

Icebreakers, Energizers & Team-building Activities

The Basics

This section includes a variety of icebreakers, energizers and team-building activities for use at your meetings. These are some suggestions on ways to have some fun, establish trust and build shared experiences between group members.

Team building activities and icebreakers are fun ways to start the process of building a strong team based on positive relationships. They can allow group members to get to know each other, practice different styles of communication, make group decisions, solve problems, work with people they wouldn't ordinarily, test leadership skills, and laugh together. Energizers can help renew the group or release tension that may develop.

Initially, the adult leader assumes responsibility for creating a safe comfortable group environment, however it is essential that the youth are part of maintaining positive group energy. As the group becomes more established, youth can assume the role of planning and facilitating energizers and team-building activities. This is an excellent way to involve youth in the group and to foster leadership skills. The adult may need to work with the youth to develop skills in assessing the group so they can effectively plan and facilitate activities. The *Awesome Activities* tip sheet included in the *Leadership Development* section is a valuable resource for youth to help plan and facilitate activities successfully.

Some key points to keep in mind when planning team-building activities include:

- **Youth need to feel part of the group.** In order for youth to have a positive experience and remain active in the group, they need to feel like they belong.
- **Establishing trusting relationships between youth takes time and commitment.** Have a variety of on-going opportunities for youth to get to know each other and work together in different ways.
- **It helps to start out with less threatening activities.** Touching each other (eg. holding hands, etc.) can be uncomfortable for some youth. You might try out an activity where the youth select their own partner or use small groups, and advance from there. Of course, youth always have the right to pass.

Additional Resources:

- TRIBES book (See *Community Resources* section)
- Big Book of Icebreakers and Team Building (See the *Community Resources Appendix*)
- Ohio State University Extension: Building Dynamic Groups.
www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~bdg/word_docs/f/C06.doc
- www.residentassistant.com



Icebreakers

Group Profile

Materials: newsprint, markers, tape

Preparation: Trace an outline of the human body on newsprint. List the following topics outside the outline next to the coordinating body part:

Head: dreams or goals we have (for our community)
Ears: things we like to listen to
Eyes: How we like other people to see us
Shoulders: problems young people may have to face.
Hands: things we like to make or do (with our hands)
Stomach: things we like to eat
Heart: things we feel strongly about
Right foot: places we would like to go



Directions:

Post outline of body on the wall. Invite participants to come up to the poster and write things or pictures to represent each area for them. This is done graffiti style, free form.

After everyone has had a chance to participate, ask for volunteers to report to the group on what is listed.

Discuss:

- What are common interests? Shared goals? Dreams?
- Were there any themes?
- What are the things we feel strongly about? How do these relate to our group's work?

Honey, I Love You

The group forms and sits in a circle. Ask for a volunteer to start the game. That player approaches one person and says, "Honey, I love you." That person must respond by saying, "Honey, I love you, but I just can't smile." If that person smiles while speaking these words, he/she becomes "it." If the person does not smile, the player who started out must approach a new person until he/she makes someone smile. "It" is not allowed to touch a player as he/she speaks, but anything else is fair play. This is a funny one, but participants should have worked together first and have some level of comfort with each other for it to work!

Incorporation

Explain that this game is about forming and reforming groups as quickly as possible. Don't worry if you are not even into the first group by the time the next group is called, just head to the next group. The idea is to meet many different groups of people as fast as possible. Get into a group of three...go!

Other suggestions:

- A group of five with everyone having the same color eyes as you.
- With the same last digit in their phone number as yours.
- Wearing the same size shoe as you.
- Get into a group of three people and make the letter "H" with your bodies.
- Find everyone else born in the same month as you
- Think of the first vowel in your first name, find four with the same vowel.

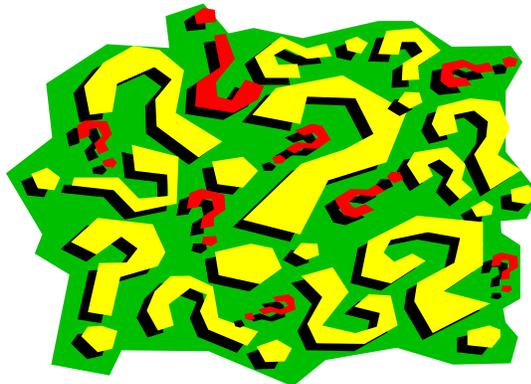
Reference: Martin, R.R.; Weber, P.L.; Henderson, W. E.; Lafontaine, K. R.; Sachs, R. E.; Roth, J.; Cox, K. J.; Schaffner, D. (1987). Incorporation (Section 2 p.9). LASER D.I.S.C. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Extension.

