

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.

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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.