
DEVELOPING A STUDENT BEHAVIOUR AGREEMENT

Middle and secondary age level

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Developing a student behaviour agreement (middle and secondary age level)

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A 'student-behaviour-agreement' is fundamental to the establishment phase of the school year :- it is the outcome of a process whereby all students and all tutor/pastoral/home room teachers (or form teachers) discuss and develop *shared understandings about learning and behaviour* with their tutor group/home group. This 'agreement' is based on core rights and responsibilities expected of all members of the school community. The student-behaviour-agreement is a fundamental reference for all expected-encouraged behaviour in our students and all behaviour management and discipline for any adult leadership. This agreement is developed/discussed in the first meeting between tutor (form) teachers and their tutor (form) classes.

Within a whole-school approach to learning and behaviour it is important for all teaching staff to :-

- (i) Develop *shared understandings* (with their students) about the relationship of behaviour to learning, and to social relationships, with students within the form/tutor groups;
- (ii) Develop a published agreement *based on (or from)* such shared understandings.
- (iii) Develop this 'agreement' in the establishment phase of the year [in our first tutor / form-group's meeting in term one].
- (iv) Focus on the core understandings, expectations and behaviours as they flow from
 - **shared rights**
 - **shared responsibilities**
 - **shared rules.**
- (v) All subject/class teachers utilise this *student behaviour agreement* within their behaviour leadership.

Developing a student behaviour agreement (S B A)

As noted above a SBA is a attempt to clarify *shared understandings* and expectations about behaviour and learning within a school community :-

- (1) Central to such understandings are the *core rights* of the members of the school community. These rights form the foundation – and reference – for teacher leadership in the area of behaviour management and discipline. Whenever a teacher addresses unthinking, unhelpful, distracting, disruptive behaviours – *anywhere in the school* – they do so from these *core rights*. These rights are also central to students' understanding of behaviour within the school community (see over).

FRAMEWORK FOR STUDENT BEHAVIOUR AGREEMENT

OUR AIM IN THIS AGREEMENT IS TO ENABLE OUR STUDENTS TO

- : be *aware* of how their behaviour affects others' rights
- : consciously take ownership, and responsibility, for their behaviour
- : respect the rights of others (here in our school)
- : support positive relationships in our class group (and across the school)
- : support our learning together

