



Consensus in the school classroom

A student guide to making decisions together

This resource introduces students to a process for consensus decision-making inspired by the Uniting Church framework and simplified to suit school settings, encouraging students to test this decision-making process that prioritises listening and collaboration over majority rule.

Note that this is an adapted version and is not intended to replicate the full Uniting Church consensus process.



Uniting Church in Australia
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Resource overview

Year levels	10 – 12
Learning intention	Students will practice consensus decision-making as a collaborative alternative to voting.
Success criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students are able to adjust a proposal to address other classmates' concerns.• Students are able to raise and explain their questions and concerns (using blue or yellow cards) and help the group reach a shared outcome.
Key instruction	This guide can be used by a teacher running a classroom activity or by a student leading a group discussion in a student council, classroom group project or other school club or society. Students participating in the process will also find guidance throughout this resource on how to engage in each phase.
Duration	20 - 30 min.
Resources required	Three colour cards (orange, blue and yellow) each per student. The cards are used by the students to indicate to the whole room how they are feeling about a current proposal. Typically, each card is about 12 by 18cm in size.
The Activity (student-led)	The 3-phase card process for consensus decision-making.
Reflection	See reflection questions at the end of the activity.

Alignment with the Uniting Church Characteristics

This activity connects with a value the Uniting Church holds deeply: 'Listening and Collaborative Decision-Making'.

The Uniting Church believes in giving opportunity for every person's voice to be genuinely heard, and that good decision-making emerges when listening goes beyond hearing the loudest or most confident.

The consensus process is a practice that the Uniting Church uses consistently in meetings and forums, as this invites the group to reflect on shared wisdom rather than giving power to the loudest voice.





Consensus decision-making

A student guide to making decisions together.

Year 10-12



What is Consensus?

Consensus means **finding a decision that everyone can live with**, even if it's not everyone's first choice. It is not about winning an argument or reaching a unanimous yes, it's about making sure all voices are genuinely heard, all concerns are acknowledged, and the group moves forward together.



Tip: Try it on something small first, like deciding the format of a group presentation or a food selection for a school event. Once you and the group know the process, use it for bigger decisions.

Your role

 If you are leading the group	 If you are a participant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead the process and keep the conversation moving. • Make sure every voice gets space. • Stay neutral throughout the process, even when that feels difficult. • Help the group stay focused. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen properly and show your cards honestly. • Speak up when something doesn't sit right with you. • Help improve the idea, not just critique it.

Your tools: the colour cards

Each participant will have 3 cards. Use them to show how you feel about a proposal without interrupting.

- Orange ("warm")** "I support this idea"
- Blue ("cool")** "I'm not comfortable or I oppose this direction"
- Yellow ("clarification")** "I need clarity or more information"



Raising a blue card doesn't mean that you're being difficult, it's your role to honour your thinking in this process. The process only works if everyone is honest.

The process: step by step

Try this proposal to practise

The student council proposes that all school events use a sustainability theme, which means no single use of plastics and at least one activity about caring for the environment per event.

Goal: use this proposal to run through the three phases below. Choose one person to lead the process and give the three colour cards to the rest of the group.

Phase 1: Understanding the proposal

Goal: Making sure everyone understands what is being discussed.



Lead does

- Read the proposal aloud clearly.
- Ask the group: Does anyone have a question before we discuss?
- Once all the questions are answered, move to Phase 2.



Participant does

Yellow cards

Show a yellow card if you have a question. Ask it. (e.g. *what does this mean?*, *how would this work?*).

Other participants

You can raise a yellow card to help answer someone's questions or add more information.

Phase 2: Discuss and improve the idea

Goal: Shaping the idea together, not deciding yet.



Lead does

- Ask the group: *How are you feeling about this proposal? Show your cards.*
- If you see blue cards, ask: *What is not working for you? What would make this better?*
- Invite the group to help change the proposal to fix the concern.
- Write down any changes to the proposal.
- Once all the blue and yellow cards have been heard, move to Phase 3.

Tip: Don't take sides. Make sure quiet voices get space.



Participant does

Orange cards

Show an orange card if you're comfortable with the proposal.

Blue cards

Show a blue card if you have any concerns with the current proposal and share it. (e.g. *This proposal only talks about plastics, but what about food waste or energy use at events?*).

Yellow cards

You can raise a yellow card if you have an idea on how to fix the concern someone raised.

Phase 3: Make the decision

Goal: Agreeing on a decision that satisfies the whole group.



Lead does

- Read the final proposal aloud clearly.
- Ask the group: *What is your decision about this final proposal? Show your cards.*
- Follow the steps according to the scenario you are in.

Scenario A - all orange

- Everyone shows an orange card.
- The group has agreed!
- The lead announces the decision that consensus is reached and the group moves on.

Scenario B - some blue cards

- Some blue cards are showing.
- Lead asks each blue card to share their concerns (if the person holding the blue card feels there is something new to offer). After they have shared any remaining concerns, ask: *Do you feel your concern has been heard? Are you happy for the group to move forward?*

If yes, the group has agreed! The lead announces the decision that consensus is reached, by agreement, and the group moves on.

If no, The group goes back to Phase 2 to reshape the proposal and try Phase 3 again.

The group can do this as many times as needed.



Participant does

Orange cards

Show an orange card if you're comfortable with the final proposal.

Blue cards

Show a blue card if you still have any concerns about the final proposal. When the lead invites you, share your concern with the group.

Also consider if you feel the group could move forward, knowing your concern has been heard, even if it is not fully resolved.

If you consider your concern is critical, suggest an idea that could help improve the final proposal.

Only if nothing else works:

If the group has gone back to Phase 2 several times and still cannot agree, that is okay, this can happen in every group decision.

In this scenario, the lead can call a majority vote to move forward. This is often only done if a "super majority" of the group – say 67 percent of those present – agree that a consensus cannot be achieved.

Reflection: If your group moved to majority vote, how did that feel? What did you learn about the group's needs from that experience?

When to use this

You don't need a special occasion to use consensus decision-making. Next time your group faces a decision, try this instead of a quick majority vote.

Student council	Planning an event or evaluating a group decision.
Classroom group project	Deciding how to organise the group work or which angle to take on a particular topic.
Group club or sports club	Agreeing on team rules or the next project.
Any group discussion	Anytime your group is stuck between options, invite everyone to participate, share their thoughts and feel included in the final outcome.

Key tips

Top tips if you're leading



- **Watch the room** If blue cards arise early, slow down.
- **Name the concern and not the person.** Keep focus on ideas, not on who holds them.
- **Silence is not agreement.** A quiet participant may need a careful invitation to speak.
- **Listen actively and don't be afraid of disagreement.** Try to understand someone's position and their concern. Differences of opinions are natural, and we need to know what they are to come up with a good decision.

Top tips if you're a participant

- **Show your card honestly.** The process only works if everyone is genuine.
- **If you're holding a blue card.** Try to name your concern clearly so the group can work with it.
- **If you change your card.** Make sure it's because your concern was heard and not because you felt pressured.
- **Help improve, not just criticise.** If you raise a concern, try to suggest what would fix it.

Reflect after the activity

1. Was there a moment when you changed your card? What made you change it?
2. Did anyone raise a concern that surprised you? How did the group handle it?
3. If the group ended up voting, how did that feel compared to the consensus process? What does that tell you about the group?
4. Thinking about the practice proposal on the sustainability theme. Would a quick vote have produced the same result?

“Consensus is not unanimity at all costs nor majority defeating minority. It happens when everyone feels heard and all are willing to move forward together.”