

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Attention Getters

Happy New Year!

This is a fantastic way to energize your group and gain participants' attention.

- As enthusiastically as you can, count down, 10...9...8...7...6...5...4...3...2...1... HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!
- Ask your group celebrate the "new year," or whatever you wish to celebrate, with high fives, loud cheers, dancing, or whatever they feel moved to do, and then quietly turn their focus to you.

If You Can Hear Me

If you don't want to be yelling over the top of a noisy group, this is a great way to quiet folks down.

- In your normal speaking-voice, say "If you can hear me, clap once."
- If your response is minimal, wait a few seconds and try saying, "If you can hear me clap twice."
- Continue until the entire group has quieted down and everyone is clapping with you.
- On the next occasion, make it a competition by challenging the group to settle down in less claps than the last time.

Two Bits!

A nice way to get your group's attention is by engaging the members in completing lyrics or chants.

- Start with the old lyrics "shave and a haircut" and ask your group to finish it.
- Or you say, "Dunt da da dunt dunt" and group responds, "dunt, dunt."
- On the final "dunt" the group should stand absolutely still and quiet. Do it a couple times until everyone is focused.

Touch Blue

Often a group spreads out, causing people to feel disconnected from the leader and making it easier for them to be distracted. Try this method to move the group closer to you.

- Begin by saying, "Everyone touch something blue!"
- Next, ask the group to touch different colors, or even another item like a person wearing a necklace, or sandals.
- Continue until participants move closer and closer to one another forming a tighter group.

Get It Out!

This is the way to get that extra energy out of you group members so they can settle down and pay attention.

- Shout out, "Get it all out!" Then encourage people to go crazy, make noise, and move around.
- When you yell, "Stop!" everyone must go completely silent and not move a muscle.

Don't Forget To Breathe

People cannot talk while they are inhaling. Consider this a built in, physiological mute button.

- Yell out, "take a deep breath!"
- While your group is doing so, encourage them to breathe even deeper and then let it all out.
- This will get the attention of the group and will also help everyone relax a little.

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Activity: Balance

Overview

"Balance" is a game of dexterity and flexibility. Pairs attempt to move their partners off their center of gravity, causing individuals to take a step forward or back in order to regain their balance. The activity is played with partners facing each other, hand-to-hand, and involves gentle pushes and retreats. The only measure of success is how much fun participants are having.

Props

- None.

Instructions and Key Points

- Request that group members find a partner and stand, facing one another, about a foot-and-a-half apart.
- Partners should put their hands together, palm-to-palm.
- When you say "Go," the pairs will attempt to force the other person to lose her or his balance.
- The motions should be slow and consistent, and hands must remain in contact with palms flat.
- Let pairs play a few rounds and then have them find another partner.
- In the second round, partners' hands should not be touching. Yet, as they did before, participants maneuver to push their partners off balance, but this time with soft bursts of hand-to-hand nudges.
- Players may also pull back as their partner pushes, causing them to falter forward.
- Allow your group to play many times using both variations for maximum fun and entertainment.

Safety

Watch for players being too rough and taking this game too seriously. Be mindful about people falling, slipping, grabbing another's hands too tightly, or scratching someone with jewelry (especially rings and watches). Safety is the number one concern.

Variation

Try palm-to-palm with hands separated, but this time in a squatting position, like a baseball catcher. This variation reduces some of the dangers of people falling from a standing position and makes it easier for people to push one another off balance. Insist on soft pushes in this variation, you do not want people falling onto their backs.

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LearningChange

Activity: Color Wheel of Fate

Overview

With a simple “spin of the wheel,” fate decides which of four activities the group will play.” Color Wheel of Fate creates smiles, generates enthusiasm, and offers variety for group interaction.

Props

- The Color Wheel of Fate (a white Styrofoam wreath ring, available from any craft store, that’s wrapped with the four different colors of tape)

Instructions

Substitute 4 different colored objects, such as plastic pit-balls, if you wish not to use the ring.

- Excitedly introduce the Color Wheel of Fate.
- Explain that each color on the ring represents a different game that they must play.
- When you throw the ring into the air, whichever color is caught determines the game they will play.
 - Red is called “introductions.” Group members quickly find partners and properly introduce themselves to each other, followed by an enthusiastic round of high-fives.
 - Yellow is called “swords.” Group members quickly find new partners, join hands and attempt to skewer the other with the extended index finger. Any appropriate part of the body is fair game except for the wrist of the sword-play hand. You’ll find this to be one of the favorites and most action-packed.
 - Green is called the “non-stop talking game.” Group members scramble to find new partners, stand face-to-face, and begin talking quickly and simultaneously. The goal is for one partner to talk longer than the other without breaking into laughter or stopping. No one may say the same thing more than once; everything that is said must make sense; and no touching, biting or spitting is allowed.
 - Blue is the classic duel, “paper-rock-scissors.” Group members again find a new partner and play for the best two-out-of-three title.

- You may want to write on a flipchart or whiteboard:

Red = Introductions

Yellow = Swords

Green = Simul-talk

Blue = Rock/Paper/Scissors.

- If not, make sure you provide hints when they look confused.
- Change games often during play to keep things in motion and to increase interactivity and leave no one standing around.

Safety

Swords can become too competitive. Make sure to let group members know that they are playing for fun, not to win. Throw your penalty flag right away to stop any unnecessary roughness and avoid accidents.

Variations

Change the games for a new approach. Use any “game-shorts” in place of the ones presented, or, in addition to, if you add more colors. All game shorts require partners. You can switch the sizes anytime to trios, quads or any other combination. Be creative and this game can be played over and over again without becoming boring. Remember that any four differently colored objects will work in place of the ring. Put the objects (like four differently colored balls) in a bag and randomly pull them from it to change activities. The ring is more fun to toss.

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Activity: **Dead Ants**

Overview

Dead Ants is a contagiously fun and cooperative tag game. One or two people volunteer to be anteaters, the rest start out as ants. Anteaters attempt to stun all of the ants on the ant hill, while the ants struggle to avoid the anteaters and rescue their friends. Dead Ants will have your group playing hard and working together.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Start by creating a boundary for play (i.e., the ant hill). Use landmarks such as trees or cones to create the ant-hill and have everyone step inside.
- Ask for one or two volunteers to become the anteaters, the rest to become ants.
- The anteaters mission is to stun as many ants as possible by tagging them.
- The ant's must avoid the anteater and work together to save their ant friends who have been stunned.
- When an ant is tagged by the anteater, the individual sits on the ground and calls for help.
- Stunned ants cannot move from the spot, but may wave their arms and legs to alert other ants to their situation.
- To make a rescue, **four** ants must carefully lift and carry the stunned ant to a location just outside of the play area.
- When all four ants have locked into positions for a rescue, they cannot be targeted by the anteater. This allows a safer rescue without the need to rush and potentially drop someone.
- Once an ant has been rescued, he or she returns with the rescuers to the game.
- Play as many rounds as you wish, and switch anteaters frequently.

Safety

Stress the importance of safe lifting and carrying, for this activity is where the most likely injuries will occur. Remind group members that there is no need to rush once four people have locked into position for a rescue. Stop the rescuers if you believe their method for lifting or carrying someone is unsafe for any party, and use these occasions to stop the entire game and discuss what it means to support one another.

Variations

To avoid the lifting and carrying of another person, you can change the rules, asking four rescuers to surround a stunned ant, lock their arms in a circle, and escort the individual off the ant hill.

