



# Cooperation in the Preschool Classroom: Class Discussions




*Class discussions can teach children respect for others, communication skills, how to interact with peers and adults, and how to vote. Learning these concepts and skills are among the goals set by the Illinois Early Learning and Development Standards (see Language Arts, Social Studies, and Social/Emotional Development benchmarks).*


 **What is a class discussion?** A class discussion is different from the usual circle time. It is a meeting that brings children together to discuss ideas, solve problems, organize the day, plan activities, or celebrate what goes well.

 **What do children gain from class discussions?** They learn to


- listen and respond to others. “Dan agrees with Tia’s idea. Who has anything to add?”
- ask questions and share information. “Jamal wants to report what he learned about snow. Then you can ask him about it.”
- set expectations together. “All of you voted to make ‘Hands to yourself!’ a class rule.”
- think about time. “After the meeting, we usually go outside.”
- solve problems and make decisions together. “Jada, you wanted snack time to be earlier.” Jada might then reply, “Yes, I want us to vote.”
- plan what to study and how to share knowledge. “What are some ways you could show what you learned about eggs?”
- build relationships and gain a sense of community. “You had a very long talk, and you made a plan that works!”

 **What is the adult’s role?** The adult facilitates class discussions by

- including them in the daily schedule.
- stating the purpose of class discussions. “It’s time to choose songs for our Open House.” (Note: If you have meetings only to handle problems, children may start to dislike them.)
- helping children remember to “speak up,” take turns, stay on topic, and listen to others.
- encouraging children to give each other suggestions.
- keeping track of children’s ideas or questions on an easel or whiteboard.

 **What’s a good schedule for class discussions?**

- You can start the first day the children are together. You might have one to start the day and one to “wrap it up.”
- Early in the year, a 5-minute class discussion may be long enough. Several short ones may be better than a long one that makes children restless. As children get used to them and see their benefits, these discussions may last 15 minutes or more.

 **How can I find out more?** You can find out more in these two books: *Ways We Want Our Class to Be: Class Meetings That Build Commitment to Kindness and Learning* by Developmental Studies Center (1996); and *Class Meetings: Young Children Solving Problems Together* by Emily Vance and Patricia Jimenez Weaver (2002).

 **For related Web resources, see “Cooperation in the Preschool Classroom: Class Discussions” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.**

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