

Setting up Civil Conversations

This is a ‘set-up’ method in which you work collaboratively with the students to set up clear criteria and behaviors to ensure the practice of civil conversations within your classroom. It can be used in multiple ways. The first step helps to define a civil conversation and the second step helps students create agreed upon guidelines for how to conduct a civil conversation. In addition to this principle, this activity supports Learning Through Thinking and Learning Through Reflection and Evaluation.

Expected Outcome(s)

Students will:

- *Be able to define and describe a civil conversation*
- *Be able to explain the criteria for a civil conversation in this classroom*
- *Be able to demonstrate active listening behaviours*
- *Be able to reflect upon and evaluate their process*

Timing

The timing of this activity is dependent on many factors: experience, classroom culture, and how you implement it, etc., the minimum amount of time you should plan for this method is 2 hours and 35 minutes (45 for the silent conversation to understand the definition; 45 minutes for the initial brainstorm and categorization, 30-45 minutes to assure clarity about the guidelines and finalizing the list; and 20-30 minutes for reflection). We suggest you break this down into multiple sessions/days.

Material

| Offline | Blended |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>A board, paper, or digital white board to collect ideas, sticky notes, markers, etc.</i> - <i>A large piece of paper for your final civil conversation guideline list.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Create a Flip account as a teacher</i> - <i>Create a Padlet account and a Padlet with columns</i> - <i>Provide 1 tablet/laptop for each group of students (groups of 3-4).</i> |

Prepare yourself

- **Definition:** a civil conversation is a **dialogue between two people or a group that intends to build a better understanding**. Participants don't have to agree—what matters is the act of listening to other people and learning their perspective. In that way, a civil conversation focuses on process rather than on results.
- Create mind map titled “what is a civil conversation”, with a center circle with the definition of civil conversations with many lines extending from the center definition with additional text bubbles. This is a silent conversation method.
- Re-write the definition so that it best suites the age of your students.

Blended

- a Padlet with columns for the guideline brainstorm. Title the board “civil conversation guideline brainstorm”. Create columns for each group to put their ideas.
- Read yourself about Flip and create a teacher account. Flip is a tool where you can create a digital classroom platform where students can post TikTok-like videos about any topic.
- Create a topic in Flip about the assignment of this exercise.

Ideally, your students have created an account on Flip with a device beforehand and installed the app on the tablets. You add them to your class group on Flip. If possible, have a lesson about Flip before this exercise (see overall document for more info).

Step-by-step or course

1 Input – What are civil conversations?

Show a mind map on the (digital) board in your classroom (this can be done on a regular white board, chalk board or on large paper as well) with the definition in the middle.

- Read the definition together with your students.
- Invite your students to a silent conversation in which they respond to the definition by asking questions, adding ideas, or explaining the definition further by filling in the bubbles extending from the definition.
- Once they have done that, now invite them to respond and/or ask questions of their classmates’ original responses. No talking happens, this is all silent the conversation is happening on the digital board.

Tip

If this is done on a real board or paper, make sure that you can save it, either by saving the chart paper or taking a picture of the students’ work.

In a class conversation ask them to discuss the content of this exercise:

1. What do you notice about what everyone has written?
2. Are there any questions listed up here you want to answer?
3. Do you have any remaining comments or questions?

Process reflection questions:

1. How did it feel to have a silent conversation?
2. Suggestion: you can set up a quick Mentimeter asking them to choose from a pre-selected set of emojis to show how they felt about the silent conversation.
3. Scan the room and ask the students to give a thumbs up, down, or middle to give feedback how the silent conversation felt to them.

2 Brainstorm

Now that the students have well understood what a civil conversation is and its goals, begin a brainstorm with the students on what guidelines would be helpful for them to agree upon as a class in order to practice civil conversations.

Begin this brainstorm in small groups of 3-4 students. Put the Padlet on the white board. Students work and think together about class guidelines. Each group gets an assigned column to put their answers.

This exercise takes for about 10-15 minutes, the groups come up with as many guidelines as they can to suggest as class guidelines for civil conversations. When the groups are done, the teacher facilitates sharing the ideas and categorizing them with the students by dragging them.

3 Categorizing and creating an initial guideline list

Once all the guidelines are categorized, work as a group to make a list of class guidelines for civil conversations. Write them down in the way you like.

Pay careful attention to using positive language, as much as is possible, in formulating the guidelines. For example: instead of don't interrupt, try: each person has an equal amount of time to speak.

Here is a list of guidelines for civil conversations. Use them to help guide and facilitate the conversation.

- Listen actively to the person speaking, seeking to understand first, then respond.
- Show respect for the views expressed by others, even if you strongly disagree.
- Be brief in your comments so that all who wish to speak have a chance to express their views.
- Direct your comments to the group as a whole, rather than to any one individual.
- Don't let disagreements or conflicting views become personal. Name-calling and shouting are not acceptable ways of conversing with others.

- Let others express their views without interruption. Your Dialogue leader will try to give everyone a chance to speak or respond to someone else's comments.
- Use "I" statements, not "we"

4 Check for Understanding

Now that you have an agreed upon list of guidelines, make sure that every word is understood. For example:

- What does showing respect actually look like and sound like? (Body language, facial expressions, etc.).
- What do you do when you are actively listening (facing the person who is talking, making eye contact, nodding to show that you are following, carefully listening to what the speaker is saying instead of thinking about your own response, asking clarifying questions when the speaker is finished to make sure you understood what they said).
- How do you make statements that address a group?
- How do you change a "we" statement into an "I" statement

5 Finalizing the list

Finalize your guidelines and make them prominent and visible to everyone. Consider having the students sign the poster with the guidelines to demonstrate their collaboration in their creation and their commitment to practice them.

Divide the students again in groups of 3-4 students. Tell them they are going to make a TikTok-like video to creatively explain the guideline on Flip. Provide each group of a tablet (preferably) or a laptop.

- Each group gets 25 minutes to make a Flip video about their assigned guidelines.

- Tell them they need to make a video where it's clear what's the guideline about.
- Each group video can max be 1 minute.

Step-by-step guide for Flip for students:

- Open the app
- Click on the circle on the bottom of the screen to start the video recording.
- Let your students create a video about the guidelines.
- There are numerous tools to use during the video making.
- Explore them beforehand or let your students explore themselves.
- Click on your fragments in the right bottom corner to edit.
- Go forward on the pink arrow to publish.
- Let your students post the video in the right topic.
- Post the topic.

Your students can see each other's video in the overview. During this exercise, the students get familiar with the guidelines and explain them to others.

6 Reflection & Evaluation

Let your students watch each video of each guideline.

Ask the students to write/draw for themselves what it feels like to know that everyone agrees and will try to use these guidelines? Can they imagine how it might impact how they will have a conversation?

These guidelines are criteria developed by the students with your help. They can be used at any time for self and group evaluation. After you have practiced using the guidelines several times in the class, consider offering the students an opportunity to evaluate how well they are using the guidelines in class. You, as the teacher, can also use the criteria to evaluate how the individual students and the group as a whole are doing in practicing holding civil conversations.

See Learning through Reflection and Evaluation.

This type of evaluation is a great exercise that can lead to a reflective conversation when the group discusses how it is going and where they need more practice.