

DSG Community Agreement



**THE DIOCESAN SCHOOL
FOR GIRLS**

As a school community we recognise that we are located in a remarkable country with a complex and often painful history. Our country is still characterised by divisions of various kinds, most often along economic and racial lines, but extending to relationships across gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity and citizenship. Our school community is no different. We embrace and celebrate the richness of this diversity, whilst acknowledging that it challenges each one of us to bring our best selves to every interaction.

Those who are different from us in any way, invite us to think again about our assumptions about the way the world works and all that we take for granted. This is what allows us to develop insight, compassion, and true humanity. However, it is most often an uncomfortable process. We might prefer to avoid it or shut it down. We might respond defensively or aggressively when we feel vulnerable. For this reason, we have worked together with our girls to put together this Community Agreement: a statement of our best intentions as a community to stay committed to each other and to the work of coming to understand one another more deeply.

The purpose of this agreement is therefore to hold every member of the DSG Community accountable to ways of being together that are life-giving and affirming for all. We choose to adopt the following intentions for our own good and benefit, and for the good and benefit of all those with whom we share community life.

These intentions apply to all conversations, discussions, dialogues, interactions and events in the life of the school.

Foundational values

As the DSG community we affirm first and foremost that we are all children of God, made in God's image and likeness. We therefore choose to treat one another with dignity, respect and kindness and live out our identity as a church school in loving community, committed to justice and creative, critical citizenship.

As a member of the DSG community, I will strive at all times to:

Be present and aware

- a. Be mindful of the impact of my presence, words, and actions on other members of the DSG community as well as the wider Grahamstown community.
- b. Turn up, with my mind and heart as open as they can be, when there is an opportunity to engage with others and learn from them.

Listen

- a. Look out for opportunities to listen: in class, in workshops, in the boarding house, on the sports field, in the dining hall, in social settings.
- b. Give others the opportunity to speak without interruption.
- c. Listen deeply, in order to understand rather than to reply.
- d. Try to see situations from the other person's point of view.
- e. Carefully consider opinions different to my own (even/especially when I do not agree).

- f. Be willing to have conversations with others who are different to me, those who I do not usually have conversations with.
- g. Allow what I hear to shape my attitudes and actions.

Speak

- a. Speak for myself, tell my own story, and express my own opinions.
- b. Only speak on behalf of a group if I have specifically been asked to represent that group.
- c. Not tell anyone else's story that I have not been given specific permission to share, unless:
 - I am telling the story with him/her in order to support them in their telling
 - I am concerned for his/her well-being and I am informing a trusted adult.
- d. When I need to speak in order to improve a situation, I will speak honestly and directly, be clear and specific and ensure that there is no misunderstanding.
- e. Address issues that arise directly and promptly rather than circulating and escalating them.
- f. Disagree with or challenge the opinion or idea, rather than the person.
- g. Tell only the facts that I am certain of/that I have verified.
- h. Avoid causing harm in any way:
 - verbal: not speaking hurtful/hateful words
 - non-verbal: monitoring my tone (e.g. aggressive, sarcastic, mocking), facial expressions (e.g. sneering, dismissive, closed) and body language (e.g. eye-rolling, middle finger, turning away)
 - physical: not punching, slapping, pinching, shoving, tripping etc.
- i. Respond with grace to genuine questions asked with respect; allow myself and others the freedom to be on a journey and not know everything.
- j. Take the other person into account when speaking; what is important is not what I intended in saying something, but how it was received/understood and the impact that it had.
- k. Be accountable for my own words and actions, and apologise and make amends when I have caused harm.

Think before, think during and think after

I will keep asking myself challenging questions to help me choose my words and actions and evaluate them afterwards:

- a. Am I speaking (about to speak) in order to do good or harm?
- b. What role can (did) I play in resolving this situation in the best possible way for all involved?
- c. Is emotion getting in the way of me hearing? What am I feeling? Why am I reacting this way?
- d. What choices do I have right now?
- e. Am (Was) I open to others' perspectives or have I closed my heart/mind to them?
- f. In what ways am (was) I responsible for what has happened/is happening, or what role am I playing in what is happening?
- g. How can I change how I think/speak/act so as to improve the outcome (now or next time)?

Be willing to keep moving – this is ongoing work

- a. Commit to doing all I can to bring about positive and lasting change at every level: in myself, in my relationships, and in the systems that govern and guide the school.
- b. Be willing to keep moving forward together, even though healing is a long, complex and often difficult process, because I believe in a better collective future.
- c. Be open to and, whenever possible, work towards rebuilding, restoring and or strengthening relationships.
- d. Always choose to continue acting in a dignified, respectful and loving way.