Name Game

Form a circle with everyone standing up. The first person says their name and makes a motion or Symbol to represent him/herself. The next person repeats the name and symbol of the person before them, then says their names and adds their symbol. The next person repeats the name and symbol of everyone before them and then adds their own. Repeat until everyone in the circle has gone.

Question Game

Each person writes down a question they want answered in the group. Roll up the questions into a ball. Each person throws her/his question to someone else. Take turns answering the questions. You can have more than one round and ask students to ask questions that increase risk. (It's a good idea to briefly discuss positive risk taking and getting to know people in the group).



Raffle Ticket

Preparation: Create and make copies of raffle tickets; get a box to use for the drawing

Distribute raffle tickets. Instruct participants to find their partner based on their answer to first question on their raffle ticket. Participants complete the rest of the raffle ticket with their partner and put it in the drawing box. After everyone has completed their ticket draw a winning pair and give out small prize.

Then each person introduces his or her partner saying the person's name and something he/she is good at. Then the partner introduces the other person and shares their partner's favorite thing to do.

Raffle Ticket*

*Find a partner who has the same zodiac sign as you (i.e. Gemini, Sagittarius...). You fill out one side of this ticket and have your partner fill out the other side. Then put this ticket in the raffle box. If this ticket is chosen you both win a prize!

Name: _____

Birthday: _____

1. What are two things that you have in common with each other?

2. What are two things you are good at?

3. If you had the power to change one thing in your school or community, what would it be?

4. What is the biggest reason you want to participate in Youth Power this summer? Circle one.

- a. TAP is fun
- b. To have something to do this summer
- c. To meet new people
- d. Earn money
- e. Help make Bay Point better for me and other teens
- f. Other _____

Sign Up Here

Materials: 6-10 pieces of large newsprint, tape, and pencils.

Preparation: Put pieces of the newsprint around the room. From the list of topics below, write a different topic of interest on the top of each newsprint. Also include a related question you want people to answer about each topic. (Topics can vary according to the age and interests of group involved):

- I like to speak or perform in public. (What group(s) have you spoken to or performed in front of?)
- I like to work on computers. (What programs do you know?)
- I can speak a language other than English. (Which?)
- I would be excited to travel in the U. S. or abroad. (Where? Where have you been?)
- Making friends is an important part of my life. (Who are your best friends?)
- My family is one of the things that makes me happy. (Something I like about them?)
- There are things that I would like to change in this school. (What?)
- There are things that I would like to change in our community. (What?)
- The voting age should be moved from 18 to 21. (If you could vote, what law would vote to change?)
- I have organized or helped to organize an event, celebration, fund-raiser, meeting, wedding, or conference. (Describe.)

Instruct participants to walk around the room, look at the different topics and sign their name on any of the sheets that represent topics in which they have an interest, and to make a comment answering the question on each sheet.

After everyone has had a chance to sign the sheets, ask one person that has signed each sheet to read the names of the people that have signed that sheet and any comments.

Discussion:

What interests does the group have? How many different interests are represented in the group? Which chart had the greatest interest? Which chart had the least interest? What does this say about the group as a whole? Is there a pattern? What comments are made?

Synthesis: Explain how these skills are important for community organizing and how each of them will contribute their interests and skills making the group stronger.

Two Truths and a Lie

Give the group some time to write down two things about themselves that are true, and one thing that is a "lie." Each group member will then share these facts about themselves and the rest of the group has to figure out which "fact" is actually a "lie."

What's in a Bag?

Materials Needed: 4 bags each with a small treat inside

Directions:

- Display four bags in an area where everyone can see them. Ask for 3 volunteers to participate in activity.
- Each volunteer selects a bag only on the basis of looks.
- Next, each volunteer can take a turn picking up the bag. They can keep their bag, trade with someone else or trade for the extra.
- Third, each volunteer can feel the object to try and figure out what it is. Each can trade with someone else or trade for the extra.
- Finally, each person gets to open the bag and see what's inside. Each has the opportunity to trade with someone else or trade for the extra.

Process questions:

- How did you first decide on the bag?
- How did each new piece of information influence your decision?
- How do you feel about the decision you made?
- How do other people in the group make decisions?
- How does this relate to our group?

