



# Icebreakers, Team Challenges, and Other Group Games

## What it is

This guide contains many ideas for icebreakers, team building challenges, and other random and fun games that youth or adult leaders can incorporate into their youth programming.

## Why it matters

[Belonging](#) is an important part of any youth development program because it helps young people feel valued and connected to others. "Playing games can allow young people the opportunity to use voice, be on teams and be provided authentic choice. [Play](#) is an important part of a young person's learning and development. Play can allow young people the opportunity to learn and [practice social skills](#). Games allow young people a framework to make connections with one another."<sup>1</sup>

## Special considerations

As you're selecting activities, be sure to consider which ones will be more appropriate for the size, ages, and abilities of your group. For instance, some games in this guide have a competitive element. Competition is generally not appropriate for youth under age 10, so consider selecting non-competitive games, or simply remove the competitive element. Also, consider the physical abilities of your groups and select those activities that all your young people will be able to participate in, or modify them (e.g., sit instead of stand). As with any activity, be sure to emphasize safety—both physical and emotional—when giving directions for all team challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, C. (2020). *Quick guide: Hosting virtual games*. University of Minnesota Extension.  
<https://extension.umn.edu/program-design-and-impact/hosting-virtual-games-quick-guide>

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# Icebreakers

## Adjective Names

Everyone sits in a circle. The first person will say their name and an adjective that describes them that begins with the first letter of their first name. Example: "Hello! I'm Creative Chris." Then the next person has to repeat the adjective/person's name for everyone who went before them.

## Alphabet Relay

Form at least two different groups. Each group has to run to the designated line and do the action or make the sound of the animal that begins with their letter. Must start at letter A and end with Z. Example: Alligator—Chomp; Bear—Grrr, etc. Also to change it up you can use foods, body parts, places, etc. instead of animals.

## Career Guess (needed: flip chart paper, markers)

This one is for small groups that have spent some time with each other. Have a sheet of flipchart paper for each participant. Write one person's name at the top of each paper and post papers around the room. Give participants markers and have them write the occupation they think each person in the group will have someday. After everyone is done, all participants write their real answers under their own name.

## Circle Tag

Arrange the group in a circle except for two. This pair is "it." They hold hands and run around the outside of the circle. As they're holding hands, one runner will naturally be closest to the circle. Wherever they feel like it, this runner closest to the circle tags a pair of hands and then makes one more lap around to try to steal their spot, while the two tagged people come out of the circle run in the opposite direction around the circle, trying to get back into their spot before the first pair gets there. If they don't succeed, they become the new "it." They have to keep holding hands through this process.

## Color game (needed: candy)

Everyone sits in a circle and takes a piece of candy (that come in different colors, like suckers, M&Ms, or skittles). Develop questions that must be answered for each different color. Examples:

- Green = Favorite memory,
- Red = Most embarrassing moment,
- Orange = The moment you had the most fun,
- Pink = Random question, etc.

## Comic Strip (needed: comic strips)

This one takes a little work, but is a lot of fun and requires participants to communicate effectively. Take a Sunday paper comic strip (one that has eight or more frames in it) and cut it into individual frames. Use as many strips as you need so that each participant has one frame. If you have 30 participants, you will need to use four comic strips with eight frames each so that everyone has one. To begin the activity, attach one frame to each person's back. If you have frames left over, do not leave them out—add them to a participant's back so they can find the complete comic strip. Participants need to arrange themselves in the correct order of their comic strip. The first group that gets their comic strip in order is the winner. This will take a while, as a lot of communication is needed to accomplish the feat.

## Detective

Have the participants form a circle and pick one to be the detective. Have the detective leave the circle. Then designate someone to be "it" who will be in charge of starting an action. "It" will start and repeat an action and everyone will follow (for instance, nodding your head side to side, or clapping your hands on your knees). Once action has started, have the detective come back to the circle and stand in the middle. "It" should change the action as many times as it wants, but don't get caught being the one to start the action! The detective will have three guesses who "it" is. Then start again with a new detective.

## Geographic Circle

Have participants sit in a circle. One player starts by calling out the name of a place. It may be a town, city, country, or county, and it can be anywhere in the world. The next person names a place that begins with the last letter of the place just mentioned. For example, if the first person calls out "London," the next person might call out "Nevada." Once a place is named, it cannot be used again. Allow only five seconds for the person to respond. *Variation:* If the person cannot respond, he/she is out and play continues until there is a winner.

## Giants, Elves, and Wizards

This is the human version of Rock, Paper, Scissors. Giants put their arms up to symbolize being large and powerful. Elves squat down and become as small as possible. Wizards point their fingers as they cast a magic spell. Giants beat Elves, Elves beat Wizards, Wizards beat Giants.

## I've Got Your Number

As participants arrive, each gets a number that they wear in an easy to see place. Ahead of time, prepare instructions on slips of paper and place them in a box. For example:

*Find out the middle name of 4.*

*Introduce 12 to 8.*

*Exchange shoe sizes with 22.*

*Find out if 2 has a pet.*

When everyone has their first instruction, let them start. When they complete an instruction, they should get another from the box. Keep track of how many participants complete, and reward those completing a set amount. Allow 5-10 minutes for the activity. Make LOTS of instructions, so you do not run out. Make sure you include all numbers.

