Examples of Widely Used Ground Rules

Ground rules should be developed and adapted for every unique context. Appropriate ground rules may depend partially on age, region, and other contextual factors. The following list of common ground rules from equity, diversity, and social justice related classes and workshops should serve only as a starting point for your process of creating a similar list suitable to your own situation:

1. Listen actively -- respect others when they are talking.
2. Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "they," "we," and "you").
3. Do not be afraid to respectfully challenge one another by asking questions, but refrain from personal attacks -- focus on ideas.
4. Participate to the fullest of your ability -- community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.
5. Instead of invalidating somebody else's story with your own spin on her or his experience, share your own story and experience.
6. The goal is not to agree -- it is to gain a deeper understanding.
7. Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses -- they can be as disrespectful as words.

It is also important to set a ground rule for how participation will be managed. Do you prefer for participants to raise their hands and be called on or for people to speak freely? Remember that some people -- especially those who tend to be introverted -- need more time to process thoughts and speak, so the latter option may exclude them from the discussion. Still, the formal process of raising hands to be recognized may detract from the collective atmosphere needed to discuss sometimes-controversial issues.

http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/groundrules.html