The key areas of focus (below) are discussed with all tutor / form classes :-

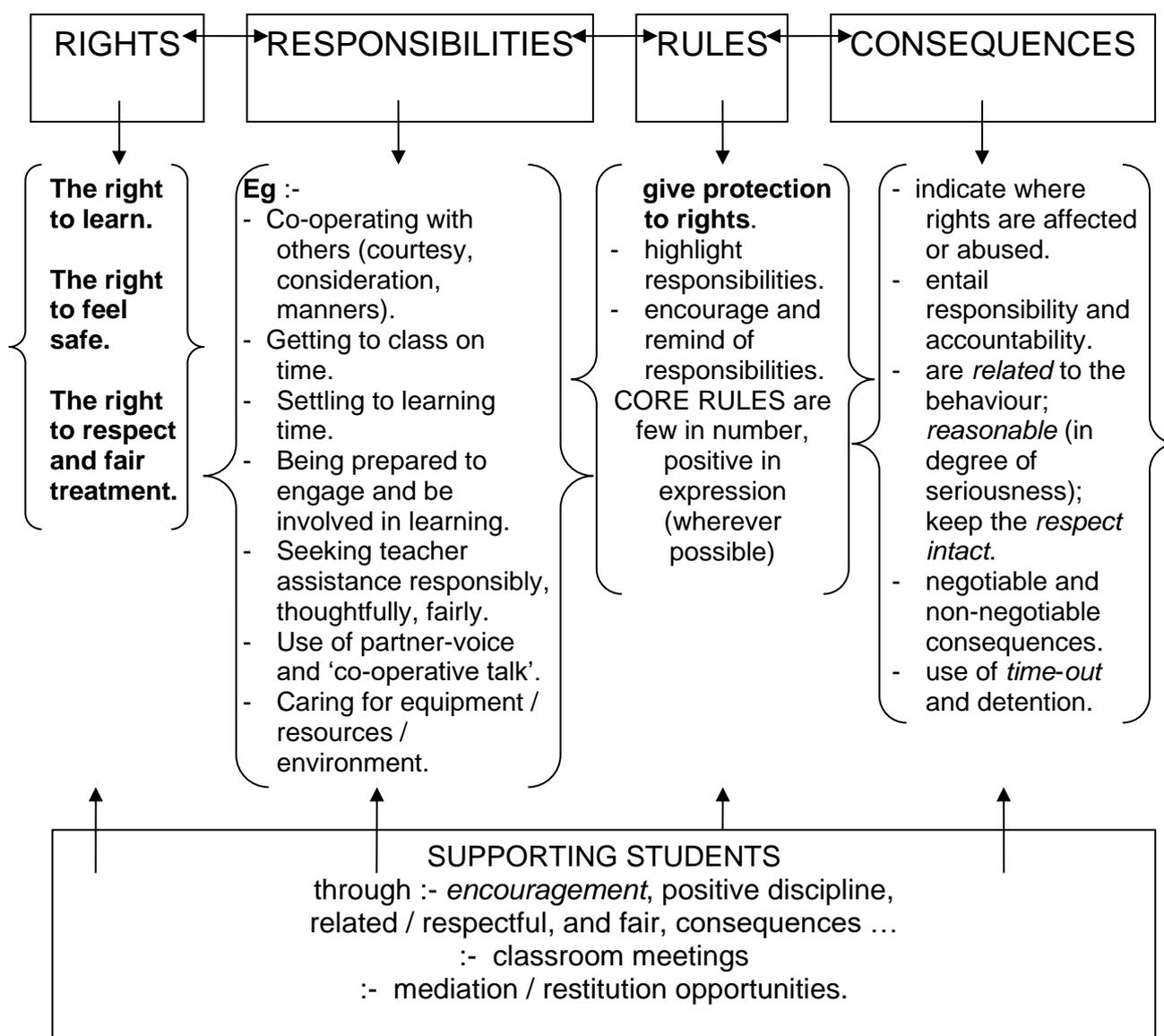


Fig. 1. Student Behaviour Agreement : A basic framework

CORE RIGHTS (Non-negotiable)

THE RIGHT TO FEEL SAFE : this right addresses not only one's physical safety, but one's psychological and 'social' safety as well. Behaviours such as 'putting others down', 'cheap shots', unreasonable teasing, name-calling, swearing *at* ..., excluding others *on purpose*..., racist, sexist, homophobic behaviours are all behaviours that take away someone's right to feel safe. This right also addresses 'personal space' issues, gender awareness issues and *any* expression of harassment /bullying behaviours.

THE RIGHT TO LEARN addresses the 'learning culture' in classroom (and non-classroom) settings. Students have a right to learn without undue, unreasonable, and unfair distractions and diversions from others. Students also have a right to learn in a learning environment where their teachers do not create unnecessary anxiety or pressure through negative comparisons (with other students), overly negative feedback or lack of consideration of learning needs and learning 'styles'.

[Even a basic awareness of, and compensation for, different learning styles will assist in *engaging – and motivating* – our students as learners.]

THE RIGHT TO RESPECT / FAIR TREATMENT. As in the right to feel safe, this right addresses the way we interact with – and treat – one another. Basic respect (at least civility) is fundamental to creating workable, positive, co-operative and safe learning communities; we do not have to always 'like' someone to treat them with basic, fundamental, civility/respect. *This is a difficult but necessary reality of social relationships.* It is also crucial that all teachers, in all contexts, be consciously aware of how they model respect and civility to their students. Even when a teacher is communicating appropriate frustration (or anger) to students, their ability to assert, allow cool-off-time and repair and rebuild with students will all go a long way to keeping such respect intact without denying the necessity (at times) for assertive teacher discipline.