## Mailman Game

Get in a circle. The easiest way to play is if everyone places some kind of marker where they're standing (easiest way is to have everyone sit on a chair in a circle, but you can also place a piece of paper or something else down on the floor to mark your space). One person will have to be in the middle. This person will decide who has to move around by saying, "I have mail for... (e.g., everyone who has brown hair)." If what they say applies to you, you have to move at least 2 spots away from where you started. Whoever is the last person standing will be the new person in the middle.

### **Make up a Story**

Each person writes two sentences on a piece of paper and then folds the paper to cover all the lines except for the last one. Each person adds to the story, only seeing the last line the person before them wrote. Read the story after everyone has written their two lines. Example: "One day Kristie decided to go on a picnic by herself. She brought milk and a peanut butter sandwich." The person who wrote these lines would then folder their paper so that only the last line, "she brought milk and a peanut butter sandwich," was showing. The next person would add two more sentences.

### **Name Juggle (need several soft balls or other throwable objects)**

Form a circle. One person starts with a ball or other soft throwable object, like a stuffed animal. This person says a person's name and then throws them the ball. Then that person does the same, and so on, until everyone's had a chance to catch and throw. Each person has to remember who they threw to and who threw to them. Repeat it in the same order. Then add more objects! How many can the group juggle without dropping? To make it really interesting, reverse the direction of throwing, so each person would be throwing to the person who had thrown to them in the previous round.

### **Pictures**

Each person draws a picture at a certain scene (e.g., beach, home, eating dinner, gym...). After everyone is done, they should put their pictures in the middle. Mix the pictures well. Each person chooses someone else's picture. Go around in a circle, have each person interpret the picture they chose. Afterwards, have the person who drew the picture interpret the picture how they perceived it.

### **Pile Up**

Everyone SITS ON CHAIRS in a circle. The leader will call out something that relates to people's opinions or facts about each person and also tells the group how many chairs they will have to move right or left. The people only move if the statement relates to them.

### **Question Game**

Have the group stand in a circle. Designate one person to start. This person will have to turn to one of the two people standing next to him/her and ask a question (i.e. Why is the sky blue?). The person who the question is directed to must quickly ask another question or is out. It has to be a question and cannot be previously asked by anyone the entire round. Each time a person doesn't follow up by asking a question, they step out of the circle and the circle tightens/gets smaller. The last person remaining wins!

### **Scrambled Name**

This is a great mixer for larger groups that do not know each other. Pass out slips of paper and pencils and have everyone write down their own name with the letters all mixed up. For example, if your name is Harvey Furd, then you might write it as "Vreahy Urfd." When all the names have been put into the hat, have each person draw one out. On GO, have them unscramble the name on their paper either by themselves or working with a partner. When participants have their names unscrambled, they must seek out that person and visit with them. After five minutes or so, have them introduce their person.

**Task** (needed: tape, scraps of paper with numbers written on them, numbered lists)

Tape a number on each person starting with one and continuing until each member of the group has a number. Also prepare some numbered lists—one for each participant—that list five tasks to do. If it is a small group, you may have a task for each member of the group. Example:

1. Find out where number 6 was born.
2. Introduce yourself to number 5 and find out four things they dislike.
3. Approach number 2, introduce yourself, and ask where they like to travel on a special vacation.
4. Exchange views on your favorite music with number 3.
5. Discuss your favorite foods with number 7.

When everyone has completed their tasks, ask them to sit in a circle. Have them share the information they have discovered about the other members of the group. The tasks may be silly or humorous, or could ask for opinions. This is a good ice-breaker to find common ground if used as outlined.

**Who Am I?** (needed: address labels and pens)

Give every participant an address label. Without letting anyone see, each participant must write down a name of a famous person, living or dead, on the label. The person should be someone that most people would recognize. When they are done addressing their label, have them put their label on another person's back. After everyone has a label on their back, have them start to mill around the room and ask questions to try to discover who they are. They can only ask questions that can be answered with a yes or no answer. They can ask two questions of each person before moving on to the next participant and asking more questions. Optional: Once they have discovered their identity, have them use the new name as a nametag.

### **Zip Zap Zoom**

(ZIP = right, ZAP = left, ZOOM = self) Everyone stands in a circle. There are 1-5 people in the middle depending how large the group is. If someone in the middle comes up to you and says ZIP then you have to tell them the person's name to your RIGHT by the time the person in the middle can count to three. If someone in the middle comes up to you and says ZAP then you have to tell them the name of the person to your LEFT name by the time the person in the middle can count to three. If someone in the middle comes up to you and would say ZOOM then you have to tell them your own name before the person in the middle can count to three.

## **Brain Teasers**

Brain teasers are a great way to pass the time while you're waiting for others to arrive, while enjoying a snack together, or while you're traveling together on a bus!

**Petals Around the Rose** (needed: 4 or 5 dice per group)

Participants must determine how many roses and how many petals can be found each time the dice is rolled. Only the person rolling the dice knows the secret. The leader rolls all the dice (5 is an ideal number to play with, but you can roll 4 instead) and asks everyone else, "How many petals around the rose are there?" They make their guess, and then the leader reveals how many petals there actually are. The leader rolls the dice several times, allowing them to study the dice to develop their theories. Here's the secret that the other

players must work out on their own: A rose is found only on a die that has a dot in the middle (one, three, five). Any even-numbered dice you can ignore, because petals are located on any die that has a rose. A one is a rose with no petals; a 3 is a rose with 2 petals, and a 5 is a rose with 4 petals. Example: In a roll with two 3's, one 6, one 5, and one 4, the leader would reveal that there are 8 petals around the rose. Why? Because only the 3's and 5 have roses, and between them they have 8 petals. In a roll with one 1, two 2's, one 4, and one 3, the leader would reveal that there are 2 petals around the rose. This is because only the 1 and 3 are roses, and between them they have 2 petals.

