**Resource 4**

**Developing a Community of Learners**

Use this tool as a guide for developing a positive classroom environment that supports families in their efforts to encourage children to be responsible learners.

Creating a warm and positive environment in the classroom is the key to setting a positive tone. Remember that the classroom belongs to all of you, not just the teacher, but the students and parents as well. One way to convey this from the beginning of the year is by allowing students to be part of creating the classroom community. We all learn best when we are actively exploring, thinking and asking our own questions.

1. Discuss what a community is. Ask the students to share what they know about communities and how a community works together. Students may talk about places, people and events and their interdependence on one another.

2. Encourage the discussion to move toward how the classroom will be a type of community. In the classroom community everyone works together to learn.

3. Allow students to help set up the learning environment by giving them choices in how the bulletin boards will be decorated, what learning centers or areas of the classroom will be important and perhaps how the furniture will be arranged. Giving students choices in setting up the physical environment will give them ownership of their learning. You can meet children’s needs for belonging and control by involving them in decisions that concern them. Being part of decisions that affect the classroom community becomes an important step in developing individual responsibility.

4. Use the resource on the following page, *Rights, Responsibilities and Rules*, to set classroom rules.

5. Once rules are defined, review them often, refer and use them to deal with behaviors that need addressing by the classroom community. Make following the rules the responsibility of the classroom community by discussing infractions of the rules in classroom community meetings.
Rights, Responsibilities and Rules

Following the class discussion on *Developing a Community of Learners*, lead the group toward a discussion of rights as learners, responsibilities to one another as learners and then develop rules for the classroom or community of learners. Depending on the age of your students, these discussions may take place over the course of several days.

Discuss with the group that we are all in school to learn. If we knew it all then we would not need to be in school. It is a place where we are free to make and learn from our mistakes. It is a place where we are encouraged to take risks that foster learning. We must however, be responsible learners. Therefore, we must develop rules for our community of learners, just like there are rules within our larger community.

**Our Rights as Learners**

Lead the group in a discussion about rights. Discuss what rights are, who has rights and how our rights are protected. Talk about our rights as learners. Brainstorm and make a list of all of the rights that they suggest. Your students might mention that we have the right to learn in a safe and quiet environment. We have the right to express our thoughts and concerns and so forth. Accept all ideas.

**Our Responsibilities to Each Other, As Learners**

Explain that because we are a community of learners, we have responsibilities to one another. Again, label a large butcher paper and make a list of suggested responsibilities as learners. Students might mention that because we have a right to learn in a safe environment, we must be responsible and safe in the classroom. We must work quietly because we said that, as a community of learners, we must respect the right to learn in a quiet environment.

**Our Rules for Learning**

From the discussions on rights and responsibilities, encourage the group to come up with some classroom rules that protect their rights as learners and reflect the responsibility they have to each other as a community of learners. Encourage the group to limit the number of classroom rules so that they will be easy to remember and easy to live and work by. Not every right and responsibility will be followed by a rule, yet the discussion will stay with them as they agree on a set of five or six rules that everyone can follow.

Write rules, or have students write them on a large poster and have each child sign his or her name to reflect his or her agreement and participation in the development of the classroom rules. Post the rules. In the beginning, review the rules often and reflect on how and why the rules were developed. When someone breaks a rule, refer to the poster and remind the class about how and why you all agreed on this set of rules.

You will find that their participation will encourage students to follow the rules much more readily than if you had posted a set of rules in which they had no involvement.