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Activity: Dollar Jump

Overview

Who says you can not get anything for a dollar these days? For a buck you can lead a very fun and challenging activity, that will, more often than not, put the dollar back in your pocket. All the participants have to do to earn the dollar is jump over the bill while holding their toes. It sounds a lot easier than it actually is.

Props

- A dollar bill.

Instructions

- Pull out a crisp dollar bill.
- Explain to your group that all they have to do is jump over it. There will surely be some suspicion among the group members due to the simplicity of this game.
- The dollar must be jumped lengthwise and not be touched.
- All jumps must be forward, never backwards heels first.
- The most important rule, which makes the game so difficult, is that the jump only counts if the participant is holding his or her toes during the entire jump. Hands must remain flat over the top of the shoes with fingers wrapped over the toes.
- Your group will see how difficult it is to keep hands from popping from their feet when jumping. This is a fantastic way to show your group your fun side.

Safety

The dollar isn't worth hurting yourself over. Tell group members to keep this in mind as they make their attempts. This activity can be played anywhere: on a nice grassy area or on a padded mat inside if you want a little more cushion.

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Activity: Finding Differences

Overview

"Finding Differences" is an amusing get-to-know-you activity. Participants quickly interview one another, trying to find things they **don't** share in common. Through exploration people learn about each other, share interesting facts about themselves, and end up discovering many more things in common.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Group members are tasked to find people with whom they share nothing or little in common. This tactic reduces the likelihood of friends jumping into a dyad with each other.
- Players interview one another looking for as many differences as possible before they must change partners.
- Players ask each other questions, sharing personal tastes and views on any topic that comes to mind.
- Switch partners numerous times to ensure many connections, and be mindful to provide sufficient sharing time for both partners before making switch.
- Participants should match-up with new people, particularly people whom they do not know. Again, you are trying to increase the connectedness among the group, not reinforce the cliques in which people commonly and comfortably find themselves when they join a new group.
- After sufficient sharing, ask the group members what differences and similarities they discovered most often.
- Ask questions like: Do you feel as if you know each other better than before and in what way do you believe stronger connections were made? How will this new information affect your relationship with this person? In what ways did these disclosures make you curious and interested in learning more about another person?

Safety

Although the term "interview" is used to describe the sharing sessions, it is by no means a "grill session" or interrogation. Encourage group members to respect those who may not feel comfortable sharing in depth. Players should not be pressured, only challenged to try something new and let someone in. Remind players that they may share as much personal information with which they are comfortable, and not to take the activity too seriously. The activity is intended to be a fun experience that allows participants an opportunity to learn things about each other.

Variations

Instead of finding differences through questioning one another, ask group members to share their "30-second life story." When participants partner-up, they condense their life history into 30 seconds. Each participant takes a turn to share and then finds a new partner. Or, for culminating experience, ask group members to find one thing they all have in common.

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Activity: **Gotcha!**

Overview

"Gotcha!" is an extremely fast-moving tag game where everyone is "it" at the same time. Each round kicks-off with a burst of energy as group members try to tag one another and not be tagged. The purpose of this activity is to have fun and create emotion through playful motion.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Designate the play area, using cones or natural landmarks. This should be fairly small in relation to your numbers. Bring the group in close for the instructions.
- Point-out the play area and boundaries they must remain within.
- Explain that this is a very fast-paced tag game where everyone is always "it." Everyone may tag and be tagged.
- When a person is tagged or runs out-of-bounds, he or she must kneel-down and freeze where they were tagged.
- Frozen participants can't move but may however lean out and freeze other people who unknowingly get too close.
- If players tag at the same time, they are both frozen.
- Play lasts until only two remain. This happens very fast so frozen players are not out of the action for long.
- Keep the energy high and try not to focus attention on the "winners." Simply shout: "Everyone ready? You better get moving because here we go!"
- Play many rounds and watch as your group comes to life. This is an excellent game to add to a "tag series." Start with "Gotcha!," move on to "Sticky Spot," and then end with "Toilet Tag."
- Spend about 2 to 3 minutes playing each and you can't go wrong.

Safety

As with any activity, you must be aware of the space in which you are playing. Be sure your play-area is clear and free of tripping hazards and potential ankle-benders. Remind group members to tag gently and be careful while moving about. There should be no pushing or shoving.

Variations

Add this twist for a variation: Ask for volunteers to thaw people, rather than to freeze them. These group members work to unthaw as many people as possible and not get frozen in the process. A newly-thawed person may freeze the person who just released him or her, adding an interesting dynamic to the game. How many people will keep the thawing-people safe, and how many will try to freeze these helpers in order to remain the last unfrozen person?

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Activity: Group Breakout Strategies

Two Unlikely Teams

When asked to form teams, people tend to cluster with the people they know best and feel most comfortable with. This method of forming teams is contrary to what group members may do naturally on their own.

- First, ask everyone to find a partner. More than likely they will go to their closest friend.
- Have one person from each pairing raise their hand.
- Ask those with their hands up to form one team and those with their hands down to form another.
- Although sneaky and diabolical, this is a great way to get people to interact who normally wouldn't.

Reflexive Behavior

Reflexive Behavior is a fun way to form teams.

- Have the group members clasp their own hands together.
- Ask them to look at their clasped hands and notice which thumb is on top. This is a reflexive response, or, something that a person does the same way every time, often without thinking about it.
- Ask the people with the "left" thumb on top to form one team, the "right" thumb another.
- Typically the number in each team is pretty even, but you may have to do a little evening out.
- Now for fun, ask them to try and switch. Those with the right thumb on top, clasp so the left is on top, and the opposite for those who originally had the left on top.
- To try another variation, ask the group members to cross their own arms and see which are on top, and then reverse it. For most people it is much harder than it seems.

Reading Minds

- Decide how many groups you want and ask participants to think of a number between one and that number.
- When you say "Go," group members will walk around, tell people their names and give them high-fives.
- They give the same number of high-fives as their secret number.
- Group members who give the same number of high fives stay together and try to find more people with the same number.
- The teams should be pretty even, although a little moving around may be necessary.

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Activity: Haven't We Met?

Overview

This silly ice-breaker may cause players to have an identity crisis. Each player writes his or her name on a note card and proceeds to mingle with everyone else. Each time a player makes another acquaintance; they switch note cards and take on that person's identity. After two or three exchanges, the goal becomes for each player to find his or her name again.

Props

- Felt-tip pens: one 5" x 3" notecard per person.

Instructions

- Pass out the note cards and pens. Have participants write their first name on the card.
 - Explain that players are to walk around and engage each other in conversation.
 - They begin every conversation by saying, "Haven't we met?"
 - The person that they approached responds with, "No, I don't believe we have."
 - The first player responds, "My name is [stating the name appearing on the card]."
 - The second person would respond, "My name is [again, whatever name appears on the card]."
 - The two people exchange cards, and state to each other, "Now, I am [the person's name on their new card]."
 - Players continue to mingle, switching cards and identities with each conversation partner.
 - It is very important to remind group members to keep the writing on their card hidden so that others in the group cannot see the name on the card. Otherwise it would be very easy for a person to track down his or her identity.
- The encounters continue until each person receives his or her own name (original note card) back.
 - When a player meets someone with his or her name card, that person has finished the activity and becomes a coach helping others to "find themselves."