### **Frustration**

Tell the full group that Group A (two or more people) are going to go outside and select a story about a counselor or advisor and come back to the room. Group B tries to guess the story by asking yes or no questions such as "Is this person a male or female?" "Did this happen last night?" What really happens is this: When Group A is outside, you instruct them to answer yes or no based, not on any story, but on the first letter of the first word of the question they are asked. If it is a vowel, say "yes;" if it is a consonant, say, "no." Group B makes up the story without realizing it. The results are very funny to watch. For variation, if the first letter of the question is a Y, have Group A answer 'maybe', then watch the frustration.

### **Black Magic**

The leader must have an assistant who understands how to play the game. After the assistant has left the room, participants select an item in the room. The assistant returns. The leader then names off several objects. When finished, the assistant tells the group the selected item. The assistant will know the correct object because it will always be the one named after something that is black. As participants think they have figured out the puzzle, they can continue playing but must not reveal the secret.

### **Crossed or Uncrossed** (needed: 1 pair of scissors)

Tell participants they must be observant and listen carefully to win this game. Participants sit in a circle. Scissors are passed around (can be passed either crossed or uncrossed). Participants must declare how they receive the scissors (either crossed or uncrossed). The leader tells the group whether or not they're correct. What actually determines whether or not the scissors are crossed is the position of the "passer's" legs or feet, either crossed or uncrossed. So, if the legs or feet of the person who is passing the scissors are crossed, then the leader would say crossed, whether or not the scissors are also crossed. If the legs or feet of the person passing the scissors uncrossed, the leader would say, "uncrossed," whether or not the scissors are crossed. As participants think they have figured out the puzzle, they can continue playing but must not reveal the secret.

## **Creative Ways to Form Groups**

No matter our age, we all tend to stick to what we're most familiar with, including each other! This is fine sometimes, but to get your group to bond, it's a good idea to find ways to creatively mix them up so they get to know others they might not normally try to on their own.

### **Grab the string** (needed: string)

To get participants into pairs, the facilitator has pieces of string (one piece for every two people). The facilitator holds all the pieces of string in a bunch in the middle and everyone chooses and holds the end of a



piece of string. The facilitator then lets go of the string and people get into pairs with the person holding the other end of their piece of string (Dudley, E. & E. Osváth. 2016. Mixed-Ability Teaching. OUP).

**Line Up** (needed: scrap paper and pencil)

Ask participants to write down an answer to your question (e.g., what was the last thing you ate? or what's your favorite movie?). Have them line up alphabetically according to the first letter of the thing they wrote down. Then split them up along the line according to the number of groups you want.

**Pizza, or Pasta, or Neither?**

Have participants find someone who has a different answer from them to what they prefer—pizza, pasta, or neither.

**Puzzles** (needed: 1 puzzle per group)

Give each person a puzzle piece. They must find others who have a piece from the same puzzle and put their puzzle together. Tips: You can make your own puzzles by cutting up a picture into pieces; also one person can get more than one puzzle piece.

**Singing and Sorting**

Try this when dividing large groups into small groups. Pick common and easy to sing songs. Write the titles of these songs on an equal number of paper slips (if you have 100 participants and want five groups, you would pick five songs and write each title on 20 slips of paper). Have each participant take a slip of paper. At your signal, groups must find each other by singing the song they chose. They cannot talk, motion, or show the slip of paper.

**Sit, Stand, Squat**

Everyone walks around the room while you're singing a tune. When the music stops, participants must either sit, stand, or squat. Then they partner with someone who did the same. Or, have all sitters in one group, all standers in another, and squatters together.

**Vegetables**

Have people find others (number of others specified by you) based on their favorite (or loathed) vegetable.

## Circle ball games

These are great games to play inside. For most of them, all you need is a throwable object, and space to move around.

**Dragon Dodge Ball** (needed: soft ball)

Have the entire group make a circle and pick 4 or 5 people for a team. This team goes into the center of the circle and forms a line by attaching their hands to the waist of the person in front of them (a "dragon"). Those people who make up the circle throw the ball at the "dragon", trying to hit the last person below the waist. Once hit, the last person returns to the outside circle and players continue to hit the new person at the end of the dragon until there is only one person left and they too are hit. A new team then goes into the middle.

Time each team to see which one can last the longest.

**Flinch** (needed: 1 soft ball or other throwable object)

Form a circle. One person in the middle has a ball. Others on the outside stand still with their hands on their thighs. The person in the middle tries to get people on the outside "out." There are two ways to do this. One is by throwing the ball to them, and if the person doesn't catch it, then they sit. If they catch the ball, they're the new person in the middle. The other way to get people out is to try to get them to flinch by fake-throwing the ball to them (make a throwing motion without actually letting go of the ball). If the person flinches, they sit. Blinking is OK (doesn't count as a flinch), but any other movement is counted as flinching. Actual throws to someone in the circle must be legitimate (i.e. not at their head, not too high or too low, and not in between two people). Game continues until there is only one person left standing.

