

## Energizers, Ice Breakers, and Team-Builders

It is essential before a group of young people is asked to create and enact a service-learning project that they be given the opportunity and time to build relationship with one another. One of the best tools to help facilitate this process is teambuilding games and activities. These types of shared experiences give students an opportunity to create a functional group dynamic, learn about each other, and break down walls or barriers to communication. These activities help them become comfortable with one another and build trust with one another, so that when the deeper work of brainstorming and discussion comes along in the service-learning process, the students will be able to more freely engage because of the teambuilding work that has already been done. Above all else, beginning a session with a group game sets the tone for being an inclusive, active community that gets things done!

### Team-builders

**Silent Name Game:** Ask all the youth to go around and say their names aloud. Then tell them that they are no longer allowed to talk. Ask them to line up in alphabetical order according to their first name. Starting at the front of the line, individuals say their name to determine if the order is correct.<sup>15</sup>

**Name Game Toss:** Person one says their name, then someone else's name and throws the ball to that person. That person now has to say person one's name, his or her name, and the name of someone else and throw the ball to them. That person says everyone's name that came before them, then his or her name, until everyone has gotten the ball. You have to throw it to someone who hasn't had the ball yet, so pay attention.

Every time someone messes up, go back to the beginning using the same order. After successfully completing the circle, have the group do the sequence backwards. You can also add additional balls and have a couple of sequences going at the same time.<sup>15</sup>

**Movement Name Game:** Ask each person to think of a movement for him or herself. Ask one youth to say his or her name and do the movement. The next person will do that person's movement and say their name and then do one him or herself. Keep going until everyone has had a turn.<sup>15</sup>

**Balloon Name Game:** Stand in a circle and toss a balloon in the air and call someone's name. That person must catch the balloon – or hit it up – before it touches the ground. That person calls out another person's name as soon as the balloon is back up in the air.<sup>15</sup>

**Commonalities:** Ask youth to get into pairs with someone they do not know very well. Ask them to make a list of things they have in common (eg., neighborhood, personality trait, experience, ability). After a few minutes, go around the room, and ask them to share with the group their most surprising commonality.<sup>15</sup>

**Big Wind Blows:** Begin by making a circle of chairs. There should be one less chair than the total number of people playing. One person starts by standing in the middle of the circle and saying something about themselves, ending with "Who else?" Example: "I love chocolate, who else loves chocolate?" All the group members who love chocolate must get up and switch places without selecting the chairs directly on either side of them. The person who is left without a chair goes to the center of the circle and picks the next statement. This game can be either light-hearted or serious, depending on the content and the group.<sup>15</sup>

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**You Wouldn't Know by Looking At Me:** Give each participant a 3x5 index card and ask them to write a little-known fact about him or herself on the card, something he or she wouldn't mind the group knowing. State that they are not to write their name on the card. Collect all the cards, shuffle, and redistribute to the group. If someone gets his or her own card back, exchange it for another. Once they all have an unfamiliar card, ask them to circulate, asking one another yes or no questions about the information on the card. For example, if the card says "I have a pet iguana," they could ask "Do you have a pet? Is it an iguana?" When the person answering the description is found, he or she signs the card and tapes it on a designated wall space. Once all cards are up read them aloud.<sup>15</sup>

**Candy Game:** Pass around a bowl of small multi-colored candies, and instruct each person to take two to five (they choose the number). Once everyone has picked their candy, youth must tell one unique fact about themselves for each candy in their hands – they can't eat them to reduce facts needed! Variation: each color has a different question or statement that the person needs to respond to. For example:

- Red: Something you don't like or try to avoid.
- Orange: Name something that motivates you.
- Yellow: If you were ruler of the universe for a day, what is the first thing you would do?
- Green: If you could have any job, what would it be?
- Blue: What is a dream you have about your future?
- Pink: Something daring that you have done.<sup>15</sup>

**Cluster Game:** The goal of this activity is to form groups quickly based on similarities. Direct youth members to form smaller groups based on criteria you give them. Speed is not essential, but the activity should proceed at a fairly rapid pace, while still allowing individuals to create groups and introduce themselves each time.

Sample Criteria:

- People who have the same:
  - Eye color
  - Shirt color
  - Extra-curricular activities
  - Birthdays in the same season (within season group, arrange by birth date)
  - Favorite sport or movie
  - Last digit of your telephone number
  - State where they were born
  - Neighborhood where they live
  - Has had the same breakfast as you
  - Has the same shoe size
  - Has a different religious belief
  - You haven't met yet
  - Has the same favorite season
  - Has been to a place you would like to visit
  - Number of siblings
  - Introversion/extraversion
  - How tired/alert you feel.