Variations

Have participants right their own name and one fact (unique interest, great experience, curious hobby, amazing accomplishment, unknown talent, or strange eyewitness) about themselves on their card, the more interesting and funny, the better. Then, when players introduce themselves, they also must reveal the "fun-fact" on the card about the person whose identity they have adopted. The game will often turn on conversations about these facts. If you want to increase the fun, ask players to state the fact on the card and then embellish the story. Each subsequent player then states the fact and all subsequent embellishments he or she was told before note cards (or identities) were switched, and each player adds more to the story. Players need to explain the fact as if they did it, and be convincing for the other person. By the time the note card returns to its owner, players may barely recognize the original fact after all the embellishments are shared. Typically players begin to laugh hysterically when another player introduces himself or herself with the original player's name, fact, and now hilarious embellishments to the original fact.

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Activity: **Look At Me**

Overview

“Look At Me” is a simple and fast game to help the group get to know each other better. This activity is perfect for when a group first forms and participants are not well acquainted.

Props

- None.

Instructions and Key Points

- Ask participants to arrange themselves in a circle.
- Have them look around at the other group members until they make eye contact with someone.
- Once eye-contact is established, the two players walk to the center (maintaining eye-contact), shake hands, and introduce themselves.
- They then continue across the circle, switching places with each other.
- The aim of the game is for each person to meet as many different people as possible. Participants want to switch spots with as many people as they can in the time given (usually a minute is sufficient).
- When the minute is up, go around the circle and ask how many switches each person had. Then find out who can remember the names of everyone with whom they switched places.

Safety

Remind players to move cautiously while meeting and switching places. If people are moving too quickly or not paying attention, there is the chance of collisions.

Variation

To change the activity have group members share a different fact in the center of the circle. Some examples are: how many siblings he or she has, a favorite sport, or favorite ice-cream. You can also change up the center activity by adding an action. Each player has to dance to the middle, or try and make the other person laugh in crossing. Have fun with it and be creative.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



LearningChange

Activity: Match Face

Overview

“Match Face” is one of the best openers we know. You will have your group rolling with laughter and see just how controlling a person’s “image” can be. By spending a little time in creative inquiry and using some of our suggestions, you can set the stage for excellent learning.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Ask participants to pick a partner and to stand next to him or her.
- After participants are in pairs, you may want to explore quickly why they chose each other. Then, ask individuals to choose another partner, this time picking someone they don’t know (or don’t know well).
- Partners must match three crazy faces. We used our favorites: the monkey, the scream, and the down-block. You can certainly invent your own, so don’t let our examples limit you from your own whacky creations.
- Have partners stand back to back. On the count of three, partners spin simultaneously around to face each other and perform (or show) one of three designated faces.
- If they match, they play again trying to match the two remaining faces on your list. For example, if they both performed the monkey face, they would not have to do that face again.
- If they don’t match, they simply get back to back and try again. Partners continue on their own until they have successfully matched all three faces.
- The rules are simple. Partners mustn’t tell each other what face to perform or what face they will show.

- Individuals cannot suddenly change their face during mid-turn (when they are turning to face the other person) merely to match their partners.
- Once a pair has matched all three faces, they encourage other groups still working on matching all three faces. Be sure all comments and actions are positive and supportive.

Safety

Keeping people mentally and psychologically safe is paramount in this activity since players are encouraged to do something a bit unusual and in the process look and often feel silly. The key is to encourage participants to venture outside of the comfort bubble and have fun “making faces” at each other—something many of us haven’t done since we were much younger. Keep in mind that many (if not most) of us are concerned about how others perceive us. Showing and acting out silly faces with quick turns is beyond some people’s comfort level. They will often be reserved, not demonstrative, in the faces they choose. Enjoy the sense of play regardless, recognizing even shy actors for their willingness to do not-ready-for-the-Academy-Award performances.

Variations

The most common variation we’ve used is start the action with dyads (or pairs), and then bring the pairs into a new grouping bringing three to four teams together, that now must attempt to match faces with the other teams. You can continue to grow the circle of “face matchers” until the entire group is split into three subgroups, with each subgroup planning their face strategy, and then collectively (usually with you providing the count) turning to show their face to the other teams. Another variation is to use your own creative faces more appropriate, applicable or goofy to your group’s situation.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Match Face

Reflection

“Match Face” can be a fun ice-breaker or an energizer when you want to recharge your group. “Match Face” can also be used as an opener, and you can process the activity relative to your group’s larger interests. Reflective questions for this activity often turn on the reluctance many people have for acting silly in front of others. Some participants will be so reserved in their demonstration of the faces that their partners may not be sure what face the person was attempting to show. In this case, ask participants how they felt when asked to do something out of the ordinary. Ask, too, what experiences outside of this event have occurred in which they have been asked to do something that seems uncomfortable, silly, or embarrassing. Other reflective questions can explore how we often in interpersonal situations actually “match the face” of the person we are talking to, or how often we find ourselves trying to “save face” or appear “straight face” in our attempt to do what some psychologists call “face management.” Another line of reflection explores what it took for the teams to coordinate their actions in order to match one another. This line of reflection works best when you grow the competition as described above, where larger and larger teams compete to match face. In this way, cooperation is more and more challenging as larger numbers attempt to agree on a face and then simultaneously turn to face and hopefully match the other two teams.

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Activity: Mental Maneuvers

Overview

"Mental Maneuvers" is a challenging and exciting focus game. Players must concentrate in this exercise if they want to get it. This should get your groups attention!

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Have your group stand in front of you about arms-length apart.
- Ask your group to raise their right arm straight up and then point it straight down. Repeat this motion to establish a rhythm.
- Stop the right arm and ask participants using only their left arm to point up, forward, and then down. As before, allow repetitions sufficient to establish a rhythm.
- Have participants begin with the right arm motion: pointing up, then down. Next, challenge them to introduce the left arm motions (up, forward, and down) while continuing with the right arm motions.
- Participants will find it easier to begin the left-arm motion when the right arm is pointing up. Then the left arm also begins in the up position.
- Most will find it a difficult task to maintain the two separate patterns simultaneously. Encourage your group to concentrate. With several repetitions and restarts, participants will typically be successful at least once, and several will often succeed repeatedly.

Safety

Make certain that participants are at least arm's length apart so that they will have room to make required motions. Watch for signs of overload and frustration.

Variations

Make it even trickier by tossing in a third element of movement using one leg. The participant continues with the right and left arm motions, and adds the movement of one leg: kicking forward, then bent, and back. When the left and right arms go up, the leg goes forward, and so on through through the pattern. We never said this was going to be easy!

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Activity: Mixed-Up Directions

Overview

It's time to confuse and utterly bamboozle your group with fun yet troublesome directions. In the beginning things seem easy. Participants simply point in the direction you point and call out that direction. As you move in to second and third rounds, expressions quickly become that of confusion, and the laughter begins. Mixed-Up Directions has you playfully get the better of your group while producing infectious laughter.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Position yourself at "the head of the class" with participants facing you.
- **Explain that in stage one, as you point into the air, the group must follow your lead and shout-out the direction you are pointing. When you point up, group members point up and shout "up!"**
- For ease of play, left and right should be in relation to your group's position not yours, similar to stage right and stage left. If you point to the left, they will point to the right. One way to set this game up is to point to the "right" and say "this is your left and you will shout 'left.'" Then point to the left and say "this is your right and you will shout 'right.'"
- Start slow to let them get the hang of it. Gradually speed up, pointing randomly in any of four directions trying like crazy to trip them up. When they have mastered this stage, move on to stage two.
- **In stage two, the group is to point in the same direction as you, but they will shout the opposite direction. For example, if you point to the left, the group points "left" and shouts "right!"**
- Again, start slowly and gain momentum. The faster you go the more difficult it becomes for participants to follow as their motions do one thing, and their brain is telling them to say the opposite.