Basic civility includes teachers (as well as our students) using (and remembering to use) students' names; basic courtesies such as 'good

morning' / 'afternoon' (to whole-class group ...); basic manners such as 'please', 'thanks', 'excuse me' ... eg : There are some teachers who will just come into a student's working space and simply take up their work, look at it, make comments, write in their workbook (without even a basic greeting and a courtesy such as "Do you mind if I ...?")

We expect, remind, encourage and (at times) discipline, our students to use their manners. We too, as teachers, need to model what we invite, encourage and 'expect' in our students.

When we are engaged in corrective discipline and addressing behaviours such as lateness to class, calling out, butting-in, noise levels of groups (in our on-task learning time) ... etc, it is important to remember to use respectful discipline language. We can all benefit from some professional reflection on our *characteristic* 'language of discipline' [see Rogers, 2011. See also notes : '*The concept of preferred practices within a whole-school approach*', 2016 and '*Preferred Practices and core skills for school-wide behaviour leadership (brief summary ...)*' 2016].

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- (2) All rights imply – and 'entail' – responsibilities if those rights are to be *realised*. It will be important to discuss the relationship of rights-to-responsibilities with our students. Even some adults forget this moral and social correlation at times.

When discussing *basic* responsibilities with a group of students they will easily enable the 'whiteboard list'; they 'know' what the fair/'right' behaviours are eg :- getting to class on time (bad-day notwithstanding); having necessary / appropriate equipment; hands up without calling out; listening when the teacher is speaking / teaching (even if the mind is blank while in the act of listening!); putting their hand up in class discussion (without calling out) so all students get a *fair* go in class discussions/listening to fellow students in whole class discussions; chewing gum, mobile phones, I-pods etc in the bag / locker ... go away (basic respect). Beyond the basic and prosaic responsibilities

students will also nominate:- caring for one another; listening to one another; turn-taking; no put-downs; manners ('please', 'thanks', 'ta', 'excuse me' when moving through personal space, ask before you borrow, return ...); care for our classroom resources, environment ... This doesn't mean (of course) that all students will always do this – *but they know what the right thing is* ...Caring for our classroom environment is also a basic responsibility. I have taken classes countless times (at secondary level) where I have walked into the classroom only to find chairs / desks askew (or chairs on the floor!); residual litter; class sets of books all over the place; the whiteboard covered with other classes' work ... It doesn't take much effort for *all* teachers to remind, and encourage, *all* students (in *all* classes) to **d.t.n.c.a.f.t.** :- "do the next class a favour thanks ... straighten furniture, pick up residual litter ..., leave considerately. Thanks folks."

It is also reasonable (and fair) to expect students to have a considerate exit from their classrooms instead of racing out to 'beat the bell' In some classes, and year levels, it is appropriate that students be 'directed' to leave the classroom 'row-by-row'. Along with **d.t.c.a.f.t.** : do the cleaner a favour thanks (chairs on table, litter ...).

When discussing *responsibilities* with our students it will help to consolidate the **core** responsibilities from those issues and understandings arising within the class group discussion. These **core** responsibilities will be accepted as fair and reasonable (at least in the discussion!) The way that all teachers (then) continue to encourage and address those responsibilities will determine how effectively such responsibilities are realised by students and how those responsibilities become reasonable, fair (and expected) learning habits.

Central to the establishment of positive learning communities (*classroom by classroom/ whole-school*) is the quality of teacher, leadership, discipline and the thoughtful use of encouragement and descriptive feedback in building positive behaviours across a school. (See Rogers, 2011 and 2015).

(3) **Rules give some protection to core rights.**

Good, fair, clear rules *highlight responsibility*, give *direction* to personal and group responsibility and give a basis for school-wide discipline when rights are infringed, ignored or abused.

Rules need to be seen as purposeful (at least **reasonable**). It is important to explain to students the reason for a rule (avoid simply assuming).

