

## Exercise 1.2. – Rights, responsibilities and rules in the classroom

Educational objectives	<p>This activity introduces a “step-by-step” approach to use with students in order to establish democratically agreed rules for their class group.</p> <p>The students experience that their contribution matters and that they have a chance to influence the drafting of the rules. They develop a sense of “ownership” and experience active participation in the setting of the class community as a micro-society.</p> <p>The students become aware of links between rights, responsibilities and rules (standing for laws in the classroom context).</p>
Resources	Large sheets of paper divided into three equal parts.

### Procedure

1. Using a group-forming “game” (e.g. by handing out matching cards to form groups of jugglers, violinists, etc.) the class is divided into three, six, or nine groups depending on the class size. There should be no more than five students in each group. Each group is either A, B or C.
2. Each group appoints a spokesperson. The teacher asks the groups for brief feedback – how did they choose their spokesperson?
3. Each group has a sheet of paper divided into three. Using the top third of the paper, they record what they believe to be the rights of every individual (including the teacher) in their class. They should record every suggestion and each suggestion should be numbered.
4. The students give feedback, guided by the following questions. How well do you think you have completed the task? What were you all doing that helped? What hindered?
5. The students pass their work on to the next group (A to B, B to C, C to A).
6. Each group considers the list of rights generated by the previous group, guided by the following questions. What responsibilities do we have in order to respect those rights? What do we need to do? How do we need to behave? For example: “Everyone has the right to be heard.” – “We have a responsibility to listen.”  
Using the same numbers as used in the rights section, the students write down a corresponding responsibility (if they can think of one) in the middle third of the paper.<sup>2</sup>
7. Teacher input: rules for rules.
  - Decide on a few rules that will be prominently displayed in the classroom.
  - They should be positively phrased – DO something rather than DON’T do something.
  - They must be specific and describe the required behaviour, e.g. the right to be heard; we have a *responsibility* to listen; *rule* – remain silent when others are speaking.
8. The students pass their sheet of paper on once again. The groups consider all the information from the previous two groups and agree on a maximum of five rules. These are written in bold letters on the final third of the paper. This set of rules is detached and stuck on a wall. Each group’s spokesperson explains their rules to the whole class.  
Teacher-led discussion. The students identify redundant rules and agree which duplicate(s) can be deleted. Some groups may not be willing to allow their submission to be deleted,

<sup>2</sup> Students sometimes find it difficult to find a responsibility for every right.

while others may. The students should try to reach a decision that everyone agrees to. Rather than excluding a group's work, duplicates can be retained for further consideration.

9. Voting for the rules. Each student has four tokens to "spend" on the rules that they believe should be included in their classroom. They can cast their vote by allocating their tokens in any way they wish; for example they may wish to cast all of their votes for one rule or spread them evenly. The four rules with the highest number of votes cast become the rules for their classroom. They can be written up, signed by each student and displayed prominently in the classroom.
10. Reflection. What helped/hindered? How did you contribute to the activities? Did you notice anyone else in the class who did things that helped? What did they do?

This is the first opportunity for the class to apply their rules and to reinforce them. The teacher could praise those students who are respecting the rules. If at all possible the teacher should ignore those who are not, otherwise it provides them with "the limelight" for negative reasons.