- When stage two has been more-or-less conquered, it's time to move on to the final and most difficult stage.
- **In stage three the group calls out the direction you are pointing and then points in the opposite direction. For example, when you point to the "right," the group shouts "right," but points left.**
- This is much more difficult than stage two, so start slowly and give your group funny looks to spark laughter. If you are feeling mischievous, vary the speed and enjoy the fun of confusion.

Safety

Keep the pace and tone playful, so that participants are understand that it is okay to be confused or wrong. This will help everyone feel safe as people are laughing with each other rather than at each other. Afterwards, ask how they dealt with looking foolish or feeling wrong . Are they more apt to avoid situations in which they might look foolish or appear vulnerable? Or, to what extent are people comfortable taking chances even if it means looking foolish or being wrong?

Variations

Instead of using directions like up, down, right, or left, you may use compass points (north, south, east and west), parts of a baseball diamond (first, second, and third base and home plate), or sides to a boat (port, starboard, fore, and aft or bow and stern) .

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Activity: **More, Dig, Done**

Overview

This is the ultimate in get-to-know-your-group-members games. More, Dig, Done! goes beyond learning each other's names. In this activity participants actually gain some knowledge about their peer's lives. The nature of this activity provides members with a safe place to share information about themselves and allows others to work on their active listening skills.

Props

- None.

Instructions and Key Points

- Have your group members partner up.
- Explain that one person will be sharing a fact about himself or herself in a single sentence. The other partner will direct the conversation.
- For example: Scott may say, "I have two crazy dogs at home." His partner Marc may respond, "more," "dig," or "done."
- "More" means he wants to hear more about the two dogs.
- "Dig" means he wants a new fact.
- "Done" means he is satisfied with the sharing on that topic.
- The sharing person may also say "done" at any time.
- When one of the partners calls "done," they switch roles. After both partners have shared, have them find new partners.

Safety

Remind everyone that we all have personal boundaries and to respect that the option "Done" is there for both parties in the conversation.

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Activity: **Morph**

Overview

Morph gives your group an excuse to get crazy and have some fun. The goal of this non-elimination game is for everyone to morph from a chirping bird, to a monkey, and finally to a rock star. With little friendly competition, participants continuously move up and down the chain between bird and rock star.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Introduce the three motions and sounds of "Morph."
- The first is the arm-flapping and chirping bird. The second is the armpit scratching and oohing monkey. The third is the disco-like impersonation of a rock star.
- The goal of the game is for each participant to morph from the bird to the monkey to the rock star as quickly as possible, and then remain a rock star as long possible.
- Everyone begins as a bird. Birds pair up with other birds and begin the morph challenge.
- Two birds face each other and place their hands behind their backs. On the count of three both birds reveal any number of fingers in front of them.
- The first bird to accurately add the total number of fingers shown by the pair morphs into a monkey. The other person remains a bird.
- The monkey goes on to face other monkeys, and the bird goes on to face other birds.
- When two monkeys face-off, the first to count all fingers morphs in to a rock star, while the other slides down the scale, back to a bird.
- When two rock stars face-off, the winner remains a rock star, while the other player becomes a monkey again.

Only birds can face-off with birds, monkeys with monkeys and rock stars with rock stars.

Safety

Remind the group to be cautious not to bump into those around them while they are waddling bird-like, swaggering monkey-like, or walking rock star-like around the room.

Variations

Add or substitute any number of motions and sounds to the game. A popular one is "The Immortal." This is the highest position one can attain, and play is slightly different. If you add the immortal status, people who becoming immortal can never morph back down, and they can choose to play anyone at any level. If an immortal loses, he or she simply folds his or her arms and laughs deeply. The exciting part about immortal status is that it can be used for good to help other players morph up the chain. Throwing a game to a bird morphs the bird but has no effect on the immortal. The flip side is someone can also use the immortal powers to keep people from advancing. Interesting conversations emerge from this unique twist to the game.

With younger children whose skills are not yet up to the quick addition, substitute rock-paper-scissors or any other easy activity.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Name Tag!

Overview

"Name Tag!" uses repetition and movement to help people learn each other's names. A volunteer races around the inside of the circle trying to give "ten" (i.e., two "low fives") to the person whose name is called out by another member of the group. If the person inside the circle successfully reaches the individual and gives them a "low ten" before he or she can call out another person's name, the players trade positions..

Props

- None.

Instructions

- The group first forms a loose circle, standing with hands out and palms-up.
- Go around the circle and ask each person to say his or her name loudly.
- Ask for a volunteer to begin in the center of the circle, otherwise known as the hot-spot.
- The center person is trying to get out of the hot-spot while the rest of the team is playing a version of keep-away using each other's names.
- Play begins when one person shouts the name of someone else standing in the circle.
- The person in the hot-spot has to locate the named person and give him or her a "low ten" before that named person can shout someone else's name.
- At no time may palms be pulled out of the way of the tag.
- Names bounce from person to person until the center person successfully lands his or her hands down on the correct outstretched palms before another name is called. Participants then switch places and start again.

- Make sure to always give the center-person an "out" if he or she is struggling.
- Encourage participants to provide subtle head-nods or hints to help the center person find the named player and to keep play moving.

Safety

It is important that the center person is nice when giving low tens. Left unchecked, the simple task of giving "ten" has the potential to become a rough or harsh slap. Also, be aware of those participants who are feeling awkward because they are not sure of everyone's names.

Variations

You can do many things to change play, such as making the circle bigger or smaller (and easier). Or, with groups that may know each other, mix it up by using last or middle names. Others have played this game after "NICK-NAME NUGGET," the alliteration names game with great success.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Nickname Nugget

Overview

This classic game uses alliterations to help people learn and remember the names of others in their group. Each player shares his or her name along with a funny alliteration. As you move around the group, the remaining members attempt to repeat the names and alliterations of the people who have already contributed. You'll be surprised at how many people will remember everyone's name.

Props

- None.

Instructions and Key Points

- Form a circle with the group so that everyone can see each other.
- Ask players to think of an alliteration for his or her name. For example: Music Mike, Rhubarb Rose, or Nevada Nick. Give them a minute or two to create inventive or memorable alliterations.
- Start with one person and go around the circle, letting each person share their "nickname."
- After everyone has introduced himself or herself, explain that the group will next attempt to repeat the name and alliteration of each team member in the circle.
- Ask for a volunteer to start by introducing him or herself. Then, the person immediately to his or her left introduces him or herself and the person who went before.
- Each time a player shares, he or she also introduces the people who previously shared in the circle.
- Individuals are welcome to help others recall their nicknames.
- Remember that the last person has the most challenging task because he or she has to recall all the names and nicknames. Put yourself in that position or ask for an extra brave volunteer who wants to try and introduce the entire group.

Variations

Instead of alliterations, try rhyming animals and/or vegetables. Or, ask players to connect a motion with something he or she likes to do. For example: "My name is Sarah and I like to swim." As Sarah introduces herself, she makes swimming motions with her arms.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: People, Traps & Tigers

Overview

"People, Traps & Tigers" energizes a group through laughter, movement and play. Engage your group in an activity resembling the classic "paper, rock, scissors" and watch as your participants work together to become part of a "winning team." The game ensures that in the end, everyone wins!

