



National Association  
of Independent Schools

## **NAIS Equity and Justice Program Principles for Conversational Leadership and Shared Work**

The NAIS Equity and Justice Team invites you to join us in a collective inquiry to surface principles guiding interpersonal interaction and creating the conditions for authenticity, egalitarianism, care, and transformation in this learning community. Rather than offering externally derived, pre-set norms that can result in policing the behavior of others, we encourage and challenge ourselves to turn inward (to the person over whom we have control) and ask:

- How will I demonstrate respect\* for others, including their differences and similarities?
- How can I support the safest container possible for brave and authentic truth-telling, for others and myself?
- When should I step forward or step back to be my best self or create space for others to do the same?
- What values do I hold that will enable me to contribute meaningfully to the purpose at hand?
- How will I show leadership when conflict arises within me or in the group?
- What will help me remain in conversation and work toward shared goals?

In moving toward principles for conversation and participatory leadership rather than ground rules, some find it helpful to tag or reference traditional norms to these questions. For example:

- **How will I demonstrate respect\* for others, including their differences and similarities?**
  - Honor (the spirit of) confidentiality
  - Respect different realities
  - Suspend judgment
  
- **How can I support the safest container possible for brave and authentic truth-telling, for others and myself?**
  - Recognize, acknowledge, and mitigate power dynamics that reinforce cultural dominance and impede authenticity
  - Own our intentions and our impacts on others
  - Speak from the I-perspective
  - Be open to controversy with civility
  
- **When should I step forward or step back to be my best self or create space for others to do the same?**
  - Be crisp; say what is core
  - Listen and think before speaking
  - Remember the Right to Pass/Challenge by Choice
  - Be comfortable with silence
  
- **What values do I hold that will enable me to contribute meaningfully to the purpose at hand?**
  - Explore what maximizes our learning and sharing
  - Be fully present
  - Be vulnerable, share our truth, lean into discomfort
  
- **How will I show leadership when conflict arises within me or in the group?**
  - Continue engagement in conflict, valuing conflict as a catalyst for change
  - Listen and think before speaking
  - Create space for the expression of thoughts, feelings, and emotions
  - Accept the sensation of discomfort
  
- **What will help me remain in conversation and work toward shared goals?**
  - Recognize, acknowledge, and mitigate power dynamics that reinforce cultural dominance and impede authenticity
  - Suspend judgment
  - Be open-minded
  - Expect and accept non-closure

\*Remember that the word “respect” carries multiple meanings and intentions.