

CREATING A COMPACT FOR EXCELLENCE

Doing our best work and treating others with respect and care

Lickona & Davidson, 2004

1. *Present the idea of the class as a team.*

- ✓How many of you have had the experience of being part of a team?
- ✓What do you need in order to have a good team?
- ✓A team needs goals, such as the desire to be the best it can be.
- ✓A team also needs rules—work together, practice hard, play fair—in order to achieve its goals.
- ✓This class is a team. But to be a good one, we need two things:
 - (1) goals, and
 - (2) rules that will help us achieve our goals.

2. *Explain the two goals of the Compact for Excellence.*

- ✓Think of a classroom that you really liked. Did the students goof off, or did they work hard and learn a lot? Did they act disrespectfully toward the teacher and each other, or did they treat the teacher and each other with respect? In surveys, most students say they like and respect teachers who have *high expectations for learning* and *high expectations for behavior*. Students say they *don't* like teachers who don't teach well or who allow students to get away with bad behavior.
- ✓Effective classrooms have high standards. In such classrooms, both the students and the teacher:
 1. *Do their best work*—work of excellence they can be proud of.
 2. *Treat others with respect and care*—so that every member of the learning community is glad to be there.

These are the two parts of the *Compact for Excellence*. To strive for excellence means always to do your best. The Compact for Excellence is a two-part challenge: (1) to *do* your best work, and (2) to *be* your best in relationships with other people. The next question is: What rules do we need that will help us achieve these two goals of the Compact? But I'm not going to give you the rules—we're going to come up with



them together. The word “compact” means agreement. The rules of our Compact will be ones that we all agree on.

3. Create classroom rules that will help all class members do their best work. (These rules help to develop performance character.)

Group Discussion: What rules do we need that will help *everyone* in our learning community **DO THEIR BEST WORK?** Decide on 5-10 rules (there’s no magic number; they should be general enough to cover all the potential issues, but specific enough to be clear and meaningful) that will help us each do our best work.

To help everyone do their best work...

People would ...

People would not ...

1.

1.

2.

2.

3.

3.

4.

4.

5.

5.

Student Examples of Rules for Doing Our Best Work

Try your hardest. (2nd-grade)

Always do our best. (3rd-grade)

Never give up. (3rd-grade)

Be a thinking worker. (4th-grade)

I will come to class prepared and determined to contribute. (6th-grade)

I will keep my commitments. (6th-grade)

Be prepared. (8th-grade)

Participate. (High school.)

Have a positive attitude. (High school)

Take good notes. (High school.)



4. Create rules that will help all class members treat others with respect and care. (These rules develop moral character.)

Group Discussion: HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE TREATED by everyone else in our learning community – by the teacher and your classmates? What would it *look like* if people treated you in this way? Think of specific things they would do that would help you feel welcomed, respected, cared about, valued, and glad to be here? What would they *not* do? In the columns below, list some examples.

To help everyone feel welcomed, respected, cared about, and valued...

People would ...

People would not ...

1.

1.

2.

2.

3.

3.

4.

4.

5.

5.

Student Examples of Rules for Treating Others With Respect and Care

Help other people. (2nd-grade)

Follow the Golden Rule. (2nd-grade)

Respect self, others, and everything around us. (3rd-grade)

Be in control of yourself. (4th-grade)

I will help others achieve their goals. (6th-grade)

Listen to each other. (8th-grade)

Show respect for others' property. (8th-grade)

Be respectful of the teacher. (High school)

Have good manners. (High school)

5. *Check your compact against common problems.* Make a list of problem behaviors you've dealt with in the past, e.g., put-downs, tardiness, bad language, side conversations, and disrespectful speech or actions. Ask questions that help students evaluate these behaviors against the rules they have just created:

- "What if someone puts somebody down? Does that show respect?"
 - "What if someone laughs at somebody who makes a mistake?"
 - "What if someone is having a side conversation while another person is speaking? Does that show respect?"
-