Rules are better expressed (and published) using inclusive language where possible : ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘our’, ‘all’, ‘everyone here’, ‘together ,,,’

When we exercise discipline – *within* the rules – our language of discipline is more positive, more invitational – if it utilises such inclusive language ie : “Justin ... remember *our* class rule for ...” (This to a student calling out.) This ‘simple’ rule-reminder is preferred (as discipline language) over “*Don’t* call out ...” or “*Why* are you calling out ...?” or “You’re not supposed to be calling out *are you?*”

It can often help to publish *core* rules on posters in the classroom (at any year level).

Even ‘*Remember* to ...’ is more positive and invitational than, ‘*Don’t forget* to ...’.

In the example (over page) (Fig. 2.) the rule poster is a summary of a year level, shared, understanding about rights, responsibilities and rules expressed in a single poster addressing **learning**. See also notes : Rule posters at secondary level (on request).

The poster’s heading highlights :

- ***The right to learn*** : WE ALL HAVE A RIGHT TO LEARN
- ***How we learn well here*** :- (our responsibilities to each other ...) means :-
 - getting to class on time,
 - settling quickly, ‘relax’ (in seat within whole-class seating plan); ready ..., prepared, (to give our learning time a fair go),
 - hands up (without calling out or talking over others, butting-in, or private chats while a fellow student is asking a question or sharing an issue ...),
 - FGFA (fair go for all),
 - how to get *teacher assistance* [ie :- *check* first yourself, then with a classmate (quietly); if you still need help write your name on the *teacher*

help board (THB); go on with other *set work* while you wait for the teacher to 'conference' with you ...].

Of course these rule-reminders – on the poster – are one 'side' of a two-'sided' (and shared) 'coin' – exchanged between teacher and students. One 'side' of the 'shared coin' entails student responsibility; and encourages student responsibility, the other 'side' of the 'shared coin' entails the teacher establishing, maintaining and encouraging the core routines to enable positive learning (in reference to the rights and responsibilities discussed earlier).

The viability of positive behaviour being realised within a class group depends on *how* the teacher *characteristically* encourages, and disciplines, within those fair rules.

WE ALL HAVE A RIGHT TO LEARN	
To learn well here we :-	
* Get to class on time	
	* Settle quickly / 'relax' / prepared
	* Hands up (discussion / assistance)
	* Partner-voice / co-operative talk in classwork time. FGFA.
	* Have necessary materials
* If you need teacher assistance : check first, THB, other work.	
Thanks. Mr Rogers.	

Fig. 2. Rule poster

(FGFA = Fair Go For All THB = Teacher Help Board)

The poster is a whole-class *aide memoire* that refers backs to the student behaviour agreement (SBA) itself, within which the year group has discussed the right to learn : *without undue, unfair, unreasonable, unnecessary distraction / disruption*. The rule-poster does not need to attenuate the *qualifiers* (eg 'without

unfair, unreasonable distraction ...). As a succinct, *visible*, expression of the SBA it doesn't list 'all' the expressions of fair behaviour, just the *key* (shared) understandings and expectations relevant to the right, the rule and its responsibilities.

nb When the poster refers to 'relax' that implies ... '*without* heavy seat-leaning, being overly-comatose, (etc)'. When the poster lists the word *prepared* (as a verb) it implies students are prepared to contribute in class discussions (not forced but prepared to contribute as they feel comfortable).

When the poster refers to 'partner-voice' it refers to the shared understanding / expectation – previously discussed – about what partner-voice implies (eg : 'quiet', 'softer' voices, a voice that 'doesn't need to travel far' ... the classroom isn't a playground so we do not need to use a footy/soccer voice (!) (unless it is necessary – say in a drama classroom).

'Co-operative talk' refers to the nature, and kind, of talk that focuses on the work we do together in class time, and supporting one another in our learning (as distinct from, merely, 'social time' outside of class time).