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Variation: **Role Call:** Divide the group into two teams. Ask the teams to line up according to various criteria (birthday, name, hair length, amount of time living in the community, number of siblings, number of cousins, etc). The team that lines up in the correct order the fastest wins that round. Go through the order to make sure they are correct. If one team is winning more frequently than the other, mix up the teams. After you have completed a few rounds of the activity, discuss what strategies helped and hindered their organization process. You can also do this as a full group and time them to see how fast they can complete the tasks.<sup>15</sup>

**Human Scavenger Hunt:** Divide the group in half and send each half to a different side of the room. The facilitator stands in the center and calls out the categories listed below (or others). Each group has to figure out which combination of people in their group fits the category, and then send those people to the center of the room. The group who gets their representatives to the center first wins a point.

Sample Categories:

- Two people who have the same first and last initial.
- The person who was born the farthest away from here and the person born closest
- Two people with the same middle name
- A group whose ages add up to 50
- A group whose shoe sizes add up to 30
- A group who have attended school for a total of 38 years
- Two people with the same birthday (or birth month)
- A group of people who can spell a word by putting together the first letters of their first names
- A group of at least three people who all have different colored eyes.

Debrief: Did anything surprise you? What was the most difficult category for your group? Did someone in your group take the lead? How did you figure out each answer?<sup>15</sup>

**Listen and Respond:** The purpose of this exercise is for youth to practice, as a group, the skill of listening and responding to questions. Pick a volunteer to be 'interviewed' by the group, and pick another volunteer to ask an initial question (eg., 'what do you think of your city?' or 'what are your hobbies?'). After the first question has been asked and answered, have other youth go around in a circle asking follow-up questions based on the responses of the person being interviewed. Because they don't have a script, this exercise requires participants to listen and respond to what was said. Remind youth to keep questions respectful.<sup>15</sup>

**Taking a Stand:** Place signs saying Strongly Agree and Strongly Disagree on opposite walls. Emphasize that there is no right or wrong answer. Have students stand in the center of the room. Read a list of statements and tell the students to line up against the sign that they most agree with; they can also remain in the middle. Begin with simple questions, such as, "Pizza is my favorite food" or "I think grades are important for my future." Gradually move to deeper topics by using questions like, "I feel safe walking home after dark" or "There's a problem with gangs in our community." Debrief: Talk about different perspectives on the issues. Discuss how this learning experience could be helpful in working together as a team.<sup>15</sup>

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**Pick your Number:** Along the wall or on the floor, place the numbers 1 to 10 with enough room for several people to stand at each number. Tell participants that after each statement they should stand next to the number that represents where they think the statement falls on the continuum of youth inclusion: 1 represents youth being completely excluded and 10 represents youth being fully encouraged and welcomed.

Ask the participants the following questions: To what extent are young people involved in the planning, operations, and evaluation of programs and organizations that exist to promote their well being (in other words how much influence do youth have) at the:

- National level?
- State level?
- Community level?
- School level?
- In this program/group?

After each statement has been made and everyone is standing at one of the numbers, ask a few participants what made them choose that number and why. Make sure that participants understand that there is no right or wrong answer, it is their opinion of what truly exists. Ask participants how they would like it to be ideally.<sup>15</sup>

**Scribble Drawing:** Give participants a piece of paper and marker and tell them to scribble until you say to stop (about 5-10 seconds). Next, have them trade papers and try to create a picture out of someone else's scribble. Debrief by discussing how each one of them used their own perspectives and creativity to create a positive change. Stress the need for creative thinking and how something that is initially nothing special (or a problem) can be transformed into something interesting, useful or even beautiful.<sup>15</sup>

**Questions:** Go around the circle and have everyone pick a question from a hat or box. Sample Questions:

- Who is the most relevant person of our time? Why?
- What is the title of the best book you have ever read? Why?
- What is the name of the best movie you have ever seen? Why?
- What comes to mind when you hear the word 'reality'? Why?
- What is the most beautiful thing about people? Why?
- What is the most honest thing you have done?
- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would you change? Why?
- What do you like to do most with a free hour? Why?
- What is the most significant event of the last three months? Why?
- On what basis do you select friends? Why?
- What is the most overwhelming thing you know? Why?
- What is the greatest problem in the United States? Why?
- What thing makes you the most humble? Why?
- What is the greatest value that guides your life? Why?
- If you could choose to be an animal, what animal would you choose? Why?

