

Teacher's Notes: Running group work activities

These notes are to be used in conjunction with the pupil sheets on *How to Talk Together in a Group* and *Our Group Work Rules*.

Inevitably, school age pupils, whether primary or secondary, tend to be noisy and all talk at once when working together. This is a characteristic of working *in* a group rather than *as* a group. When you are introducing classroom routines for group working, there will be a natural tendency for voices to rise in volume over the course of a group work session. So, when training your classes how to work as a group, set some ground rules for working as a group.

It can be challenging to get pupils to come up with their own rules that are useful and practical. This exercise uses some ready-made rules to get pupils started on considering what behaviours are needed for effective group discussion. This is an extension of the kind of classroom routines that you use for whole-class discussion, question and answer sessions and so on. Running their own group session is a way to begin to get classes to experience and understand the sorts of procedures that adults use in similar situations, such as having someone chair a meeting, taking turns to speak, keeping minutes, and so on.

There are 25 suggestions for possible rules. Some are obvious, and some are perhaps suitable for some types of activity and less significant for others. You can adapt the list if it's too long for the age group of your classes, or if there are other priorities you want pupils to consider.

The exercise gets the pupils thinking about having a structure for a group work activity. You can include roles and responsibilities if you think that that will be helpful for the groups and for the planned activity. However, this exercise goes beyond identifying roles and responsibilities. It is to be used when classes are already familiar with working in groups and are ready to take collective responsibility for the work the group will undertake.

Organise groups of three or four at most (depending on the age and the readiness of the pupils). Larger groups are more difficult to manage.

The group needs a set activity to carry out with clear learning intentions. An information sheet that contains details of the curriculum content for activity would be helpful. Wall displays and other related information available around the classroom will help groups remember details about the activity they are doing.

Don't expect pupils to learn how to work as a group and learn the content material at the same time. When running a group work activity, prioritise one or the other. If your focus is on bedding-in behavioural procedures during group work, make the content more straightforward. Once classes become familiar with required group work behaviours, set the groups more demanding activities. Remember that behavioural standards won't necessarily be remembered between group working sessions. They will need to be repeated before the class are really familiar with what's expected during a group session.