(4) **Consequences flow from choices we make about our behaviour.**

This is not always a 'simple' cause-effect relationship about consequences that students immediately appreciate. It can help to raise this issue with our students :-

*"Sometimes it doesn't seem that we make 'choices' we just **do** 'behaviour' : we call out; we forget to put our hand up and wait our turn (do we really 'forget?'); we fiddle (a bit too loudly) with our pen, (or water bottle, or pencil-case or mini skateboard or toy) – while the teacher is explaining something; we butt-in while a fellow-student is making a point in class discussion; we make a 'put-down' comment about a fellow student – about what they said in a class discussion – and we may not have thought that we were 'putting-them-down' ... we may have thought we were being 'funny' or 'smart' ... Sometimes we behave in unhelpful ways because we are tired, bored or hungry.*

*Sometimes – of course – we do consciously behave in ways that don't consider others' feelings and needs. We behave in unfair ways, and unacceptable ways because we want others in class to 'notice us a lot'; to 'laugh at us'; to get others to think we're 'special'/different/better /more powerful than others ... We all want to belong in our own way ... It seems hard, sometimes, to realise how important it really is to 'belong' in thoughtful, helpful, co-operative ways that do consider others' needs and feelings as well as our own. Sometimes we are tempted to think we're 'extra important'; that we can 'do what we want and no one can really stop us ...'; sometimes we might not even care (!) **But our behaviour is our responsibility, and our behaviour always has consequences – for ourselves and our classmates, our teachers (even our parents).** It affects how well we can work together, feel good about ourselves and feel safe here ..."*

Students understand these conceptions and realities about daily behaviour at school; a class discussion can help re-affirm and re-appraise these conceptions and understandings. Students also (generally) understand why a school has behaviour consequences for more serious behaviours (sometimes they interpret them as 'punishment'). What is important is that students see consequences in a *relational* way; connected to how others' rights are being affected (even abused); rules being broken are rights affected, ignored or abused.

An important key to establishing consequences – as teachers – is to remember that a behaviour consequence should :

- **Relate** – in some way – to the disruptive behaviour. For example, none of us (as teachers) use the writing of 'lines' any more for that reason (write out 500 times "I must not be stupid in class ...") That's what we got at school in the 1950s/1960s/and 1970s). We often, however, use a *right of reply proforma* – where appropriate – as part of consequential discipline where students have the opportunity to write down :- *What happened?* (to cause them to be, for example, 'in detention'); *What rule or right was affected / broken?* (by their behaviour);

What's your side of the story? (How do you see the situation? – the right of reply ...); *What can you do to fix things up ... change ... things?*

How can your teacher help? (See the in-service notes : *The Establishment Phase of the Year*, 2016).

- Consequences need to have a **degree of seriousness / and be reasonable** in the kind of consequence applied; there's a big difference between the kind of 'consequence' we would give for calling out several times in class, or being late, or homework not done ... and, say, a bullying incident. The consequences vary significantly related to the *degree of seriousness* about the behaviour at issue and the way in which rights have been infringed or abused. Students need to see the 'moral weight' in the kind and degree of behaviour consequences utilised by their teachers.
- **Keep the respect of the student intact.** There is no place for keeping a student back after class, or 'in detention', and *then* speaking to them in unthinking, mean-spirited, petty, arrogant ways. " ... I'm sick and tired of your stupid behaviour! You *never* listen; you're wasted space here ..." (*ad nauseum*). Such behaviour is unacceptable, unnecessary and unprofessional.
- When we speak with students in such contexts we need to allow some **appropriate right of reply**, while *still* exercising the consequential follow-up and follow-through. We should also refer back to the SBA (as is relevant) as affected by the student's behaviour (see *Establishment Phase* in-service notes, 2019*).

Behaviour consequences are – thus – directly related to the rights and responsibilities within the SBA.

It will help to discuss with students the difference between 'negotiable' and 'non-negotiable' consequences.

