

The Agnes Irwin School

AIS Principles of Civil Discourse 2020-2021

The Agnes Irwin School strives to honor the individuality of all of our students, families, teachers, and staff, as well as foster a truly inclusive, diverse, and equitable community.

Diversity of experience, thought, and ideas is not only a pillar of our school, but is an integral part of the learning process and the Agnes Irwin experience. Aspects of individuality are explored through inspiring speakers, our rigorous curriculum, faculty development, and student organizations. Every day, we nurture the necessary skills and provide experiences for students to thrive in a diverse and inclusive community.

Equity and Inclusion Philosophy

The Agnes Irwin School respects and values diversity, including but not limited to differences in age, ability, ethnicity, family structure, gender identity, national origin, physical attributes, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic level. We actively promote and develop a school community that is culturally competent, socially responsible, and globally engaged.

Guidelines for Civil Discourse at The Agnes School

What is Civil Discourse?

Civil Discourse is **conversation**, often of various perspectives, built upon mutual respect of values and ideas, even when they differ.

It is a discourse that supports, rather than undermines, the societal good. It demands that democratic participants in a society respect each other, even when that respect is hard to give or to earn (Teaching Tolerance).

Civil Discourse is...

- Mutually respectful
- Open-minded
- Built on listening
- Grounded in facts
- Productive

Civil Discourse is not...

- Hate speech (insults, slurs, discriminatory language, mockery, stereotyping, etc.)
- Hostile or demeaning
- Politeness at the exclusion of truth
- Indoctrination or an attempt to control or manipulate

The Agnes Irwin School

Our Mission & Core Values

The Agnes Irwin School empowers girls to learn, to lead, and to live a legacy.

Excellence

We provide an exceptional education that develops each girl's highest potential and produces passionate, resilient, and empowered learners and leaders.

Community

We foster an inclusive environment where individuals are valued, contributions are celebrated, deep connections are formed, and traditions are cherished.

Character

We expect honesty, kindness, and personal integrity in all that we do and say.

Respect

We treat all with dignity and understanding, welcoming differences in backgrounds, perspectives, and cultures.

How Civil Discourse Supports Our Mission & Core Values

Engaging in Civil Discourse in our classrooms and in our wider community helps us continue to be a school that empowers girls to learn, to lead, and to live a legacy. Students who have the opportunity to experience productive struggle, to wrestle with divergent ideas, and to respect varying perspectives are better equipped to navigate the complexities of an ever changing world.

Guidelines for Engaging in Civil Discourse at Agnes Irwin School

Guidelines for Students

1. **Assume positive intention** knowing that everyone is coming from a unique perspective.
2. **Be kind and respectful to each other**; honor our varied ideas and backgrounds.
3. **Listen actively to others**, without interrupting, rather than just waiting for your turn to talk.
4. **Recognize the difference between intent and impact.** What you said and how it felt to others might not be the same.
5. **Differentiate between facts and opinions.** Both are valid when expressed appropriately.¹
6. Understand that **you may not convince everyone to agree** with you, but **expect that you will be able to share your ideas without fear of personal attack.**
7. **Lean into discomfort and challenge your thinking**: be open to considering ideas and experiences that differ from your own.
8. **Speak from the “I” perspective**, seek to understand and try to find common ground.
9. **Be self-responsible**: if you make a mistake, own it, apologize when necessary, forgive yourself and move forward; give others permission to do the same.
10. **Accept conflict and it's resolution as an important catalyst for learning.** Recognize that uncomfortable conversations are not necessarily unsafe.

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Guidelines for Faculty, Staff & Administrators

1. **Promote community norms** that create a climate of safety for everyone to express their opinions and perspectives in a manner which complements existing guidelines for student behavior.
2. **Allow conversation**, even if tense, recognizing that conflict and its resolution are a necessary catalyst for learning.
3. **Intervene when you are needed** and address violations of our principles and core values when they occur.
4. **Ask questions** to clarify or redirect the conversation, rather than giving your own interpretation of what a person said.
5. **Embrace the complexity of the individual**; don't reduce a person to a single idea or opinion.

Guidelines for Parents, Guardians & Families

1. **Practice meaningful discussion.** Push your child(ren) to express their opinions and to justify their stances, even if they differ from your own, in a way that promotes respect for difference and the dignity of others.
2. If your student comes home feeling emotional about a discussion in school, **ask questions** to help them process, rather than making assumptions or assigning blame, and partner with the School by keeping us informed when necessary.
3. **Assume positive intention** from administrators, faculty, staff and other students.
4. **Differentiate between facts and opinions.** Both are valid when expressed appropriately.¹
5. **Lead by your daily example**, model these principles of civil discourse for your child(ren) and appreciate the benefits of learning in a diverse community.

What can I do if someone violates these guidelines?

We are committed to creating a safe and inclusive community at Agnes Irwin. If you experience or witness action that goes against these guidelines and don't feel comfortable addressing it in the moment, please be in touch with a member of the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee, your Division Director or any member of the administrative team so that we can partner with you to improve our community.

References:

1. American University School of Public Affairs
2. Teaching Tolerance
3. National Association of Independent Schools People of Color Conference community norms
4. United States Courts¹