

# Developing Guidelines for Group Behavior

(Adapted from *The Handbook for SMART School Teams* by Anne Conzemius and Jan O'Neill, 2002)

Ground rules help a group take ownership of its collective behavior, articulate its concerns, and take action on those concerns by establishing their own norms of conduct as a team. Ground rules are often established early on in a group's development.

Creating ground rules as a whole group increases the odds that people will follow them. There are several methods you can use. For example:

1. **Pose open questions to the group and then discuss the answers.** Use the following questions as discussion starters for talking about how the group wants to function. You might write down answers to the questions on a flipchart or whiteboard, for example, and then have your team discuss what themes appear in their answers.
  - ***What could this group do to assure that this team fails?***  
This question, called "The Cotter Question" after its creator, Maury Cotter from the University of Wisconsin's Office of Quality Improvement, usually generates some laughter, but after the group begins to really think about it, they discover that some of their previous team experiences were bad enough to have been planned that way. Had they thought through the behaviors that they wanted to avoid, those experiences would have been quite different.)
  - ***What makes a team successful?***
  - ***What drives you crazy about meetings?***
  - ***If you had the chance to create the perfect team experience, what would it be like?***
  - ***It's okay to \_\_\_\_\_; it's not okay to \_\_\_\_\_.***
2. **Have the group discuss various categories of behavior.** Another process for creating ground rules is to identify categories of behavior and ask people to write one idea per category on sticky notes and post their ideas on a flipchart. Then, the group discusses which of the ideas the group would like to adopt as its own.

Typical ground rule topics and some examples are shown in the table below:

Ground Rule Topics	Examples
Attendance	All members agree to attend every meeting. When someone cannot attend, that person agrees to contact the team leader 24 hours in advance, if possible.
Participation	There should be no substitutes for team members. Members should participate fully both inside and outside meetings.
Interruptions	We will attend meetings as though we had driven 100 miles to attend. WE will allow interruptions for emergencies only.
Preparation	We will come to all meetings with assignments completed, prepared to productively contribute to discussions and decisions.
Timeliness	We will start on time if at least 80% of members are present. We will stop discussions 5 minutes before the meeting ends so we can decide on next steps and how to handle unresolved issues.
Decision-making	We will discuss the best decision-making model for each situation. We will support decisions made by the group.
Conflict Management	We will deal with conflicts in the group directly, respectfully, and immediately.
Communication	We will keep accurate meeting records and share them with team members within 3 days following the meeting if at all possible.
Meeting Practices	We will have an agenda for every meeting and commit to following it.
Jargon Cops	At each meeting we will appoint one person to pay attention to jargon. Violators will throw 25 cents into the treat fund.

### **Suggestions for Using Ground Rules:**

Create them as a team.

Review them often.

Discuss them with new members.

Keep them visible at all times.

Confront behaviors that violate them.

Revise them as needed.