**Protect the President** (needed: soft ball)

(Credited to J. Hart)

Players again stand in a large circle with two people in the middle. One person in the middle is the President, the other is the Bodyguard. Those standing in the circle try to hit the president with the soft ball. The bodyguard may do anything to block the ball with his body: jump, squat, dive, etc. If the ball touches the President at any time [any part of the body, not just below the knees], the person who threw the ball (or the last person to touch it) then becomes the Bodyguard, the Bodyguard becomes the President, and the President rejoins the circle. What makes this exciting is that from the moment the President is hit, the new President is vulnerable as the transition is instantaneous. The new bodyguard must be fast at getting into the circle to defend him or her. This sometimes makes Presidential Turnover pretty quick, but it's exciting.

## Relays and Random Fun

**Fork Over The Chocolate**

Needed: A bar of chocolate (preferably cold for older players), 1 knife, forks (1 per person), a dice, a pair of large gloves and some other items of clothing depending on age group. e.g. scarf, hat, large coat or jacket, trousers, waistcoat.

Everybody forms a circle or half circle or sits on chairs. One person starts by throwing the dice followed by each person in turn. When a six is thrown, the person then runs to where all the clothes are and starts putting them on. Once they are completely dressed they can then start trying to eat the bar of chocolate, but they may only use the knife and fork. For sanitary reasons, make sure each person uses their own fork. While they are doing this the rest continue throwing the dice, and if someone else throws a six, the person eating the chocolate has to stop and get undressed while the next person tries to get dressed and start eating the chocolate etc... The game ends once the chocolate has been eaten.

**Marshmallow Catch** (needed: 2 marshmallows and 4-foot string per pair)

Break the group into pairs. Give each pair a piece of four foot string and two large marshmallows. Have one person be an A and the other designated a B. Have pairs stand at arm's length and face each other. Participants cannot move their feet. Have A tie a marshmallow to each end of the string and place one of the marshmallows in his/her mouth. Participants cannot use their hands. They can only move their heads.

When you signal, time begins. A tries to swing the string so that B can catch the other marshmallow with his/her mouth. The first pair to do this successfully, without cheating, wins.

**Ping Pong Ball Relay** (needed: ping pong ball and party horn per group)

Divide into teams. Have one player from each team step forward. Give each a ping pong ball and party horn. The player must push the ball down the floor and back, without using their hands, and then pass the ball to the next player. Each player needs a party horn. The first team to have all the players complete the action wins the relay.

**Runaway Chain Train**

Groups of four or five players form a train and chug around the area. Players are in contact by holding the shoulders of the person in front of them. The front (engine) of each train attempts to link up to the backend (caboose) of any other train while also trying *not* to be linked from behind by another train. If one train does hook up with another, the two parts continue as one train, trying to hitch up with other smaller trains. Before long, all of the small trains will be joined into one large train. The front engine can then attempt to catch and hook up to the last car. Runaway Train is a good way to end up in a circle formation for a quieter game.

**Straw Relay** (needed: 1 drinking straw per person)

Give everyone an ordinary drinking straw and have them place one end in their mouth. When time begins, they must try to get from one end of the straw to another without using their hands. The facial expressions are great. Those who can do it in less than a minute qualify for a final race in front of the entire group.

**Squeeze Play** (needed: 1 balloon per pair)

Have pairs of people stand back to back. Give each pair a balloon to blow up and tie. Have pairs place the balloon between the backs of their necks. When time begins, have pairs compete to see who can break the balloon first, using body pressure from necks, back, rear, or legs, without using their arms or hands. If a pair drops the balloon, they must find a way to pick it up without facing each other or using their arms or hands.

**Tomato Test** (needed: 1 tomato per pair)

This one can get messy—be careful. Break into pairs and give each pair a tomato (or use a golf ball if you do not want to clean up). Have the pairs face each other and place the tomato between their foreheads. Without using his or her hands to hold the tomato in place, have each partner untie and take a shoe off the other partner.

**Rubber Band Relay** (needed: 1 large rubber band per person)

Give everyone a large rubber band. They should place the rubber band around their head so that it crosses the tip of their noses. Participants use their facial muscles to work the rubber band down to their necks without using their hands.

## Team Building Warm-ups

Before getting into the more difficult team challenges (see pages 12-20), consider having your groups do one or more of the following very quick little activities that can help them get in the mood for team building and warm up to each other. Be sure to clue them in to the team building connection for each activity.

## Commonalities

Get into groups according to visible similarities (find people who have the same color shirt as you, etc.). In your group, create a list of things that you all have in common, visibly. Then get into a different group. In that group create a list of things that you all have in common that can't be seen just by looking with your eyes.

*Team building connection: Remember, as you work as a team, to make good use of each other's strengths.*

## Gotcha

Stand in a circle. Each person puts their left hand out, palm up, and places their right index finger in the hand of the person standing on their right. When the facilitator says GO, each person tries to grab the finger in their left palm while trying to avoid getting their right finger trapped.

*Team building connection: Sometimes during these challenges, we'll be asked to do more than one thing at a time!*

## Hog Call

Blindfolded partners try to find one another from across the room.

*Team building connection: Communication is always key!*

## PDQ

Have participants share a series of tests with each other (who can snap with their dominant hand; who can snap with non-dominant hand; who can make popping noise with their finger). People successful at it try to help people who are unsuccessful.

