

# Getting Started

## And (Hopefully) Not Wasting Your Time



The main goal of the *Owning Up Curriculum* is to help students “own up,” or take responsibility for and control of the decisions they make in life. *Owning Up* asks them to take a big risk—to be self-reflective and honest about participating in social dynamics that can demean and isolate people. Furthermore, *Owning Up* asks young people to take this risk in the presence of their peers.

Wherever you teach, as the educator and facilitator, your responsibility is to create a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment where this risk taking is possible. Students have to believe in the process; they have to see that everyone in the group will be asked to examine and reflect on their own experiences—including the adults. That requires a foundation of mutual trust and respect between the educator and the students, as well as among the students themselves.

## OBJECTIVES

- To feel comfortable being uncomfortable
- To establish program guidelines for educators and students
- To create the foundation for mutual trust where students will want to be self-reflective, share their opinion, and engage with the group
- To define dignity and respect

## MATERIALS

- Whiteboard or flip chart
- Pencils or markers

## Session Outline

### What Are We Doing Today?

This session begins to create a safe environment for the students; it also lays the groundwork and sets the tone for the sessions that follow. Use the educator plan presented here and the following sessions as a guideline for expressing the main points (it's not a script to follow word for word), and be willing to go with the flow to respond to your students' questions, concerns, and views.

#### Activity: Cross Your Arms

**Time:** 5 minutes

**Purpose:** To connect feeling uncomfortable with the feeling of learning

1. *Ask students to cross their arms.*
2. *Ask students to uncross their arms and let their hands hang free for a moment.*
3. *Ask students to cross their arms in the opposite direction.*
4. *Once they figure out how to do that, ask them to drop their hands again.*

#### Debrief

How did it feel to cross your arms the way you usually do?

How did it feel to cross your arms the other way? It probably feels a lot less “normal” or comfortable that way.

#### Takeaways

You cross your arms in the same way most of the time, but that doesn't make it “right”—it just makes it what you're used to. That's what this program (the time we spend together) may feel like: doing something that feels different or even uncomfortable. Feeling these ways aren't bad because it helps us do what? Pay attention to how we feel and learn. Sometimes it's hard to put words to our feelings and that's another thing this program is about. Putting words to feelings or things that happen to us that can be hard to explain.

#### Activity: Creating Group Guidelines

**Time:** 15 minutes

**Purpose:** To establish session guidelines

Before we move on, we need to set up some guidelines for our group. The first part of doing this is describing what you need from me and what you need from each other.

So let's start with me: What does it sound like or look like when a teacher does something that you don't like? Or...what **don't** you want me to act like, be like, or do when I am teaching you?

*Write students' responses down on the whiteboard or flip chart.*

- *Don't be boring*
- *Don't treat us like we're five years old*
- *Don't yell at one person and make us all feel nervous*

What does it sound like or look like when a teacher does something that you do like? Or, what **do** you want me to act like, be like, and do when I am teaching you?

- *Listen*
- *Get us out of our seats*
- *Make it fun...do different kind of activities*

What guidelines and expectations should you have for yourselves? (Be honest, listen to each other, take turns speaking/don't interrupt.)

**Teacher says:** *We have listening as one of our guidelines. Before we move on, let's think about that. In Owing Up we define listening as being prepared to be changed by what you hear. Can you give me an example of what that could look like? For example, what if someone (including me) says something that makes someone else in the class frustrated. How should we handle it? What would that look like?*

What guidelines should I have for you?

- *Tell me what you think, not what you think I want to hear.*
- *Listen to what I say. Let me know if the topics we are covering make sense (or don't) to you.*
- *Participate!*
- *Let's be hard on ideas and not on people.*

**If students say,** "Respect each other," or "Honesty" ask them to give concrete examples of what that looks like.

**Teacher says:** *What if someone doesn't feel comfortable participating but wants to? Let's come up with some ideas about what to do if that happens. You can always set up a time to*

*talk to me or you can write me a note to tell me how you're feeling. Don't worry about spelling. The most important reason for writing the note is you tell me how you're feeling.*

Here's a guideline you can share with your students as well: "It's possible I may struggle with some of the things we talk about. I may really disagree with something I hear in class. When that happens, it may be hard for me, so I will be learning with you. But we will stick with the idea of everyone deserving to be treated with dignity—especially when we disagree, and that should get us through some of these tougher topics."