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- If you could smash one thing and one thing only, what would you smash? Why?
- What is the greatest crime one person can commit against another? Why?
- For what do you think you would be willing to lay down your life? Why?
- If you were tape recording the sound of violence, what would you hear? Why?
- What sound would you use for beauty? Why?
- If an atomic bomb were to explode in 10 minutes, what would you do? Why?
- What one word would you put on your gravestone? Why?
- How many children do you want? Why?
- Choose a word that best describes your life up to this moment. Explain.
- What is your biggest worry? Why?
- What was the best gift you have ever received? Why?
- What do you people like best about you? Why?
- What is the best gift you have ever given to somebody? Why?
- What do you think of when you think of tragedy? Why?
- What person has influenced your life the most? Why?
- What skill do you need in order to succeed? Why?
- What talent would you like to develop? Why?
- What makes you most secure? Why?
- What institution is in need of change the most? Why?
- If you could eat dinner with any three people from history, who would you pick? Why?
- When do you feel most lonely? Why?
- When do you sense being most alive? Why?
- What TV advertisement bothers you the most? Why?
- What will you be doing 10 years from now? Why?
- What future discovery do you anticipate most? Why?
- What do you love most? Why?
- What superpower would you want, if you could have any? Why?
- What is your favorite meal? Why?
- What kind of adventure would you want to go on? why?
- Where do you want to visit most in the world? Why?
- When was the last time you felt content? Why?<sup>15</sup>

# Energizers, Ice Breakers, and Team-Builders

## Energizers

When students are losing focus as a group, sometimes all they need is five minutes of fun to get them back on track. It's important to remember their needs and abilities based on their stage in development. Integrating energizers into your daily schedule helps keep energy high by allowing for breaks in concentration, and making space for the intentional integration of fun.

**Popcorn:** Stop what you are doing and have everyone move to a new seat (not directly next to where they are currently sitting). Let participants know that "popcorn" may be called at any time by the facilitator or by a designated participant.<sup>15</sup>

**Snowball:** Stop what you are doing and have each youth write down the answer to a silly question, or an idea for how to make the session better. Instruct the students to then crumple up the piece of paper. Give them 30 seconds to throw the crumpled papers around the room as a 'snowball fight' (you may want to make the rule that they can't throw the snowballs AT each other). After the time is up, have each student find a 'snowball,' open it up, and read what is written to the group.<sup>15</sup>

**Affirmations – "Shout Outs" and "Props:"** Stop what you are doing and ask each youth to say something positive – or give a shout out or prop to a person standing next to them.<sup>15</sup>

**Have You Ever:** Instruct the group to get into a circle. Place yourself in the middle of the circle to start.

The person in the middle of the circle needs to ask a question that starts with "have you ever...?" (i.e. gone sky diving, owned a dog) Any person who can answer yes to the question moves to a new spot around the circle along with the person in the middle. The person left without a spot must stay in the middle and ask a new question. **Adaptation:** Stay in the circle formation, but instead of putting down spot markers, ask each person in the circle to hold up five or ten fingers (depending on how long you have to play the game. The more fingers, the longer the game will last) and begin with one person in the circle asking the question "have you ever...?" If anyone in the circle answers yes to the question, they must put one finger down. Everyone around the circle then has an opportunity to ask a question. The object of the game is to be the last remaining with fingers still up.

**Two Truths and a Lie:** Tell the group you want each of them to come up with two things that are true about themselves and one thing that is a lie. When someone is ready they present their three statements to the group and the group tries to guess which of the three statements is the lie. The individual who guesses correctly is then the next one to share his or her three statements.

**Jedi Numbers:** Everyone stands in a circle, and everyone puts their heads down. The group then needs to count up to a certain number (usually just the number of people there are in the group, so that everyone gets a number) one at a time without two people talking at once. If two people talk at once, the group starts over at one.

**Going on a Picnic:** You have to guess what to bring to this party! This is a guessing game where players try to guess the Leader's rule! One person is the Leader and thinks of a rule for what can be brought on the picnic. For instance, maybe the rule is that people can only bring items beginning with the letter 's' like salad, or salami. Players take turns suggesting items to bring to the picnic. If the suggestion follows the Leader's rule, he or she tells the player that they can come on the picnic. If the suggestion doesn't follow the rule, the Leader tells the

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player they can't come on the picnic. If the players think they've figured out the rule, they can guess it on their turn. The player who guesses correctly becomes the new Leader.

**Doodles:** Each player needs a sheet of drawing paper taped to his or her back and a marker (except for player 1, they just need a marker). This game is like the game telephone, but instead of passing words down a line, players pass a drawing. Players get in a line, with each player facing the back of the person in front of them. The person at the back of the line (player 1) draws an object on the paper of the person in front of him or her (player 2). Player 2 can't see the drawing, but can feel it! Player 2 then tries to draw the same thing on the paper of the person in front of them (player 3). Players keep going down the line until it reaches the last player. The last player in the line then tries to draw the object on a separate sheet of paper. Compare the drawings on everyone's back and on the last sheet of paper. How'd you do?

**Back Words:** Divide the group into teams of 5 people each with a pencil and paper. Call out a word which has four or more letters. Each team write the word vertically down the left side of the paper, and on the right side writes the word vertically backwards. Then they have to fill in between the letters to form new words. The first team to fill in the words successfully wins!