Most consequences are 'negotiable' *in the sense* that individual teachers will work through with students what needs to happen *as a result of their* inappropriate, or disruptive, or rights-infringing *behaviour(s)*. They will negotiate in the sense of an 'after class stay-back session', or more extended

behaviour interview, where the teacher talks the issue through with the student, or a short lunch-time detention, or (perhaps) a more 'formal detention'. The degree of 'negotiation' – in such consequences – will vary, of course, but will focus on the questions noted earlier such as :- What happened?; What right, or rule, was affected by your behaviour? What is your understanding of what happened?; How did it affect others?; What can you do, now, to 'fix' or 'change' things, ,,,? How can I help ...?

The degree of 'negotiability' *always* refers back to the rights affected by the student's behaviour. We seek to engage a restitutive process not (merely) a punitive process.

Teachers, as part of their 'classroom discipline plan', will make it respectfully clear to their students that "If you make it difficult for others in our class to learn here, to feel safe here, to have fair respect and fair treatment here you will be reminded of our rules; you may be asked to work away from others; you may be asked to take 'time-out' (away from our class group). You will always have the right to discuss your behaviour with your teacher/s in non-class time ..."

Non-negotiable consequences refer to behaviours such as :-

- *repeated* disruptive behaviour in class (behaviours affecting others' rights to learn or feel safe).
- *Any* hostile, threatening, aggressive or violent behaviour in / or out of our class/use of any weapons/violence.
- *Any* bullying/harassment.
- Drugs, (including smoking).

All of these behaviours occasion some form of **immediate** and **non-negotiable**, consequence ranging from time-out to suspension; *temporary* exclusion (from class groups, or even social play) *within school*, in-school suspension or exclusion from school (at home) – through to permanent exclusion.

Students will generally ‘wear’ the consequences of their behaviour if they know (in advance) that any consequences will be fair and will be carried out with as reasonable a consistency as we can (as they relate to our fair rights and rules in the SBA).

Developing a Student Behaviour Agreement with a form / tutor groups / pastoral groups / home groups

In developing an SBA with our tutor / form group we will (as teachers) need to consider how to present the core ideas in our first form/tutor meetings. (see Fig. 1.)

- RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES and how they relate to each other.
- How RULES are there for *everyone’s* benefit; ‘to give everyone a fair go’.
- How CONSEQUENCES are the outcome of our ‘choices’ and our actions. We are responsible, and accountable, for our choices and actions. This is life. There is a fundamental sense of justice here, if (and when) the consequences are administered *fairly* and *reasonably* and *respectfully*.
- Working with students to seek repairing/rebuilding and restitution beyond consequences wherever possible.

The *core* rights (pp 1 – 4) are non-negotiable and always entail responsibilities eg :- we all have a right to have ‘our person’ and ‘our property’ respected. Whether we enjoy that right depends on others – around us – being responsible in relation(ship) to us (and our property and our environment). We can’t really have *one* (our *right* to something ...) without the *other* (our responsibilities to others) so they can enjoy those rights – *their* rights; our rights.

Even our ‘*self-rights*’ (the right to ‘relative good health’) entail obvious responsibilities (‘Ouch my tooth! I knew I shouldn’t have kept drinking that sweet lemonade, those rubbish energy drinks and eating those hard lollies... and then doing nothing about basic dental hygiene. Ouch!’)

Students are used to the language of rules from a very early age (at home, in sporting clubs, on the road, even in board games ...). A reference to this – in whole group

discussion – can assist younger students to appreciate the ‘why’ of rules; the need for protection of fair rights, and common reminders about responsible behaviour.

What makes a good / fair rule?

What would happen if we didn’t have rules? (say in a board game, on the road, in football / rugby / cricket / in a courtroom ...(?)) What (sometimes) happens *even when we do have rules* in soccer, football, cricket?!

Some rules are non-negotiable (they are made *already* on our behalf) and some are semi-negotiable; dependent (always) on protection of core rights.