*Team building connection: It's just as important to help others be successful as it is for you to feel so.*

## Red-Handed (needed: several random objects)

Sit in a circle. Distribute a few objects around the circle, evenly spaced. The goal is to get two objects at the same time in the lap of a player sitting beside you. Objects can be passed in either direction. The person holding the object decides which direction to pass it. Objects may only be passed to the player next to you. If you're caught with two objects on your lap, make a loud noise. The only consequence is having to make the noise. You may continue to play.

*Team building connection: Remember to have fun with each other!*

## Silent Get-to-Know-You

Partners communicate something about themselves to each other without speaking or writing (but they can draw). Share what you learned about your partner as a large group.

*Team building connection: It's important to show an interest in getting to know something about each other.*

## Tiny Teaching

Pair up. Partners spend a minute teaching the other person how to do something, anything. Could be a dance move, how to make pesto, or something like in PDQ exercise.

*Team building connection: It's just as important to help others be successful as it is for you to feel so.*

### **Yurt Circle** (needed: rope)

Everyone holds a circle of rope. The challenge is for everyone to lean back and for the group to support itself. Once they get good at it, they can try sitting down all together.

*Team building connection: This is a quick and easy way to practice team building. How did it feel?*

## **Team Building Challenges - COMMUNICATION**

### **1-2-3-4**

Ask participants to hop around on either their left or right foot. Now have them get together with two other people who are hopping on the same foot (left or right). The three participants stand facing each other, holding one fist clenched in front of them. Ask them to shake their fist up and down together four times and chant "1-2-3-4" together. Those are the only words that can be spoken. On the count of four, each person puts out any number of fingers from zero to five. The object of this game is for the three people to have exactly eleven fingers out, without talking to each other. Once they are at eleven, try getting to twenty-three with each of them shaking two fists at a time and putting out any number from zero to ten fingers.

Discuss: Without words, how did you communicate to get to the number eleven?

*Communication connection: Demonstrate alternative methods of communication.*

### **3-D Mine field** (needed: rope, several random non-breakable items)

This is a classic communication game that also includes elements of trust, risk taking and problem solving. Mark off a large area either outside or inside. Rope works well to mark off the area. Make certain it is large enough to be challenging for the group (at least 8 x 10 feet). Scatter non-breakable items inside the area (e.g., tennis balls, beach balls, paper plates and cups, balloons). Use anything that might get stepped on and still not lose its value. Pair the participants off and blindfold one person in each pair. Have those that are blindfolded move to one end of the minefield. Have the partner stand to the side of the minefield. At the signal, the blindfolded participant steps into the minefield and starts walking to the other side. The partner can use only verbal clues to assist—he or she cannot touch or guide the blindfolded person in any way. There is usually a great deal of confusion as all the partners start yelling at their blindfolded partners. If the blindfolded partners touch any of the items in the minefield, they have to start over. Or you can keep a count of the number of touches and add penalty points to the final time across the minefield. Have the partners switch roles for round two of the game.

Discuss: What worked well for communicating? What didn't work?

*Communication connection: This is a great game to demonstrate the power of simple and accurate communication.*

### **Back Drawings**

Have participants line up facing the same direction, with each person facing the back of the person ahead of them. The leader uses a finger to draw a picture on the back of the last person in line. This person must then draw the same picture on the back of the person in front of him or her, until all participants in line have a

picture drawn on their back. The leader should then move to the front of the line and have the last person to draw the picture on his or her back determine how much the picture has changed. (If available, have the person draw the picture on a board or flipchart, and the leader can draw the original picture.)

Discuss: Why is it so hard to get the same picture from beginning to end?

*Communication connection: This is the same as gossip through a crowd of people. It is never the same story that was started. It can also demonstrate nonverbal messages.*

### **Count to 10 (or 20)**

The whole group must be quiet. Then someone says "1," another says "2," and so forth, but if 2 or more people say the same number at the same time, the whole group must start over! To make it more challenging, try counting up to 20!

Discuss: What did you do to be successful?

*Communication connection: Body language is just as important as speech!*

### **Magic numbers** (needed: paper and pencils; calculators optional)

This is a game about following directions. Have participants take out sheets of paper and pencil. If they have a calculator, they may want to use that as well. This is a test of their mathematics skills. Have them take their house number (or box number or road number) and double it. Then add five to the number (example: house number 9 doubled is 18; add 5 to get 23). Multiply that number by half of one hundred (example:  $23 \times 50 = 1150$ ). Add your age (example:  $1150 + 15 = 1165$ ). Now add the number of days in a year (example:  $1165 + 365 = 1530$ ). Then subtract 615 (example:  $1530 - 615 = 915$ ). The last two digits will be your age (15) and the first numeral is your house number (9). This problem works with larger house numbers as well. It is simply a matter of arithmetic!

Discuss: What strategies did you use to try to get the right answer? (Note we never said they couldn't ask questions to get clarity or repeat instructions or in any other way get help).

*Communication connection: This is a fun way to see if they can follow directions, and if you can give clear directions that are easy to follow. But it's also a way to demonstrate what we can do to get clarity. It is all a matter of communication.*

### **Picture not so perfect** (needed: paper and colored markers)

Provide paper and colored markers to everyone in the group. Select one person to give the directions of what is to be drawn. The person giving the instructions must imagine the details of a picture based on the description given. Then they describe the picture they imagined without using any words listed below the description. The rest of the group attempts to draw a picture matching what the describer tells them to draw, based on what they hear. Allow time for the group members to view each other's pictures after each description is completed.

