



monroe one
EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

PREPARING FOR CHANGES AND CHALLENGING MOMENTS

Supporting our staff and students

*Adopted from: How to Turn Challenging Moments
into Teachable Moments (PCSD) - Winter 2022*

Preparing for challenging moments in school

surrounding the change
to mask mandates



General principles for facilitating challenging moments

Establish classroom norms and common ground. Focus on re-uniting the group under the common goal of practicing empathy and respecting personal choice. Be flexible and remain prepared to support students.



Be prepared, be supportive

Remain neutral while recognizing your own opinion may differ. Be prepared with supportive language to help facilitate conversations that are respectful of everyone's personal choice.



Check in outside of class

Connect with your school's mental health team if needed to provide additional resources for students and families.



Connect with your own support network

Check in with each other as a team to build a united, consistent approach while also taking care of your own mental well-being.

For the last two years, our school community has come together with a united responsibility to create the safest school setting for our students and staff.

That mission continues as we now prepare for another layer of change in protocol surrounding masking and COVID management.

As we prepare to support our students, families, and colleagues, there may be some challenging and unexpected conversations that occur over our differences of opinion related to masking.

It is our collective goal to create safe, respectful spaces for all students and staff.

We can do this through engaging in a united community approach centered around empathy, kindness, and creating a culture of personal choice free of judgement.

Please use this resource guide as a way to help navigate through respectful conversations.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR FACILITATING CHALLENGING MOMENTS

Re-establish classroom norms and establish common ground.

Remind students that everyone has a story, and a desire to be safe and respected. Consider a classroom meeting or community circle ahead of the new guidelines.

If tensions arise, acknowledge them in the moment or shortly thereafter.

Remain neutral and remind students of re-established norms. Focus on uniting the group under the common ground of practicing empathy, choosing kindness, respecting personal choice, and feeling safe at school.

Be flexible and remain prepared to support students.

As we make the initial transition, there might be a time or two when you need to set aside academics to engage in a class discussion or circle. Mental health and social emotional wellbeing are critical in order for learning to take place.

Remain neutral when possible.

There is a lot of medical and scientific information being shared in the media. Consider remaining neutral by avoiding engagement in debates or conversations about the facts from various sources, and instead focus on how the classroom can come together in a united way to respect choices.

It is okay to say:

"Let's keep our conversation in school focused on ways we can respect each other and help each other to feel safe and ready to learn. I encourage you to continue to talk with family and caregivers at home about detailed facts and information that support your own decision about masking at school."

Be prepared with supportive language.

It may be challenging as the adult in charge to remain neutral, simply because we as adults also have personal choice, and our choice is quite possibly the most visible to every student in the room. While maintaining our own right to make a personal choice, remember that children watch us, and depend on us for safety and support. Consider practicing some prepared responses to acknowledge opinions while preserving dignity. Seek to re-establish a common ground. Ideas to consider:

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"Everyone in our classroom has the right to feel safe and respected at school. When the new masking changes were made, we agreed as a classroom to [insert classroom norms]."

"It is important that when we have a disagreement or difference of opinion, we listen respectfully, share our thoughts, and then come together with kindness toward each other."

"____, we respect your choice to continue to [mask or not], and we want you to know that you are an important member of our classroom. How can I help make sure you feel safe and comfortable in our classroom?"

"It seems like you are feeling uncomfortable [or insert other emotion] in this moment. I am here to support you. Would you like to talk now, connect privately later, or talk with one of our school counselors?"

Know yourself.

As you are personally comfortable, give yourself permission to be flexible with your own approach to masking based on the needs of the students in front of you. Remember our role as educators to make students feel safe and supported, and think ahead in preparation to support students regardless of their beliefs.

FACILITATION STRATEGIES FOR CHALLENGING MOMENTS

If tensions arise, let yourself take a moment to decide whether to address the issue immediately as a community, or take it up separately with individual students. Try counting silently to 10 before speaking or reacting.

Remind your students of your discussion or participation guidelines and focus on helping students find common ground connected to empathy, kindness, and the right to feel safe.

Where appropriate, seek to clarify student comments that have sparked tension, so all voices are heard.

Try to depersonalize positions of disagreement that have emerged around students (instead of using student names, try "this disagreement about such-and-such").

Check in outside of class with the students most directly involved in a moment of discomfort. Connect with your school's mental health team if needed to provide additional resources for students and families.

Connect with your own support network, especially if you feel uncomfortable with a challenging conversation that unfolded, or a student's response to the situation. Be sure to make your building administrator aware of charged discussions that took place in your classroom that may spill over into other aspects of the students' day.

Support your colleagues. Compassion fatigue and pandemic exhaustion are challenging on a daily level. Check in with each other as a team to build a united, consistent approach to student and family support.

ALWAYS REMEMBER

It is our responsibility to create spaces where **ALL** students **feel safe, supported, and respected** by their personal choice. Challenging discussions can provide valuable opportunities to learn to engage in civil discourse in a community setting while remaining positive and focused on healing. We must never prioritize our own comfort over the needs of students to be heard and protected from harmful remarks.

Our job is not to teach students WHAT to think; it is to teach them HOW to think.

Providing opportunities for them to engage in supportive, safe dialogue about this new level of choice related to COVID-19 gifts them with the tools they need to be successful adults.