Who Am I?

The leader tapes the name of a famous person on the back of each participant. (i.e. Fred Flintstone, Mary Lou Retton, Bill Clinton, etc.) The group member is not to see who is taped to their back. Their task is to find out who they are. The participants go around the room asking others **only** yes or no questions. If the member receives a "yes" answer, they can continue to ask that person questions until they receive a "no" answer. Then they must continue on to ask questions to someone else. When a group member figures out who they are, they take off the tag, put it on the front of their shirt, and write their own name on it. That person can then help others find out who they are. The exercise concludes when everyone has discovered who they are.

Variation: Use names of famous pairs (like Syskell and Ebert, Bert and Ernie) and do a partner activity after the game.

Energizers

Chalkboard Sentences

Tell participants they will be competing to see which team is the first to complete a group sentence. Next, divide participants into two teams. If the group contains an uneven number, one person may compete twice. The leader sets up blackboards or newsprint for each team. The teams then line up 10 feet from their board. After giving the first person in each team's line a piece of chalk or marker, explain the rules of the game. The rules are: Each team member needs to add one word to the sentence. Payers take turns; after they go to the board and write one word, they run back to give the next player the marker, and then go to the end of the line. (The sentence must contain the same number of words as there are members on the team.) A player may not add a word between words that have already been written. After, discuss the value of anticipatory thinking and the importance of individual cooperating in a group task).

String Balloons

Materials: String, 10-12" balloons, and a whistle

Give participants a piece of 12" string and a balloon to blow up. After blowing up the balloon, the string should be tied to the balloon and the other end tied to the right or left ankle. After everyone has completed tying their balloons, instruct participants to stand in a circle with their hands behind their backs, standing on one foot. It can be either foot. When the whistle blows, the group moves and around each person, trying to pop someone else's balloon. Once a balloon is popped, that person sits down. The winner is the last person with the balloon still inflated and attached to the ankle.



The Wave

Form a straight line with people standing behind each other. The leader starts off making an arm motion and the group members follow one at a time immediately following each other to make a wave. See how fast how you can go. The leader can change the motion and the pattern of the wave.

Youth Power Chant

Preparation: Make a poster with words to the following chant: "Ain't No Power like the POWER of the Youth, 'Cause the POWER of the YOUTH DON'T STOP!"

Explain that often when people come together to take on an issue they need to keep up their energy. One way of doing this together is at a rally or event; groups chant to raise energy and send a message (to participants and target.)

Facilitator repeats twice. Ask if any questions. Repeat once more. Then on count of three, everyone repeats together. Ask for volunteer(s) to make their own 'spin' on the chant and teach the group.



Team-Building Activities

Birthday Line Up

Explain to the group that this is a nonverbal exercise. The group is to form a single straight line, according to birthdays. For example, persons with January birthdays will be at the beginning of the line, earliest January dates first followed in order by later dates. The line progresses by months and days with December birthdays at the end. Persons with the same birthday share the same place in line. You must communicate non-verbally (no lip-reading or spelling in the dirt allowed). When the line is completed, each person will shout out his/her birthday, beginning in January.

Group Juggling

Form a circle with everyone standing up facing the inside of the circle. The leader of the group will begin with one object in hand (i.e. a small ball). The leader will ask one group member to repeat their name, and then the leader will gently toss the object to that group member. The group member will reply "Thank you, (the leader's name)!" The leader will reply by saying, "Your welcome, (the individual's name)!" The object will continue around the circle in the same manner, making sure everyone has received the object, until the object ends up in the hands of the original leader. NOTE: During the first round, once a group member has tossed the object, have them cross their arms to prevent repetition. The same pattern will start again with the leader adding more objects. Once an object has been dropped, the pattern starts all over with the first object. NOTE: the leader should mix up sizes and shapes of objects (i.e. a rubber chicken, toilet paper, etc.)

Group Lap Sit

Facilitator Note: This activity can bring up issues about body image and size, although size doesn't matter for the actual activity. It's a good idea to know your group before trying this activity and remind folks they have the right to pass.

The group will start standing in a circle, shoulder to shoulder. Everyone then turns to the right and put their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of you. The group will need to work together to communicate. At the count of 1-2-3 everyone is instructed to sit on the knees/lap of the person behind him or her. If this is done too quickly, group members will fall over.

