEDS

Determine what your group will need to reach your goal.

- Refer to the *Roles and Responsibilities* Student Resource for suggestions on what your group may need to reach the goal.
- Make sure everyone knows how they can contribute to reaching the goal.



STEP UP, STEP BACK

Be mindful of your participation in the group.

- Be sure to **step up** and add your ideas and suggestions and **step back** to allow others to contribute their ideas and suggestions.
- Mute yourself when others are talking and use strategies like Pass the Popcorn to make sure everyone gets a chance to speak.



BE CREATIVE!

Two heads are better than one! Have fun and be creative.

- Use the skills and talents of all your group members as well as the resources and tools available to you.
- If you are unsure how to do a task online, brainstorm as a group, ask your teacher for ideas, or search the internet for information and ideas.



REFLECT

Reflect on how well your group worked together to reach the goal.

- Did you accomplish your goal?
- What went well and what could have been improved?

Roles *and* Responsibilities

Which of these roles will help your group reach the goal?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Goal Tracker	Who will get group input on the goal and processes and keep the group work on track to reach the goal?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Moderator	Who will make sure that everyone in your group has the opportunity to speak and be heard?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Questioner	Who will ask questions to keep the group on track?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourager	Who will offer words of encouragement to motivate everyone to do their best and participate?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tech Support	Who will troubleshoot any issues involving the use of technology?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Researcher	Who will head up the research, check facts, and cite sources?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Timekeeper	Who will keep the group on task to complete the goal in the time provided?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Scribe	Who will take notes and write down necessary information needed to reach the goal?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Organizer	Who will keep track of the steps and materials necessary to reach the goal?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spokesperson	Who will communicate with all group members and the teacher about the group's progress to reach the goal?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluator	Who will lead the group in determining if the goal has been accomplished and what next steps may need to be taken.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Artist	Who will lend their artistic talents to help the group reach your goal with flair?