

# PROVIDING A CODE OF CONDUCT

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### # Practical questions for which this card offers SUGGESTIONS

- How can we build a safe space as a team?
- How do we have the right conversation with each other?

### Why is it important to provide a code of conduct?

Starting a new year with their class offers teachers the opportunity to define some ground rules of interaction. If they genuinely want to listen to their students and give them the opportunity for developing citizenship in the school as a practice ground, they will not subscribe these rules, but will formulate them with their students. This will also enhance the compliance of the students since they produced the rules themselves. Articulating these rules and living by them contributes to a safe learning environment for students because these rules make a clear statement about how they want to interact. It will help students feel welcome, understood, and valued.

### A code of conduct for everyone

A school becomes a better place if learning processes are aligned. This means that the same learning opportunities we offer our students should be offered to our teachers. The school leader can take this role as the teacher of the teachers. Together with their team, they can develop a code of conduct. They can do this in a similar way as teachers constructing the rules of engagement with their students. Developing a code of conduct is important since it provides clarity about

“the way we do things around here”. Using a code of conduct provides psychological safety. Psychological safety means that the workplace is safe for interpersonal risk taking. A shared code of conduct makes it possible for teachers to ask questions, seek feedback, report mistakes, and propose new ideas in an appropriate way.

### What is needed to develop a code of conduct?

Setting up the ground rules for collaboration or engagement should be based on trust. The most crucial element of trust is benevolence. This provides the feeling of caring for each other, having the best interest of each other at heart. If you feel safe to be your true self, it opens the opportunity to say what is on your mind. It opens the opportunity to be vulnerable and not to be afraid of making mistakes. Developing trust is not easy. Developing a code of conduct can contribute to trust building and will enhance trust building; trust begets trust. The school leader can scaffold trustworthy behaviour during the development of the code of conduct. The rules for engagement, the rules which are formulated for the code of conduct are reflected in their behaviour. It is extremely helpful to be explicit about your actions as a school leader, to show and tell why you act the way you do.

It is the school leaders' job to assure that teachers feel appreciated, psychologically safe and trusted by acknowledging emotions and group dynamic processes during the development of the code of conduct. Similar to the work of the teachers, they can start by explaining the importance of having a code of conduct and inviting the teachers to set up the ground rules collaboratively.

## STEPS TO DEVELOP A CODE OF CONDUCT

### Step 1

Explain to your staff what a code of conduct is and why it is important. You can provide them with some examples, such as

- We will not interrupt each other; we will ask for each other's opinion.
- Mobilize the power of empathy. Show genuine care and concern for others. It is a powerful tool that can open vulnerability to move conversations forward. Challenge the idea, not the person.
- Listen. Sometimes people just want to be heard without rebuttal or advice. Making and leaving space for others is a sign of utmost respect.
- Consider being wrong. Leave room for the possibility that you might not be right. It is okay to say, "I don't know" or "I admit that I might be wrong".
- Call in rather than call out. Try asking a question during a disagreement rather than dismissing it. Clarifying perspectives can assist you to understand the speaker.
- Do not overshare. Sharing your experience can be illustrative but do not let your personal story detract from the issue. Instead, focus on moving the conversation forward. It is not about you.



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### Step 2

Invite your staff members to formulate their preferred rules, by asking: *What do you need to collaborate within this group? What kind of behaviour satisfies your needs? What do you need to feel safe?*

Allow everyone private time to write down their needs, preferably formulated as rules. Let them share their rules in small groups. Hold an open dialogue about the rules to identify which ones are seen as valuable for all. Write down these rules on a flipchart or project them on a screen, so every staff member can see them during the session. You can put them up every session you have and can make alterations if necessary.

### Step 3

Reflect at the end of the meeting by asking everyone: *Have we managed to engage with our code of conduct and act accordingly?*

You can provide the participants with coloured stickers and invite them to stick them on the flipchart. Participants can use a red (we did not adopt this rule), an orange (we did not adopt this rule completely), or a green sticker (we did adopt this rule). Ask participants to elaborate on the placement of their stickers. Ask: *What can we learn from this for our next meeting?* Write down the answers on the flipchart and start the next meeting with summing them up.

If you wish to learn more, check out

*Inclusive Dialogue Cards Harvard University; DIB Inclusive Dialogue Cards (harvard.edu)*

*O'Neill, J., & Bourke, R. (2010). Education teachers about a code of ethical conduct. Ethics and Education, 5(2), 179-192*