Once this has been completed, the group may wish to try to walk in this formation. This is a dynamic activity - and one that will make the group feel a great sense of accomplishment when successfully completed!

Human Knot

Participants stand shoulder-to-shoulder in a circle, placing both hands in the center. When the whistle blows everyone grabs the hands of someone else, being careful not to grab both hands of same person or the hands of someone right next to them. Once everyone is connected, the object is to untangle the knot, without releasing the grip, except for permissible pivoting, as long as touch is maintained. One pair will be instructed to release their grip. Try to form a straight line.

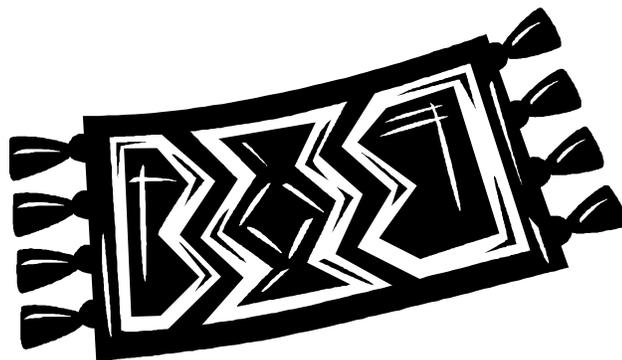
Magic Carpet Ride (This works best with a group of 12-18 people per sheet)
Materials: One double/full-sized bed sheet (a plastic tablecloth can be a good substitute)

Directions: Lay sheet flat on the floor or ground. Ask everyone to stand on the sheet. Now, turn the "Magic Carpet" (old sheet) over without anyone touching the floor or the ground in any way. No one may lift anyone off the sheet at any time.

Processing questions:

- Who had the ideas to overcome the challenge?
- Who was the leader of the group?
- How many different solutions might there be?

Reference: Sachs, B. & zumFelde, P. (1998) Magic carpet ride. Let me grow in peace-team challenge-asset building. (p. 10). (Available from Lutheran Social Services, T793 State Route 66, Archbold, OH 43502)



New Planet Activity (Decision Making)

Time: 25 minutes

Materials: copies of worksheet (1 per student on white); copies of worksheet (1 per group on colored paper). (See Tools at the back of this section for worksheet.)

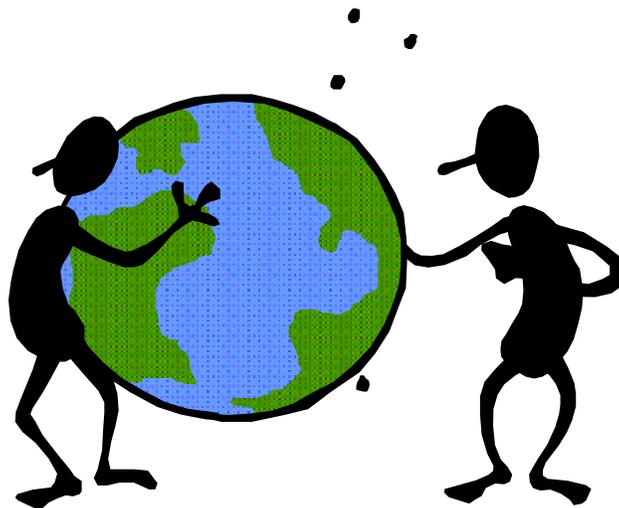


Directions

- Explain that each person will receive a list of 30 people. However, due to air pollution, the earth's ozone is too thin. In a few days, the earth will be too hot for people to survive. NASA going to send rocket to new planet so humans will not become extinct. However, only 10 of the 30 people can go to the new planet. Each person has 5 minutes to decide by themselves who will go.
- Distribute copy of new planet worksheet to each person (copies on white paper).
- Next, divide group into groups of 3-4. Give each group a worksheet on **colored** paper. Each group has 10 minutes to come up with their list of people for the new planet.
- Ask each group to pick a recorder and a reporter.

Group process questions:

- How did you make your decisions individually?
- How did your group make its decisions?
- What were some challenges? How did you handle conflict? Did you have to compromise?
- Did a leader emerge? What was the leader's style? How did she/he lead?
- What values influenced your decisions? Where do our values come from? What can happen when people with different values get together? (Point out any stereotypes that seemed to influence decisions. Reinforce no judgments in this group.)



