Newman School Principles for Civil Discourse

Newman values each individual

Newman values each individual’s ideas, experiences, and worldview. The Newman community welcomes individuals without regard to physical handicap, race, color, gender, religion, national and ethnic origin, or sexual orientation. As a result, Newman’s intellectual and social environment is rich and diverse, with many opportunities for its students to learn from each other and to enhance their own understanding of the world around them. Newman is committed to remaining a place for the healthy expression of diverse ideas, the exploration of various viewpoints, and the use of civil discourse.

Civil discourse is a conversation based upon respect and civility; its purpose is to enhance understanding, trust, and learning.

Newman encourages its community to follow the guidelines for civil discourse at all times.

Guidelines for Civil Discourse

As members of the Newman community, we should:

- Respect everyone’s right to hold individual ideas
- Approach social and political conversations with a willingness to listen to ideas that differ from our own
- Ground discussions in fact and reason

As members of the Newman community, we should avoid:

- Direct antagonism (insults, demeaning or discriminatory language, mockery)
- Hostility (ad hominem attacks, uncontrolled emotion, threats)
- Excessive persuasion (misrepresentation of facts, emotional manipulation, logical fallacies)

Civil Discourse: Core Values

As in all aspects of school life, community members should adhere to our core values when engaging in discussions on social and political topics:

- Honesty: We should represent ourselves and our views with honesty, and avoid manipulating or misrepresenting factual information for the advancement of an agenda.
- Kindness: Because political or social disagreements often lead to feelings of animosity, it is critical that we keep kindness in the forefront of all interactions.
- Respect: When engaged in conversations that contain differing viewpoints, all parties should maintain and show respect for others.
- Responsibility: Members of the Newman community are responsible and accountable for their words and actions.
Guidelines for Faculty to Foster Civil Discourse
Because we believe that it is the role of teachers, coaches, advisors, and administrators to encourage students to think deeply about complex topics, we endeavor to foster civil discourse with and between students in these specific ways:

- Make clear that it is our responsibility and intention to create a classroom community where civil discourse is the norm.
- Share and model the guidelines for civil discourse with students by referring to this specific language and Newman’s four core values when redirecting a student or discussion.
- Be explicit and specific about what is and is not being assessed in a particular class or on a particular assignment.
- Make clear and reiterate often that students should take their own reasoned positions when responding to discussion prompts and that students will not be penalized for disagreeing with what they perceive as the teacher’s viewpoint.
- Be mindful of the impact that commentary or political expression by teachers, coaches, advisors, and administrators may have on students.
- Be deliberate and purposeful whenever discussing social or political topics with or in the presence of students.
- Create space for civil discourse and open dialogue if expressing opinions on social or political topics.