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Like "Paper, Rock, Scissors," this game has three interrelated motions: "people," "traps," and "tigers."
- People beat traps, traps beat tigers, and tigers beat people.
- Each of the three has a particular motion that involves a person's arms, stance, and vocals. These should be exaggerated for best results!
- Demonstrate the motions for each element. Then, ask them to show you each element, encouraging them to get into the spirit of the game with bigger arm motions, growls, and jaw-like chomping enthusiasm.
- Group members begin by standing face-to-face with a partner and playing one-on-one.
- Each pair plays the best two out of three, wildly performing the motions.
- The person who wins takes the other on to his or her side, forming a team of two.
- This newly formed duo seeks out another pair. When pairs meet they play just as before, except this time the members of each team must agree on which motion to perform or they forfeit the win. No team may show more than one motion in a turn.
- When a team of two wins, once again they take the others on to their side forming a team of four, and compete against another team of four next round.

- Later in the game, if it becomes impossible for groups of the same size to face-off try and match them up as best as possible.
- Continue play until only two large teams remain. The championship match is the best two out of three between the two final teams. Ensure that everyone on the same team does the same motion each round; otherwise that team forfeits that round. In the end, you are the referee, so be sure to enforce the most important rule: Have fun!

Safety

Movement is required in this activity. Be conscious of the surrounding area of play for potential tripping and other hazards. Use common sense and watch when students perform the motions. Sometimes the "trap" gets confused with the "grab."

Variations

Use "People, Traps & Tigers" to create a fun environment. It is perfect at the beginning of the day, or as a break between long periods of sitting or intense effort. The no-props, no set-up properties of this game make it ideal as an "on-the-spot" activity. Of course you may change the motions, sounds and context to fit your situation.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: People, Traps & Tigers II

Overview

PTT 2 is the highly anticipated sequel to "People, Traps & Tigers." Like the first one, version two is loaded with laughter and based on the idea that motion creates emotion.

Props

- Cones or rope

Instructions

- Divide your group into two teams. You can use a breakout strategy or even play the original version of "People, Traps & Tigers" to form the two teams.
- Mark a center line with rope or cones and place a team on each side.
- Use rope or cones to designate boundary lines roughly 15-20 feet behind each of the two groups.
- Ask each team to huddle up and decide which of the three characters they are going to be: People, Traps, or Tigers.
- People beat traps, traps catch tigers, and tigers eat people.
- Call the teams back to the center line and ask everyone to stand close to the line.
- On the count of three both teams enthusiastically show their character.
- The winning team chases the other team to the boundary line behind them.
- For example, if Team A chose "people," and Team B chose "traps," Team A would chase the members of Team B back behind their boundary line. Members of Team A try to tag as many people from Team B as possible before Team B players make it behind their safety line.

- Those tagged join Team A, while those who make it past the boundary line untagged remain on Team B.
- Teams will go back and forth, gaining and losing players.
- After each round, teams briefly huddle and decide on a new character and strategy.
- Allow the group to play until only one team is left or time's up.

Safety

Remind the group to tag gently. They only have to touch the other team member to win him or her to their side. People should also be careful while running not to shove another person, trip, or run into someone. This is a "tag" game, not a shoving match. Be sure to intervene immediately if anyone is being too rough or careless. Stop the game if you are concerned about people's safety.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Rapid Digits

Overview

Rapid Digits explores the realm of group synergy. Small teams of three or four people struggle to collectively show eleven fingers. Each attempt begins with both players hands behind their backs. Then, with a silent countdown, the players reveal their hands with any number of fingers raised. The group then counts the total number of fingers to determine if they add to eleven. Groups continue until they reach the magic number eleven.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Divide your team into groups of three or four participants.
- From this point they must remain absolutely quiet. Complete silence is necessary to allow space for concentration as well as to make the task more challenging.
- The task is for each group to reveal a total of eleven fingers, regardless of the combination.
- Participants place their hands behind their backs, and when ready, reveal any number of raised fingers.
- The group adds all raised fingers. If the number of combined fingers is not eleven, the group tries again to work out the problem without talking.
- When participants are successful, form new subgroups. As participants join a new group each, they bring with them a set of rules from the previous team that helped them achieve eleven raised fingers.
- Without being able to talk, how did they communicate intentions? How creative were they in coming up with a solution? What patterns emerged? All of these questions serve as springboards for deeper reflection. Of course, you can always choose to play just for fun!

Variations

Change the number of people in each group. The larger the group, the more difficult the task becomes. You could also change the number from eleven to any number. You can require that participants may show only one hand. You can make things more difficult by telling group members that they may not show the same number of fingers twice in a row.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: **Rhythm Hunter**

Overview

Rhythm Hunter is a wonderful activity to get a group moving around, having fun, and energized. This game relies on the individual's ability to pay attention and react undetected to changes in rhythm and movement. The "rhythm leader" attempts to change rhythms and movements of the group without being detected by the person in the middle, the "rhythm hunter."

Props

- None

Instructions and Key Points

- Instruct the group to form a circle, allowing plenty of space for each person to move around.
- Select a volunteer to be the "rhythm hunter."
- Ask that person to move to the middle of the circle, close their eyes and cover their ears.
- Select a "rhythm leader" and have him or her establish a rhythm. The rest of the group immediately follows.
- Have the "rhythm hunter" uncover his or her ears and open his or her eyes.
- The hunter's job is to carefully watch the group and figure out who the leader is.
- The leader attempts to change the rhythm as many times as he or she can, without being detected by the rhythm hunter.
- The hunter has three chances to correctly identify the leader.
- When the hunter correctly finds the leader, or uses all three guesses, ask for another rhythm hunter and rhythm leader, and play again.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Round & Round

Overview

Round & Round combines active elements of tag with a healthy dose of cooperative play. Four-person teams sidestep, spin, slide and dodge to keep a chosen member of their group safe from the pursuant fourth team member. This is a fantastic game to play anytime your group is low on energy or simply restless.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Split your group into small teams of four.
- Each team chooses a “getter” and a “gotter.”
- The “gotter” links hands with the other two team members, forming the “circle-of-friends.”
- The “getter” stands outside the circle.
- The object is simply for the “getter” to tag the “gotter.”
- The “circle-of-friends” is committed to keeping the “gotter” from being tagged. They’ll run around, spinning frantically to keep the “gotter” safe.
- The “getter” may not make a tag through or across the center of the circle.
- When the “getter” tags the “gotter,” the participants switch roles and start again.

Safety

Round & Round requires group members to move quickly, so be sure that groups are playing in an open area free of obstacles and that safety remains a priority. Sometimes the “circle-of-friends” gets carried away trying to keep the “gotter” safe. Watch for rough play and call them on it.

Variations

To make things easier on the “getter,” have the “circle-of-friends” put their hands on each others shoulders, rather than holding hands. This will make the circle smaller and switching faster. Another variation is to allow “getters” to switch to any group they wish. When a “circle-of-friends” encounters a new “getter,” they must reveal the “gotter” in their group. This adds a new dynamic and changes the face of the challenge.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Safety in Numbers

Overview

"Safety In Numbers" is a cooperative version of tag. Players "school together" in groups of three to avoid being tagged by the person who is "it." This is a great exercise to kick-off your day.

Props

- Cones (optional)

Instructions

- Start by clearly designating an area of play; refer to it as "the ocean."
- Ask for somebody to volunteer to be "it;" this individual will be called the "shark" in this game.
- The remaining group members will be "schooling jacks," fish that enjoy sticking together.
- As in nature, the shark will be trying to catch (tag) a jack for a meal. The only way for the jacks to be safe from the shark is to school together in groups of three, giving the illusion they are bigger than they really are.
- Schooling is a group of three players who hold hands or place their arms around each other's shoulders to form a small circle.
- After three or four seconds of schooling, the jacks must break apart and "swim" away.
- The shark can only tag a fish not attached to a school.
- The shark is not allowed to wait around for a school to break apart; the shark must keep moving at all times, always on the hunt.
- When the shark corners and tags a defenseless jack, the players switch roles and the game continues.