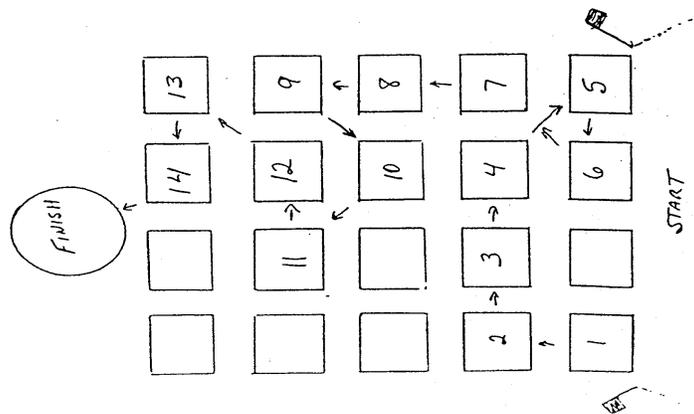
Swamp Island Maze

Materials: 20 8x10 sheets of paper and masking tape, "start" and "finish" boundary markers, Squeaker toy, a map of the "safe" specified route

Objective: To transport the entire team across the quicksand swamp using only the "safe" grass clumps in a specific order to cross the swamp. Referring to the map of the "safe" specified route, the Leader uses "Swampy" (the squeaker toy) to confirm the "safe" island pattern as players each take each step. The team member must return to the back end of the team's line if they step on an "unsafe" island. Team members must rotate turns attempting to discover the safe route across the swamp. There are exactly "14" mandatory safe steps to cross the swamp. Only one person may be crossing the swamp at any one time.

Variations:

- Do this activity without voice communication, no talking!
- Team members must all stay on the final safe island until all team members cross the swamp.
- Alter the safe clumps/route in some specific pattern (really devious!)
- Allow more than one person crossing the swamp at any one time, probably need a separate squeaker and facilitator for each crosser.



Reference: Fark, J. (1994) Swamp island maze. Team challenge: Introduction to low initiatives training. (Available from Ohio State University Leadership Center, 109 Agricultural Administration Building, 2120 Fyffe Road, Columbus, OH 43210)

Tower Building Activity

Beforehand, construct a structure out of a combination of art and office supplies. Display the structure in a separate room.

Divide participants into groups of 4-5. One at a time, each person in the group has a chance to view the structure for one minute and then report back to the group what it looks like so the group will build.

Debrief questions:

- What was the experience like?
- What was it like to see the structure one time?
- Did any leaders emerge? What traits helped them to lead the group?
- How did your group communicate?
- How did you work out conflict?
- Did it get harder or easier as each person had a chance to look at the structure?



Tools



**Icebreakers,
Energizers &
Team-building
Activities**



New Planet Activity Sheet



Due to the pollution in the air, the Earth's ozone layer is way too thin. Days are getting hotter and hotter. In a couple of days, the Earth is going to be too hot for humans to survive. NASA has a rocket that will send people to a new planet so that they can repopulate and the human species will not become extinct...the only problem is the rocket can only take 10 people!!!

Talk to your group and decide which 10 people should go to the new planet:

1. 35 year old female, has 3 children, graphic artist
2. 12 year old male, straight A student, wants to be a police officer
3. 59 year old male, computer technician
4. 18 year old male, high school drop out, does not have a job
5. 24 year old female, pregnant and expecting twins, teacher
6. 25 year old female, fashion model
7. 15 year old female, pregnant, high school student
8. 16 year old male, boyfriend of #7, baby's father
9. 30 year old male, garbage collector, has a wife.
10. 21 year old male, photographer, single
11. 70 year old male, retired lawyer
12. 50 year old female, doctor, cannot have children
13. 45 year old male, investment banker, very wealthy
14. 40 year old male, dentist
15. 22 year old female, college student, studying the environment
16. 30 year old male, famous actor, known to use drugs
17. 14 year old female, soccer player, has part-time job as cashier
18. 38 year old male, pilot and astronaut, has the flu
19. 29 year old female, botanist (studies plants/trees)
20. 49 year old male, governor of California
21. 27 year old male, reporter for the local newspaper
22. 30 year old female, cook, owns her own restaurant
23. 10 year old male, farmer
24. 60 year old female, astronomer
25. 52 year old male, fisherman
26. 49 year old female, aircraft repairwoman
27. 22 year old female, singer, dancer, actress, smoker
28. 28 year old male, professional basketball player
29. 33 year old male, carpenter, has the chicken pox
30. 28 year old female, psychologist, counselor, has fear of flying