**Picture 1:** A waterfall flowing between two mountains and a rainbow connecting the two mountains with a bright sun in the sky. *Do not use the words: Waterfall, Mountains, Colors, Rainbow, Sun*

**Picture 2:** An island in the middle of the ocean with two palm trees on it, with coconuts under the trees and a sailboat in the water in the distance. *Do not use the words: Island, Sailboat, Coconuts, Ocean, Palm Trees*

**Picture 3:** An airplane in the sky that is flying in front of a football stadium, pulling a banner that says "Happy Birthday Joe." *Do not use the words: Airplane, Happy Birthday, Stadium, Football, Banner*

**Picture 4:** A person in a green baseball hat waiting at a bus stop. There is a stop sign in the background and a garbage can under the stop sign. *Do not use the words: Bus, Garbage, Hat, Stop, Green*

**Picture 5:** A dog is at the bottom of a tree barking at a cat that is stuck in the tree. The tree is in front of a house with a bike sitting in a driveway. *Do not use the words: Dog, Tree, Bike, Cat, House*

Discuss: Asking the person giving the directions how they felt about not being able to use some of the most descriptive words. For others, what was important to do when listening to the description? What do you do when you encounter someone who does not give clear directions?

*Communication connection: This activity is designed to enhance verbal communication skills and stress the importance of paying close attention to others when they are talking.*

### **Spider Web**

Ask the group to stand in a circle. One person begins the activity by stating his or her name, and something he or she likes to do. While holding on to the end of a ball of yarn, the person tosses the ball to someone else in the circle. This continues until everyone has received the ball of yarn and a spider web has been created. Next, reverse the pattern by stating the name and activity of the person who last tossed the ball. Keep going back, winding up the slack on the ball until the ball reaches the first person.

Discuss: Why is it so important to listen to what others share with you about themselves?

*Communication connection: For a team to be effective, each person needs to feel valued and listened to.*

### **Spaghetti Conversation**

The leader asks for two volunteers to sit in chairs facing each other. Then ask the rest of the group for four words, e.g., opossum, cola, dinner, baseball. The two players are told that these are the only words that they can use to have a conversation. Remember no other words. Participants will be forced to draw on and accentuate communication basics: tone, emphasis, body-posture, etc.

Discuss: When participants have completed their conversation, ask the group how well they communicated. Use this information to discuss the basics of communication. To add an element of drama to the



conversation, have participants use the four words in different scenarios, such as being stopped by a police officer for speeding or you are driving your wife to the hospital to have a baby.

*Communication connection: Participants must use non-verbal techniques and accentuate the voice to get their point across.*

## Team Building Challenges – TEAMWORK

**Create a Game** (needed: one sack with random supplies per group of 3 or 4)

Here is an open game that requires both creativity and teamwork to accomplish the task. Divide the participants into groups of 3 or 4. Give each group a sack with miscellaneous supplies. Consider the following items for the sacks: Balls, tape, paper, dice, marbles, paper cups, paper plates, rubber bands, index cards, markers, etc. Use your imagination—be creative and on the wild side when putting the sacks together. Not every sack needs to have the same materials. Instruct the groups to use the materials to create a game that demonstrates teamwork. Give the group 15-20 minutes to create their game and then at least 2 minutes per team for them to demonstrate their game to others. Add time for them to play each other's games if time allows.

Discuss: What kind of skills did this challenge require of your team? What part of this challenge was each person in your group best at?

*Teamwork connection: All team challenges require different skills. One of the reasons we work in teams is so that we can utilize the unique skills of each person.*

**Create a Skit** (needed: one sack with random supplies per group of 3 or 4)

This is similar to Create a Game (above) but instead of creating a game, the groups must use the materials in the sacks to create a five minute skit that demonstrates some aspect of teamwork.

Discuss: What kind of skills did this challenge require of your team? What part of this challenge was each person in your group best at?

*Teamwork connection: All team challenges require different skills. One of the reasons we work in teams is so that we can utilize the unique skills of each person.*

**Extension Cord Confusion** (needed: extension cord or long piece of rope)

Hand the group an extension cord or long piece of rope that is knotted several times. Ask each person to place one hand on a section of cord. When all hands are in place, they must untangle the cord without removing the hand holding the cord.

Discuss: How would you rate your problem solving as a team? What could you have done better?

*Teamwork connection: Being part of a team involves listening to others' ideas about how to solve a problem you are working through together.*



### **Keep Your Eye on the Ball** (needed: ping pong ball and soda bottle)

The objective of this activity is to hit a ping pong ball off the top of a soda bottle using your middle finger and thumb in a flicking motion, while walking by the ball at a fast pace. This may seem like a simple task, but it is not. Have participants keep trying, while focusing on the ping pong ball. After several tries they can usually get the ball knocked off the soda bottle. The real challenge is to make sure that every person in the group is successful at it at least once.

Discuss: What did you do to help others be successful? Why is this important when you're part of a team?

*Teamwork connection: Working within a team, each individual must focus on accomplishing their own goals, but they can also support others in accomplishing theirs.*

### **Pass the Ball Relay** (needed: 2 balls)

Split the group into two teams and have the opposing players sit in a line facing each other. Ask the first player in each team to extend his or her legs, keeping the ankles together. Place a ball on each pair of extended ankles. The balls must be transferred to the next person in the team, using legs only. If a ball is dropped, it must go back to the beginning again. The first team successful in getting the ball to the end and back again is the winner.