- The new shark must make his or her presence known to the rest of the group upon being tagged.
- If you are working with a large group, you may designate two or more people to be sharks. You may have "sharks" wave bright colored bandannas above their heads as they cruise through the jack looking for un-schooled fish. In this way, the sharks are more easily spotted prowling the waters, and when new players become sharks the jacks are alerted to the change.

Safety

Watch for players tagging roughly, pushing, shoving, running, tripping, or otherwise becoming too competitive. Also, make sure there are no hazards in the play area for people to trip on.

Variations

You may turn this game into a hands-on lesson about ocean life. Teach about schooling fish, predators, and prey by bringing in more information about this subject. You can also use the game as a metaphor for how we protect ourselves in many situations. Many of us are still protecting ourselves in this way all the time. You can change the setting from ocean to forest to create a new conversation. Be creative and modify this activity to fit your situation.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Spellin' Melon

Overview

In this game group members will be spelling their names with their melon. In case you are thinking, "my kids don't have melons," melon is code for head. As each person spells his or her name, the group will be guessing at each other's names. But this isn't just a name-game; it is also one of the silliest games there is. People will be laughing out loud and might even be a little dizzy at the end.

Props

- None

Instructions and Key Points

- Ask your group to form a circle, so that everyone can see everyone else.
- Explain to them that they are going to have to spell their name, letter by letter, using their melon.
- As they carefully draw the letters in the air, the group will attempt to guess the author's name.
- The author will go very slowly and start the next letter only when the group has correctly identified the previous letter.
- Go around the circle and let each person have a turn. Strongly encourage everyone to really get into the nonsense that this game promotes.

Safety

Watch out for people who become dizzy, or swing wildly enough to fall forward and bump their melons.

Variations

If your group already knows each other's names, substitute with middle names, pet's names, or the city where they were born. Also try using other body parts for spelling. Elbows and, (do we dare say) "bottoms" are especially funny.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Start When You Start

Overview

"Start When You Start" is a quick, simple opener or closer which may strengthen the bond between group members. The group holds hands and "starts when it starts, and finishes when it finishes." The rest is up to your group to figure things out on their own.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Ask the group to form a circle and join hands.
- Explain that "this activity starts when it starts and ends when it ends."
- Don't be surprised when your group looks confused. No matter how much they insist that there must be more to the instructions, simply state the rule again: "This activity starts when it starts and ends when it ends."
- Add nothing more, nothing less to the instructions.
- Your group may drop hands immediately, begin analyzing the point of the game, or move around playfully.
- There is no right or wrong way to play this game. The point is to see how long it takes a group to "finish," and how they come to the conclusion that they are done.
- Most commonly a group "finishes" by dropping hands. Groups that are more comfortable with each other tend to hold hands longer. Some groups will begin a conversation and declare they are "finished" when the dialogue stops. It is totally up to the group to decide what start and finish means to them.
- Be sure to allow time for the group to talk about their different interpretations of the rule. In addition, allow time after the activity to process with the group what "start," "activity," and "finish" meant.

Safety

Some groups will begin to move around, going under each other's arms and turning in circles. Make sure everyone is moving carefully, not dragging another person behind. As with all of these activities, safety should be the number one concern.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: **Sticker Sneaker**

Overview

This is a sneaky kind of ice-breaker that will require stealth and patience. Participants are given a set of stickers that they must get rid of by secretly sticking them on to other players.

Props

Stickers (ten small stickers for each person)

Instructions

- Hand out a sheet of ten small stickers to each group member.
- Explain that participants must walk around and get-to-know as many people as they can.
- While they are mingling, players will secretly be trying to “tag” other group members with their stickers.
- To make a tag, a player must place a sticker on another player without being seen by that person.
- If caught by the tagee in the act of a tag, the tagger must take the sticker back and allow that person to place one on him or her.
- The most important thing to remember is that a player must actually “see” another place a sticker on him or her for a catch. Feeling it and seeing it are two very different things.
- The goal of the game is to see who can get rid of all their stickers (by tagging others) and who has the least number of stickers on them when someone runs out.

Safety

Use common sense and good judgment and this event is very safe.

Variations

For a shorter game, provide fewer stickers to each person. For an added challenge give each group member a particular color of sticker, and explain that they may only tag each person one time.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: **Sticky Tag**

Overview

"Sticky Tag" is a wild, fast-past variation of tag that your group will enjoy. Everyone is "it" trying to tag everyone one else without being tagged in the process. In this version, when someone is tagged, their hand becomes "stuck" to that spot for the remainder of the game. On the third tag, a player is frozen in place, but definitely not out of the action.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Start by designating fairly small boundaries in a safe area where people can run around.
- Explain to the group that everyone is "it!" The goal of the game is to tag as many people as you can and not get tagged.
- When a player is tagged, his or her hand becomes "glued" to that spot on which they were tagged. For example, if a player is tagged on the elbow, he or she must hold his or her elbow for the rest of the game.
- The first and second tags result in a hand being stuck to the location of the tag.
- Players who have been tagged twice can no longer make tags because they have no free hands. They must run for it, and try to avoid the crucial third tag.
- The third tag freezes the player in place, but their hands become unglued.
- Frozen players must remain stationary, but may attempt to tag other group members as they run by.

- Play continues until there are only one or two unfrozen people.
- Play a couple of times, quickly starting new games to keep everyone engaged.
- This is a fantastic game to play in a series with "Gotcha!" and "Toilet Tag." Play one after the other and watch our group come to life.

Safety

Remind group members to tag softly and be careful while running.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Strangers, Friends & Winners

Overview

"Strangers, Friends & Winners" will challenge your group to look at the different ways in which we treat others based on the roles that we assign them. The group, standing in two concentric circles, greets one another in the manner consistent with the roles you have assigned.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Ask participants to find a partner.
- Have them decide who will be partner "A" and who will be partner "B."
- Ask the A's to form a circle facing out and away from the inside of the circle.
- Have the B's form a circle around the A's facing toward the center and the A's.
- Explain to them that when you say "Go", the inner circle will slowly walk in one direction, either clockwise or counter-clockwise; the outer circle will move in the opposite direction.
- As they pass by each other, participants greet each other first in the manner that they would a complete stranger. Spend some time allowing players to greet several people in this fashion.
- Stop the rotations, and explain to the players that they will now introduce themselves to other players as if they were close, long-lost friends who haven't seen each other in years. Again let this unfold through several introductions.
- Finally, ask players to greet each other as if they are splitting the winnings of a jackpot lottery. Remind the group to be conscious of the differences in their treatment of the other people.

- You may wish to reserve time after the activity to discuss what the differences were in the way that they treated each other with each successive situation. What did each look like? How were they different? With which scenario were they most comfortable?

Safety

Use common sense and good judgment and this is a very safe activity.

Variations

After trying Strangers, Friends, & Winners, use different roles. Try a celebrity ("I'm so famous now"), a sports star or salesperson who has the opportunity of a lifetime for the other person. Use your creativity and you can spark many excellent conversations.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Tap Dancing

Overview

Tap Dancing tests group members' agility. Players try to tap the tops of their partner's feet without allowing their partner to do the same to them. This activity is a playful, nimble, toe-tapping dance. It is a great way to lighten the mood and get your group's energy soaring.