The *degree* of dialogue and discussion within these core themes of the SBA (rights, responsibilities, rules and consequences – see Fig. 1) depends in part on the ‘comfort’ of the form/tutor/pastoral teacher in conducting such discussion and in part on the age of the students.

General discussion

I like to begin *any* discussion of *rights*, *rules* and *responsibilities* with a reference to why we’re all here, together, in the first place.

Beyond our first, immediate, settling in (on day one as a form / tutor / house group) it will help to reaffirm with our students that :-

“ ... we all share the same reason – and necessity – for *being here together* every day. We come together as a *special kind* of community; a learning community. Of course we spend a lot of time ‘socialising’ with friends (hopefully *mainly* out of classroom time), but together in here (in our classroom) we seek to build a co-operative teaching and learning community. We share the same place, space, and learning activities. We *also* share the same feelings and needs – *all of us* ...

Being aware of our rights and responsibilities means we are aware of our feelings, needs and relationships here ... We are aware of the impact of our behaviour on our fellow students (and teachers) ...”

From here, the tutor / form teacher can begin to emphasise the core, *non-negotiable* rights *we all share* here in our school; in our class together and the kind of responsibilities those rights entail.

As a visual learner I appreciate simple posters and key words as an *aide memoire*, so I like to have the key, *core*, rights listed with the key points underneath and use that as a basis for group discussion with the group. (See Fig. 2).

Some teachers prefer to discuss the rights and responsibilities with their tutor groups as a more 'formal' exercise, with a printed sheet attenuating the *core rights* (and what they mean); the *core responsibilities* (and key, essential, examples of such ...); the *core rules* (and the elements of the rules) and the *core consequences* (and key examples).

I believe it is important to discuss – as a collegial team – how we can more effectively develop this **student behaviour agreement** through some shared student-teacher dialogue (or at least discussion) with each of our form / tutor groups.

It will be important to allocate a full class period for form / home group tutors to develop the SBA approach in the first meeting, first week, term one. This is crucial in the first year of high school. With years 10-12 a *review discussion* on this issue is still very important.

Some 'form' teachers find it helpful to have a 'lesson-plan format' for developing the SBA with their 'form' [year / tutor/ 'home' groups]. This approach supports form/pastoral/tutor teachers who may not find whole-class discussions particularly 'easy' or 'comfortable'.

In some schools the SBA is simply a formal expression of shared expectations. If this is the case in your school, *at the very least* give the students an opportunity to discuss, ask questions and clarify the SBA so that it is more than a mere *printed fait accompli*. It obviously needs to be more than merely a printed page or two in the student diary!

I would encourage colleagues to reflect on how they will utilise that first meeting with their tutor / form group with respect to the concept, purpose and usage of the SBA.

Subject teachers

Subject teachers obviously do not develop an SBA with each class group; they will, however, *refer to it* in their first session (with each class) as a reference point for shared understandings about behaviour and learning. The rights/rules posters help here.

Teachers will also obviously need to *contextualise rules* eg : in art / textiles / materials design tech. / I.T. / science / drama / food technology, wood design / automotive workshop classes ... In these learning areas, rules will need to be more focused on aspects of safety, reasonable movement ... how to fairly get teacher assistance in a busy woodwork class etc. Though in any class and in any setting in a school *any rule* will derive its focus from and seek to protect the core rights (safety/learning/respect and fair treatment of one another).*

The *Student Behaviour Agreement* – though – is relevant at every year level, every age, every class group as it forms that shared understanding about behaviour – and learning – across the school community.

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Key References :-

- See - ROGERS, B. (2006) *Behaviour Management : A Whole School Approach* Scholastic Australia : Sydney. (2nd edition 2006).
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Available in Australia from *Footprint Books* www.footprint.com.au
{This text is primarily for senior staff ...}

See also notes on :- *The Establishment Phase* (Practices and Skills) [In-service notes] (2016) and *Rules posters (secondary)* 2016.

* See also the *Rule Posters* notes (2016).