Discuss: Sometimes we win as a team; sometimes we lose. When have you felt successful even if you were part of a team and you lost?

*Teamwork connection: Sometimes when working with a team, we lose, but it can still feel successful if we all worked well together.*

### **"Roll" Playing** (needed: 1 basketball)

Have participants sit on the floor in a tight circle so that they are touching their neighbor on either side. Have them extend their feet into the center of the circle. Now place a basketball on the lap of one person in the circle. The participants' task is to move the ball as quickly as possible from lap to lap without using their hands. Overlapping is encouraged and may even be necessary! Once they have that down pat, add a couple of signals to the merry-go-round. For instance, when participants hear "woah, Nellie!" they need to send the ball in the opposite direction. There are a number of ways to spice up the game: One option is to add more signals (for example: stop, go, slow motion). Another option is to add more balls. About two minutes into the game we like to add a smaller ball (like a softball). Two minutes later, you might see what happens if you add a tennis ball to the circle. A golf ball or a ping pong ball can increase the fun geometrically. The players really have to synchronize with each other's rhythm as they keep the different sized balls moving around the circle as quickly as possible (and sometimes, different balls are going in different directions)!

Discuss: What did you find was the best strategy for cooperating with each other to move the ball around the circle?

*Teamwork connection: This is a great cooperation game. The group must determine how to solve the problem—it can only be done with cooperation.*

**Stairway of Words** (needed: paper and pencil per group of 2-3 people)

Divide the group into small teams of no more than two-three people. Give each group a letter of the alphabet, avoiding X and Z. The group must build a stairway using its letter. The harder the better—the more points the group receives. More points for creativity (see if you can have your staircase create a sentence or phrase or have some kind of theme tying the words together). Use Scrabble points if you wish. Example:

A  
An  
Ate  
Able  
Actor  
Abated  
Abandon

Discuss: What kind of skills did this challenge require of your team? What part of this challenge was each person in your group best at?

*Teamwork connection: All team challenges require different skills. One of the reasons we work in teams is so that we can utilize the unique skills of each person.*

**Volkswagen** (needed: masking tape)

A popular college activity in the 1960's and 1970's was to see how many people could fit into a Volkswagen Beetle and get the doors closed. Have an outline of the Beetle laid out on a floor using masking tape to create the shape. The challenge is to see how many people can get inside the tape without any body parts being outside the tape markings. Make certain the shape is small enough so that nobody can lie down inside the shape and be completely inside the car.

Discuss: How would you rate your problem solving as a team? What could you have done better?

*Teamwork connection: Being part of a team involves listening to others' ideas about how to solve a problem you are working through together.*

## **Team Building Challenges – PROBLEM SOLVING/DECISION MAKING**

**Blanket Turnover** (needed: blanket or tarp)

Lay out a blanket flat on the ground in front of your group. Have everyone step on the blanket with both feet. No hands, feet, etc., can touch the ground outside of the blanket at any time. They must flip over the blanket so that everyone is standing on the opposite side (the side that is now touching the ground).

Discuss: What decisions did your group make? Did everyone's ideas get heard?

*Problem-solving/Decision-making connection: Making sure everyone's ideas are heard is an important part of group decision-making.*

## The Great Escape

This exercise can bring about some lively conversation. It can be used as a tool in working toward conflict resolution, decision making, and creativity. The group is told they are trapped in a hut in the middle of a large forest, food is pretty much gone, and to stay in the forest would probably mean they would perish. To reach safety, the group will need to overcome the following obstacles:

- Break out of a thick walled hut.
- A twenty-foot high smooth barricade.
- Negotiate an intense barbed wire fence, part of which is electrified.
- Cross a treacherous murky river.
- Travel through an entangled deep tropical forest
- A malarial swamp.

The group must decide what three things would be useful to their escape. They will have nothing else at their disposal. The group cannot use things like helicopters, or magical devices like laser guns. Another alternative is to put a sack of unusual items together or simply cards of unusual items and have them use these as their options. The list may include things like: necktie, pie tin, sundial, one glove, computer disk, etc.

### **Group Jump Rope** (needed: long jump rope or small ropes tied together)

This activity requires group members to work together as a team to complete the task. You need an extra long jump rope or many smaller ropes tied together. Ask the group to set a group goal of how many jumps they think the group can do consecutively without anyone making a mistake. This can be a difficult activity. Four or five jumps are about the limit for most groups, but do not tell them that in advance. Choose two people to hold the rope while the rest of the group attempts to successfully jump rope all at the same time. Take turns with the people turning the rope so that everyone gets a chance to try both parts of the activity.

Discuss: Share with the group that four or five jumps are about the limit for most groups. Ask what they feel they did successfully.

*Problem-solving/Decision-making connection: Good problem-solving involves good planning.*

### **Guess the Length** (needed: string)

Beforehand, set up a length of string (300 feet recommended) around the room. Have it go every which way—under a table, over a chair, down the hallway, etc. The group must try to estimate the length of the string. Their only rule is that they can't move from their table. They'll have 2 minutes to plan, and then 5 minutes to carry out the task. There are many ways to do this—they can use their arm to pull up the string and measure; they may use objects such as a book to wrap the string around, etc. If you have more than one group, you can shorten the length of the string and the timing for each group so that their strings don't overlap and get tangled. 1 ½ feet of string per minute is a good guide.

