

## Preparing the Ground Face Sheet

### The big idea: Preparing the ground.

- This section provides a series of activities that teach basic social skills, self-regulation and self-management skills
- The following practices, skills and procedures are *essential* for a healthy classroom and school community:
  - Agreements and Guidelines
  - Routines
  - Meaningful Work
  - Self-regulation
  - Communication Skills
  - Mutual Respect
  - Building Cooperation
  - Mistakes and How to Fix Them
  - Encouragement
  - Respecting Differences
  - Buy In for Class meetings

### Why preparing the ground is important.

- Taking the time to methodically teach the foundational skills in this section will help your class learn how to work together more effectively and respectfully. The skills learned here will help students manage stress, develop self-regulation and learn to identify and express their thoughts, needs and emotions.
- **The ability to self-regulate and delay gratification are better predictors of academic success than intelligence.**
- When a classroom doesn't function smoothly, we often find that the students creating the disruption are those lacking in these basic skills. Though it is common to think or wish that students would come to school with an ability to manage stress and self regulate, many don't. (Many adults don't either.)
- *"Preparing the Ground" skills will need to be revisited many times as students or the classroom encounters challenges. It is **the practice** of repeating these tools and skills that empower children to be "fluent."*

### What else are students learning?

When students work together effectively they develop the following "Significant Seven\*" perceptions and skills:

- I am capable.
- I can contribute in meaningful ways and I am genuinely needed.
- I can influence what happens to me in life.
- I have the ability to understand my personal emotions, to use that understanding to develop self-discipline and self-control and to learn from my experiences.
- I have the ability to work with others and to develop friendships through communicating, cooperating, negotiating, sharing, empathizing and listening."
- I have the ability to respond to the limits and consequences of everyday life with responsibility, adaptability, flexibility and integrity.
- I have the ability to use wisdom and to evaluate situations according to appropriate values.

**Recommended order for teaching:**

- It is important to teach lessons from each section and that *you* determine the appropriate order for your students. This is the order we recommend:
  1. Agreements and Guidelines
  2. Routines
  3. Meaningful Work
  4. Self-regulation
  5. Communication Skills
  6. Mutual Respect
  7. Building Cooperation
  8. Mistakes and How to Fix Them
  9. Encouragement
  10. Respecting Differences
  11. Buy In for Class Meetings
- If students are lacking the most basic ability to work together you may need to rearrange the order.

For example, student-generated classroom guidelines are an important first step, but your students may not be able to complete the task.

  1. You may need to post temporary guidelines for behavior before your students begin school.
  2. Teach routines and the lessons below, at an appropriate point.
  3. When ready, teach "Agreements and Guidelines" to create *student-generated guidelines* to replace your temporary ones.
- These activities will also help you assess your students' skill levels and which basic skills and competencies need more work.

**Literature connections.**

Many Face Sheets include a few children's books chosen because they:

- Are easy to read
- Support and develop one or more concepts.
- Are enjoyable for all ages
- Are generally consistent with Positive Discipline throughout. (An exception is that a few may mention rewards or punishment as an aside to the overall theme.)

Teachers in higher grades are adept at drawing multiple concepts emphasized in Positive Discipline from more complex literature. Such skill is beyond the scope of this manual. For this reason no attempt is made to recommend books that would appeal only to middle or high school students.

\* From the work of: Glenn, H. Stephen and Jane Nelsen. *Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World*. Rockland, CA: Prima Publishing and Communications, 1989.

## Agreements and Guidelines for the Classroom

### Preparing the Ground: Face Sheet

#### Concept: Creating agreed-upon guidelines.

- Guidelines are statements created by the group to determine their course of action.
- Having agreed-upon guidelines is a powerful way to lead a classroom.
- *Establishing guidelines with your students is one of the first things to do at the beginning of the school year or semester.*
- In many traditional classrooms, students walk into the classroom and the “rules” are already posted on the wall. There are three challenges from these kinds of rules:
  - 1) Students sense that they are imposed from above – and even if they make sense, they ask students to comply instead of cooperate.
  - 2) Students have heard the words in the rules many times and may have a general sense of what the words mean. However, they often have not linked the words to their own actions and remain disconnected from personal responsibility.
  - 3) The rules become background noise instead of an agreed-upon “living document” that teaches students awareness of their own behavior and that of those around them.

*Important Note: Extending the process of establishing agreed-upon guidelines throughout the school changes the climate and culture of the entire school. School staff creates agreed-upon guidelines with each other and the student council takes agreed-upon guidelines from each classroom, to create school-wide guidelines.*

#### Why agreed-upon guidelines are important.

- Guidelines create a “shared vision” for the classroom. As the teacher, *you are the steward of this shared vision*. It is what empowers you to *lead* your classroom instead of *manage* your classroom. (We lead people, we manage things.)
- It is the teacher’s job to invite students to self-reflect and self-correct over and over again until, with practice, the students themselves will understand and “feel” what a smoothly functioning classroom is like.
- *Guidelines vs. Rules*. We use the word “guidelines” intentionally. This sets them apart from traditional rules that are inflexible and made by someone else without input from the group.

#### What else are students learning?

- The practice of pausing, reflecting and then making small corrections increases students’ awareness of the world around them.
- Students begin to transfer the skills of pausing and reflecting to academics.

#### Recommended order for teaching agreements and guidelines:

- ***Beginning the Almost Perfect School Year (BAPSY): Guidelines for our Classroom (extended version)*** is the most powerful way to engage students in creating guidelines that fit and have meaning. It challenges them to think more deeply about the meaning of words like “respect” and “considerate” and what they might sound like and look like in action. For example: Students have heard the word “respect” over and over again, but without having an opportunity to create an active definition, it has less meaning.

For this reason, we suggest using BAPSY, especially with young children.

- ***We Decided: Guidelines for our Classroom (short version)***. This is a quick, simplified and effective process for generating classroom guidelines.
- ***We Decided: Guidelines for our Class Meeting***. Use later, before beginning class meetings. This is a quick and effective process for any additional guidelines needed for class meetings (or other situations, e.g. time out space, work with another teacher, etc.)

**Teaching is not enough:**

- Agreements and guidelines must be reviewed and practiced over and over again.
- Routines (refer to Routines Face Sheet) provide predictability and order that supports classroom guidelines.

**Tips:**

- **Keeping the guidelines alive.** Checking in with students regularly throughout the day (thumbs up/sideways/down) about specific guidelines helps students attune to the classroom environment and their own behaviors.
- **The teaching doesn't stop.** Guidelines are not written in stone for the whole year. It is common for classrooms to modify their guidelines when unexpected or unaddressed situations arise.
- **Holidays.** Students lose track of their agreements in the time leading up to and immediately after holidays. It is helpful to re-focus on routines and the 5 R's at those times.
- **New students.** Have a plan about how you will introduce new students to the class guidelines. (This can be a student job or an opportunity for whole class review.)