Props

- None

Instructions and Key Points

- Have group members divide themselves into pairs, face their partner, and grab hands.
- Keeping their hands connected, they dance around trying to lightly tap the top of their partner's shoe with the toe-end of their own shoes. At the same time they are attempting to keep their partner from doing the same.
- The winner is the person who taps his or her partner's foot twice in a row without being tagged in between.
- Have the players switch partners often, so they get to dance with as many people as possible.
- While there is a winner, that is not the important thing. There are no cash prizes or awards. The goal is to have a blast and enjoy playing with the people in the group.

Safety

The toe-tap should be a gentle touch, not stomp or a heavy slamming down of the foot. That's why it's called "tap," not stomp, dancing. People wearing heavier shoes or boots need to remember to touch or tap only with the toes of their shoes, and to be particularly considerate of people with sandals or other open-toed shoes. If the group is comfortable with removing their shoes, then the activity can be played in socks and bare feet. Remember, socks can be slippery on some surfaces.

Variations

Try groups of threes for a new challenge. This time the first person to score three taps wins the round.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: **The Ten Count**

Overview

Your group must count to ten, collectively, without any two people saying a number at the same time and with no verbal planning. This will get your group to cooperate and focus.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Ask your group to form a circle.
- Explain that no talking or planning is allowed.
- The task is for the group to count to ten collectively without any two people saying a number at the same time. For example, one person starts by shouting “one,” and another person shouts “two” and so on.
- When two or more people speak simultaneously, the entire group starts back at zero. For example, if two people call out “five,” the group restarts.
- Each number must be called out clearly by one person, and no one else may talk when a number is called.
- The group must work out an informal solution to accomplish this task.
- You’ll find that talking isn’t the only method of communication. Group members will work out solutions in many creative ways.

Variations

If your group makes it to ten, try a larger number. You may also insert the rule that no one may say two numbers in succession. In other words, an individual cannot say, “one, two...,” but rather is allowed to state only one number.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Toilet Tag

Overview

This game is about as goofy as they get. This crazy version of tag will have your participants running around frantically and laughing their heads off.

Props

- None.

Instructions and Key Points

- Start off by designating the boundaries of the play area, also known as the “wash room” in this game.
- Ask for 1 to 3 volunteers, depending on the size of the group, to be “plumbers,” in other words, to be “it.”
- Explain to participants that if the plumber tags them, they must kneel down, on one knee, and point one index finger away from them. They have now become a toilet and their finger is the flush level!
- To be relieved from their job as a latrine another player must gently sit on one of the toilet’s knees and flush the handle.
- Make sure that your participants are making swooshing and gurgling sounds when the toilet is flushed.
- To keep this game polite, plumbers are not allowed to bother anyone already seated in the flushing position.
- To keep the game sanitary, the toilet and the flusher must wash hands by rubbing them together when done.
- As soon as the flush is completed and hands are washed, the flusher and the toilet are fair game for the plumber.

Safety

Explain to your group members that they should not be putting all of their weight on the knee of the toilet or tug too hard on the flush handle. Ask participants to be cautious while they are running around, as to avoid high-speed collisions.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Virtual Catch

Overview

“Virtual Catch” is the ultimate in imagination games. Your group can play an energetic game of catch, and all each person needs is a paper lunch bag and keen imagination. You may be thinking something is missing, like the ball. With a snap of fingers, the ball becomes “real” and a game of catch begins—but in truth the ball is imaginary.

Props

- 1 paper lunch bag per person.

Instructions

- Pass out a lunch bag to each player.
- Ask players to roll the top of the bag down once or twice to create a good place to grip.
- While you explain how to hold the bag, model the grip: four fingers inside the bag, with the thumb resting on the outside.
- Present the imaginary ball with much fanfare. It is up to their imagination to make the ball exist.
- Toss this imaginary ball high in the air and position yourself to catch it forcefully in your bag.
- At the moment that your imaginary ball would land inside, snap your fingers inside the bag and make a catching motion. This provides the sound and illusion that a ball truly has landed in the bag. You’ll be surprised how much it sounds like a real ball landing inside the bag.
- Have group members practice the snap a few times and offer help if needed.
- Now begin throwing the ball around the circle.
- Allow your group members to be creative about the height and speed at which they throw the ball.

- The catcher should exaggerate their actions and adjust their improvisations based on how a person threw the ball.
- You can break the group into pairs and let them play catch back and forth and practice their improvisation skills.
- As the group begins to get more comfortable with the idea, group members will start getting trickier with their throws and catches.
- This is a fantastic improvisational game that proves that an imagination goes a long way.

Variations

While the group is throwing their imaginary ball (especially when the ball is supposedly floating above the group), announce that the ball is a large beach ball, a balloon, or a bowling ball. See what participants will drop their lunch bags to catch a bowling ball. Keep changing the ball and enjoy the fun. Some groups get pretty silly, and will change from balls to throwing imaginary cats (but no animals are actually hurt in this game!), flaming basketballs, raw eggs, and bowls of hot spaghetti. To enjoy the improvisation requires that you have fun thinking up new things to toss.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: What If I Told You?

Overview

This activity allows people to learn about each other, and fosters imaginative thinking and story-telling. The group forms a circle around a volunteer who is standing in the center. Each person, minus the one in the middle, stands at a floor marker. The person in the middle tells the group something about himself or herself, which may or may not be true. The people forming the circle vote on the truth of the statement with “thumbs up” or “thumbs down.” The person in the middle reveals the truth, and those who incorrectly judged the statement, as well as the person in the center, must locate a new mark to stand at. While having a great time scrambling for a spot and listening to each other’s wild and many times truthful stories, the participants will learn about each other and find common ground among their peers. Sometimes the truth is stranger than fiction!

Props

- One (1) half-sheet of paper, large note-card, or paper-plate per person (minus one) as a floor marker.
- Masking Tape.

Instructions and Key Points

- Ask the group to arrange themselves in a circle and have one volunteer step into the center.
- Pass out the floor markers and a piece of tape to those people forming the circle and ask them to attach the card to the ground in front of them.
- The goal for the person in the center is to acquire a spot on the border of the circle. To do so he or she must share a true or false fact about himself or herself.
- The person in the center starts by saying “what if I told you...” followed by the fact. For example, someone might say “what if I told you that I have been skydiving.”
- The players standing on marks judge the truthfulness of the statement by giving thumbs up (for true) or thumbs down (for false).

- When everyone has voted, the person in the center reveals the truth using his or her thumbs as well.
- Those who guessed correct do not move, but those who guessed incorrect must move to a new floor mark.
- Participants may not move to a spot directly to either side of their current spot.
- While people are moving around, the person from the center must also find an open spot.
- The person caught without a marker is the next “volunteer” to share in the middle.
- You can play as long as your group’s interest holds. Challenge them to be creative with their facts and see how many people they can displace while in the center.

Safety

If you are playing on a slick surface, make certain that the markers are taped securely to the ground. Also encourage participants to not step directly on the markers, to avoid slipping. They should move quickly but be cautious about running into each other. Remind them to be polite about acquiring a new location; this means no pushing or shoving. The first person to a marker gets it.

Variations

Try the classic “I Have Never” version for a switch. The player in the center starts by saying “I have never...” and reveals something they actually have done. For example, a player who has been to a foreign country might say “I have never been to a foreign country.” Everyone, including the person in the middle, who has been to a foreign country must find a new floor marker to stand at. Sometimes it is easier and less intimidating for players to share with “I have never.”

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: **When My Hands Cross**

Overview

“When My Hands Cross” is a ton of fun. All your audience has to do is clap their hands whenever your hands cross. Sounds easy, but it all depends on how hard you make it for them. This is an awesome way to get people loosened up because they will be moving and laughing.