## Activity: Think About Understanding Confidentiality

**Time:** 10 minutes

**Purpose:** To reaffirm the definition of *confidentiality* for the students

Let's describe what it would look like and feel like in our class if:

If people in our group feel comfortable sharing what they really think and feel?

If people don't feel comfortable sharing what they really think and feel?

Confidentiality is a promise to keep something private. There may be a time when a student in our group shares an experience. They want to share it with the group but they don't want to share it with people outside the group. So we need to make a promise to each other that what we share in the room stays in the room. Can we make that promise?

Sometimes we may talk about problems people have with other people. Sometimes we will talk about what people say to each other that could make us feel uncomfortable. Some of these terms could be considered "bad words" like, "*He said I was stupid*" or "*She called me a jerk.*" But if you use these words to explain something that happened to you, then you are allowed to use them. If that happens and it feels uncomfortable then let me know and we can talk about it.

There is also a possibility that people in the group may say the "right" things but then behave the opposite way as soon as they leave the room. Can you give me an example of what this would look like?

If this happens it doesn't mean our group isn't working. It means that what we are trying to accomplish is hard and doesn't happen overnight. Observe what's happening and ask yourself why the person is choosing to act the way they are (and that includes you if you find yourself in the same situation).

If you feel strongly that there is a big difference between what is being said in this group and how people are behaving outside the group (and you may already expect that to happen), you can come to me privately and share your thoughts.

Remember the guidelines for the group is What is said in the room stays in the room. What's the word we use for that?

## Reporting

However, there are cases where sometimes it's good to tell someone else outside of our group about a problem. Examples of that are when someone shares that they're in trouble right now or they don't feel safe. If that's happening then I'm going to work with that student to find another adult who can help. If a situation like this should happen to you, I won't tell another adult without your knowledge and we will work together to choose the person you feel most comfortable sharing the problem with.

## Activity: Think About It: Getting Clear About Words

**Time:** 20 minutes

**Purpose:** To clarify definitions of *dignity* and *respect*

People can use words assuming that the person they're speaking to agrees with what the terms mean. So before we go on, let's make sure we understand about some terms.

### Dignity:

From the Latin word dignitas, meaning "to be worthy."

As in: All people have the right to be recognized for their inherent humanity and treated ethically. Dignity is a given. You just have it and no one can take it away.

### Respect:

From the Latin word respectus, meaning "to look back at."

As in: showing admiration for someone because of their abilities, qualities or achievements.

Respect is earned. You are respected by others for what you have achieved, experienced and how you have handle yourself.

## Activity: Draw it: What do these words look like to you?

Teacher note: Doing this exercise with your students is important; especially if you're not great at it. Why? Because you are modeling vulnerability; you are willing to contribute even when you don't look like the expert and you have important thoughts worth sharing.

### Drawing

**Time:** 10 minutes

Ask the students: What's your personal definition of dignity? Write or draw the images, colors, and symbols that come to mind when you think of the word dignity.

Ask: What's your personal definition of respect? Write or draw the images, colors, symbols come to mind when you think of the word respect.

### Share and Debrief

Share your personal definitions of dignity and respect. What are the patterns we see with people's individual definitions of dignity and respect?

What did you see in other people's drawings that made you think an interesting thought?

Engage them in a discussion about their reflections and also highlight the differences between dignity and respect (defining them, if necessary), and how that plays out in the classroom. You can even use their work to frame the group's behavior guidelines for the rest of the sessions you have with them.

### Wrap It Up

**Time:** 5 minutes

Everyone in this room has gone through challenging experiences.

- When you see someone they may be feeling differently on the inside than they are acting on the outside.
- It's ok to feel uncomfortable, sad, or even angry as long as you feel safe and you don't take out your feelings on other people.

### Carry It With You

As you walk out of our session today, ask yourself

- What was the most important thing someone said today? Why did you think it was important?
- What is one thing we learned in class today that you can use outside of the class?