6. *Have students make a large display of the rules.*

In some classrooms, students write the final rules on a large poster board and surround it with illustrations. In all cases, the final presentation of the rules should be displayed in a prominent place (*Rules in School*, www.responsiveclassroom.org). This is the classroom *Compact for Excellence*. Post it. Give every student a copy for the inside of his/her notebook or planner. In some classrooms, the teacher invites all students to sign the Compact to show their commitment. Some elementary classes have invited families to a signing celebration, where students explain how the rules came to be (*Rules in School*, Katherine Brady *et al.*)

7. *Develop your system of character-based consequences—how you will respond when students break the rules. Discuss with students how you will respond and your reasons for doing so.*

☒ The goals of character-based consequences are five:

1. Maintain an orderly classroom—either by eliciting appropriate behavior or moving the student to another place.
2. Help students recognize and learn from their mistakes.
3. Help students internalize the rules (develop a deeper understanding and commitment), so they grow in their self-control.
4. Help students fix their mistakes (make restitution and repair the relationship).
5. Enables students to share the responsibility for holding all class members accountable to the agreed-upon rules.

☒ Discussion to help students share responsibility for rule-enforcement:

Q: "Who created these rules?" A: (We did.)

Q: "So who should be responsible for helping to make sure everyone follows follow the rules that we all created?" A: (We all should.)

Q: "How can we do that? What are some ways we can share responsibility for holding each other accountable for following our rules? Suppose someone . . .

- Is having a side conversation instead of listening to the person who's speaking
- litters the classroom or school grounds
- puts somebody down
- asks to copy someone else's homework
- uses bad language
- isn't following the teacher's directions
- isn't doing their fair share in a cooperative learning activity. . .

Q: "What could you say or do that would help that person think about our rules and follow our class Compact?"

✓Work out "words to say" or non-verbal signals that students can use to give each other a reminder in at least some of these situations. One program uses a Thumbs-Up as a reminder, and "Foul" when somebody puts you—or another person—down. The class agreement is that the person who committed the putdown has to pay two "put-ups" (compliments) on the spot.

✓"What should be the consequence if the person *doesn't* follow the rule after a reminder?" With the class, develop a hierarchy of consequences, or present your hierarchy and explain its rationale. Make sure the consequences are character-based:

1. *Relevant*—logically related to the rule or the offense (not arbitrary)
2. *Respectful* of the person (not embarrassing or demeaning)
3. *Reasonable* (not harsh or excessive)
4. *Restorative* (they restore or repair the relationship by making restitution)
5. *Resource-building* (they help the student develop, and plan to use, the character virtues—such as empathy, self-control, social skills, and the motivation to do the right thing—there were not put into practice when the behavior problem occurred.)

There are three kinds of relevant or logical consequences:

- Time-out ("Take a Break")
- Loss of privilege
- Restitution ("If you break it, you fix it.")



8. Send a letter home to families—celebrating your compact and its rules, explaining your consequence system, and asking for family support.

Dear Family,

During this first week of school we have developed a *Compact for Excellence* in our classroom. This Compact has two purposes: (1) to help us do our best work, and (2) to help us treat everyone with respect and care. These are the two most important goals of our classroom.

To achieve these goals, the students and I have worked together to develop the following rules, which make up our Compact for Excellence:

Rules for Doing Our Best Work

- 1. Be prepared. (Be ready to learn and have all the necessary materials.)**
- 2. Set goals every day and evaluate whether we met them.**
- 3. Always do our best, and never give up.**

Rules for Treating Others With Respect and Care

- 1. Respect everyone in word and deed.**
- 2. Have good manners. (Say “please,” “thank you,” & “excuse me.”)**
- 3. Help others be the best they can be.**
- 4. If you create a problem, try to fix it.**

When someone doesn't follow one of our rules, a reminder or question gives the student a chance to self-correct. We use time-out in a positive way, to help students make a plan to “get back in the game.” Whenever possible, we ask students to think of something they can do to heal a hurt or otherwise fix a problem they may have caused. If a behavior problem persists, we will always let you know. In such cases, we may ask the student to make a written Behavior Improvement Plan (you would receive a copy).

You can help us at home. Please discuss these rules with your child and encourage your child to follow them. We are working hard to have a classroom where all students realize their potential for learning and doing quality work and where every child, without exception, feels safe, valued, and significant. Please call or email me whenever you have a question. Thank you very much for your support.