Props

- None

Instructions and Key Points

- Tell your group that they have to simply clap each time your hands cross.
- Explain that the goal is to clap at the exact moment that your hands pass each other.
- Encourage them to try their best to clap in unison.
- Start off easy by passing your hands by one another rather slowly. Once the group gets the idea, start making it more difficult by stopping your hands just before they cross.
- Try to throw them off by establishing a rhythm and then changing it up or stopping midstream.
- Be sure to playfully tease the group a little about having clapped when your hands didn't cross.

If you are working with a new group, this is an excellent method to establish a connection with the members. You can show them that you are into having a good time and have a sense of humor. This is truly an icebreaker because it is so effective at cutting through some of the awkwardness in a new group. Of course, this activity is effective with any group. When you are ready to end it, pass your hands back and forth very quickly, and bask in the roaring applause that your group is showering upon you.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



LearningChange

Activity: **Who's Watching?**

Overview

You've probably heard the old saying, "Somebody is always watching." But who is that someone? Group members secretly and individually pick another person in the group to watch for one minute. Players remain in constant motion, always keeping their watched person in direct line of sight, yet trying to be sneaky enough that the watched person isn't sure who is keeping an eye on them. This activity works as a fun metaphor for how we are both observing and being observed in our daily lives. How we present ourselves by what we say and do, and how others use this information to form their opinions about us. What messages are you sending? How does that message change when you think no one is watching?

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Ask all group members to secretly choose a person in the group, but not to share with anyone who that person is.
- For one minute, group members must keep this person in direct line of sight. For example, if your chosen person moves behind a tree, you need to move to a position to keep him or her in plain view.
- The objective is for group members to keep their chosen person in sight for the full minute without being discovered as the watcher.
- When time is up, bring your group together and ask if anyone figured who was watching them.
- Ask:
 - Did you find yourself immediately aware of who was watching you?
 - Were you preoccupied with whom you were watching or more concerned with who may be watching you?

- To what extent did you become more aware of what people might be thinking about you if they were keeping an eye on you? For example, did you adjust your clothes, straighten your hair, or wondered if you looked too goofy to someone else?

Safety

Occasionally, people become so preoccupied watching someone else and worrying about who is watching them that they fail to watch where they are going. While it can be funny when people start backing into each other or stumbling over something because they don't want to be discovered as the watcher, people need to be careful. In addition, the intention of the game is to have fun and exaggerate how we feel when we're both watching others and being watched; nevertheless, some people, for whatever reason, become anxious or overly self-conscious about being "watched." If you see someone who appears terribly awkward, ask if the person to help you keep time or to be an observer of the whole group.

Variations

Ask group members to choose secretly both one person to watch and another person to avoid (i.e., stay at least five feet away at all times during play). In this way, participants have to both keep their eyes on one person, but try simultaneously to keep their distance from another person. If you want to increase the challenge even further, ask participants to choose secretly one person to watch, one person to avoid (at least 5 feet away), and a third person to stay near (i.e., within 5 feet). This third challenge keeps a group moving quickly for 60 seconds, and it's hilarious when players have, unknowingly of course, made secret and mutually exclusive choices regarding whom they'll watch, whom they'll avoid, and whom they'll be near. How do these variations change group dynamics? What new questions do the variations raise?

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: **Work of Art**

Overview

Participants rotate through roles as artist, clay, and model. Through the creation of living sculptures, your group's level of comfort will rise, as will each individual's confidence in the team.

Props

- 1 blindfold per group of three.

Instructions

- Divide your group into teams of three.
- Hand out a blindfold to each group and ask them to decide which person will play the artist, the clay, and the model for the first round.
- The clay will wear the blindfold and act like a moldable lump of clay.
- The model will pose in any creative pose he or she can come up with.
- The artist will observe the model, and attempt to form the clay into the identical position as the model.
- All three members of the team must remain silent throughout the exercise.
- When the artist feels confident that his or her work is an exact copy of the model, he or she will remove the mask from the clay, so that all can observe the work of the artist and creativity of the model.
- Next, the members switch roles. Play at least three times so that everyone can have a chance to play each role.
- At the end, for a reflection component, discuss when people were most and least comfortable. Ask them which role they preferred and why. Also ask them what things brought up challenges for them personally or as a group, and where those things come up in life.

Safety

Some players may not be comfortable with the blindfolds. In this case, challenge them to play with integrity and simply close their eyes. Remind group members to be very careful and treat each other well and respectfully. The artist has a big responsibility to make the clay feel comfortable and taken care of. Stop any kind of rough or inappropriate behavior right away.

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: Yin-Yang-You

Overview

"Yin-Yang-You" requires participants to pay close attention to the other members of the group. While rapidly passing the Yin-Yang-You pattern around the circle, participants struggle to stay focused and not become confused. No one is "out" in this game. Those who get confused and break the pattern simply slide into a new role.

Props

- None.

Instructions

- Ask your group to arrange themselves in a circle.
- Demonstrate the three movements of the activity: Yin, Yang and You.
- "Yin" requires placing a hand on top of one's head.
- "Yang" requires placing a hand under the chin, palm down.
- "You" is a hand pointed straight out towards someone else.
- Yin and Yang can pass only to the left or right, while You can pass to anyone in the circle.
- The direction of play (left or right around the circle) is determined by the direction that the person's fingers are pointing as they say Yin or Yang.
- For example, if a player does the Yin motion (palm flat on top of the head) with the right hand, his or her fingers would naturally point to the left and play would move in that direction. The person to his or her left must then "Yang," (hand under the chin, palm down) either left or back to the right.
- The person who is "Yang-ed" must quickly "You" (point straight at) anyone in the group. The person who is "You-ed" starts the cycle over again with a "Yin" to the left or right.
- When a player confuses the pattern or takes too long to make a move they step out of the circle and become a heckler or supporter.
- These players try to confuse those still in the circle by talking or gesturing near them, or, help them through supportive comments.
- Hecklers or supporters may not touch anyone in the circle.
- Play continues until there are only two or three people left in the circle.
- You should play numerous times so that the group can grow accustomed to the pattern.
- Start slowly at first and gradually speed up play as your group gets used to the game.

Variations

Another excellent non-elimination variation starts with two circles playing simultaneously. When a person steps out of one circle, he or she moves right into action in the second. Players can bounce back and forth many times, while trying to stay put as much as possible.

Also, try changing "Yin," "Yang" and "You" to bo-log-na, A-B-C or any other variation that suits you. The more creative you are the better!

Inspire! Ice Breakers & Openers



Activity: **Your Big Entrance**

Overview

"Your Big Entrance" gives everyone a chance to feel like a superstar. The team makes two lines, and one-by-one each "player" introduces himself or herself and jogs between the two lines of enthusiastic team members. The superstar is greeted with energetic high-fives and supportive hollering by peers. Your Big Entrance is an awesome way to show group support and to get everyone energized.

Props

- None

Instructions and Key Points

- Have the group form two equal lines facing each other. Leave 4-5 feet between the lines to allow enough room for someone to move in through the center.
- As they do prior to professional basketball and football games, each team-member loudly introduces him or herself and jogs between the two lines accepting high-and-low fives, while the team shows their support by hooting, hollering, and generally cheering their team mate on.
- Once the person has reached the end of the lines, he or she returns to the line and participates as an enthusiastic teammate for the next person introduced.
- Alternating from the two lines will keep the lines even, and help keep track of who has been introduced.
- Encourage enthusiasm, high energy, and support among group members.

Safety

Make sure teammates are contributing to the person going down the middle and not taking away with negative comments or rough and inappropriate high-fives. Encourage players to have a lot of fun but not to get too carried away.