Discuss: How did you communicate different ideas about how to measure? (e.g. everyone did their thing and combined it, one person dictated how it would work, a few ideas were tried...etc)

*Problem-solving/Decision-making connection: Making sure everyone's ideas are heard is an important part of group problem-solving.*

**Human Bridge** (needed: 2 chairs per group)

Set up two chairs about 15-20 feet apart. As a group, form a bridge from one chair to the other. The trick is that only a few different body parts can touch the ground. Collectively, the group can have five hands, four knees, three feet, two butts, and one back touching the ground. (Vary the number of body parts based on group age and size.) Be creative. There is not one solution to making the bridge.

Discuss: How did you communicate different ideas about how to make the bridge? (e.g. everyone did their thing and combined it, one person dictated how it would work, a few ideas were tried...etc)

*Problem-solving/Decision-making connection: Making sure everyone's ideas are heard is an important part of group decision-making.*

**Off Balance**

Ask participants to find a partner who was born in a different month than themselves. Have them stand facing each other, firmly grasping each other's hands or wrists, whichever feels more comfortable. This game is called OFF BALANCE and its object is for both participants to be off balance, yet totally supporting each other the whole time. Now have participants lean their weight backwards, so that if it weren't for their partners supporting them, they would fall over. Have participants be careful not to put too much strain on their partners and really try to work out an effective counterbalance between them. Have them move around together, exploring different levels, different points of balance for their bodies. Participants should use the support from their partners to explore things that they could not do by themselves. They might try leaning backwards balanced on one leg, pivoting around close to the ground, etc. Be sure they support each other.

Now ask participants to stand back to back, leaning into each other, so once again they are off balance and supporting each other's weight. They should move around and explore this new position with the same idea they had when they were holding hands. The participants should both continually be off balance, yet continually supporting each other.

Discuss: How is trust formed in a team? How does trust relate to resolving conflict?

*Problem-solving/Decision-making connection: Giving and taking is a basic component of conflict resolution.*

**Save the People!** (needed per group: rice, stick pretzels, orange, balloon, straw, jar)

This requires a bit of set-up ahead of time. Place a cup of rice on each table along with some stick pretzels or chopsticks, an orange, a balloon (deflated), and a straw. Make sure each team has the same exact supplies. At the opposite end of the room, there should be an empty jar or cup (nothing with too wide a mouth—that would be too easy). Tell participants that their team has been sent to save the population (their pile of rice) of Tragedy Island (their table) from utter destruction! They must transport as much of the population as they can to their jar, but they must not touch the rice at any time, only the supplies they've been given may touch the rice, and they must not remove their jar from where it is.

Discuss: What was your process for solving the problem (e.g., brainstorm ideas first, or jump right in)?

*Problem-solving/Decision-making connection: Sometimes the best ideas are the most simple, but it's always good to try different solutions!*

## Group Activities for Building Self Esteem

**Awards and Trophies** (needed: paper, markers. Optional: craft items to make trophies)

This is a great activity for a small team. Assign each member of the team another team member to make a trophy or certificate for. The award must represent something special or positive about the recipient. Have each team member present the award to the recipient, calling special attention to the positive qualities each brings to the team.

Discuss: How important is it to your self-esteem for others to say positive things about you? How do you feel when you compliment others? How do we express our feelings without talking about them?

*Self-esteem connection: Recognition is an important aspect of building each other's self-esteem.*

**The Candy Store Game** (needed: candy)

Using your favorite candy (M&Ms, Skittles, Jellybeans, etc.) ask participants to take the amount of candy they want, but they cannot eat the candy. For each piece of candy taken, the participant must state one positive fact about himself or herself. Others can chime in if they run out of ideas.

Discuss: Why is it important to see positive things in yourself?

*Self-esteem connection: It's important to be able to see in yourself qualities that you like, and it's nice to know that others have your back when you have trouble seeing them in yourself.*

### Human Machines

Divide members into equal teams. Each team must create a working machine or appliance that is recognizable by the other teams using only themselves. It must have moving parts and everyone must be involved with the machine. Parts of the machine should represent the strengths that members bring to the team.

Discuss; Have them demonstrate their machines and explain how the parts represent the strengths of the team members.

*Self-esteem connection: A good team knows the strengths that each person brings to the group.*

**License Plate Name Tags** (needed: cardstock/cardboard in shape of a license plate per person, markers)

Give each participant a license plate and markers. Have them design creative, personalized license plates for themselves. Use letters and numbers. Examples: SWEET16, NLUV, KLU LESS, IMGR8. Limit the time and number of digits that can be used.

Discuss: When participants are done, have them mingle and try to read other plates. Have them share the significance of what their plates say.

*Self-esteem connection: This activity is a simple way for people to share a bit about themselves in a non-threatening way and gain validation from each other.*

**New Newspaper/Front Page Special** (needed: old newspapers or magazines; glue; paper)

Give each participant some old newspapers or magazines. Have participants create a front page of a newspaper that is running a special feature on their lives. All aspects of their lives should be represented on the front page special. Have the group share their newspapers, and post them around the room.

Discuss: What did you learn about your peers that you didn't know?

*Self-esteem connection: A good self-disclosure activity that can also build self-esteem.*

*Compiled by Jessica Russo, Extension Educator, UMN Extension Center for Youth Development, 2022*