

Working With Campers

Now that you and your co-counselors are ready to begin a summer session with your first group of campers, it is equally important that you spend time helping them work through the challenges of being part of a group. The following activities have been carefully chosen to get you started with this process . . . beginning the very first day the campers arrive! Most of these activities are designed for pairs or trios; it is best to assign partners or small groups who do not know each other well yet. The selected exercises begin with icebreakers that will promote campers getting to know one another and then progress to those involving communication, problem solving, and trust. (Author's note: Camp directors and leadership staff may choose to do these same activities with camp staff during orientation training to facilitate the building of unified staff teams in living and program areas as a precursor to the "Big Deal or No Big Deal" questionnaire.)

Ice Breakers

- "Twin/Triplet" Costume Contest
Have camper pairs or groups of three dress as much alike as possible (this can be as simple as rolling up the same pant leg and wearing a hat backwards) and then create a secret handshake to share with the group.
- Hog Call
Campers are given words that go together in "2s" or "3s" and are to find each other by saying their part of the phrase out loud after the entire group is mixed up; eyes are closed (or use blindfolds) and "bumpers up" for safety. Examples: peanut butter and jelly, salt and pepper, planes-trains-automobiles, red-white-blue, and so on (Rohnke, 1984). *Variation: Use animal sounds (laminated hog call cards can be ordered from www.training-wheels.com).
- Songs by Syllables
Pick a song everyone in the group knows (Row, Row, Row Your Boat) and alternate back and forth singing one syllable (or word) at a time so that it sounds like one voice singing.

Have small groups sing through a couple of times and then organize a "concert" for the larger group (Weinstein & Goodman, 1980).

- Pairs Tag
One person is "it"; try to "tag" partner by staying in a contained area and moving at a fast walk. Switch roles if tagged by partner; play for 1–2 minutes (Rohnke & Butler, 1995; Cummings, 2007).
- ### Communication
- Interviews
Each camper gets a minute to tell his/her life story to a partner. Afterward, partners take turns introducing each other to the group and telling as much as they can remember about the partner's "autobiography" (Frank, 2001).
 - Story of Your Name
Give campers a piece of string (approximately 3 ft. in length) and have them take turns telling the story of their name as they wrap the string around one finger. They might share the origin of their name, other people having their same name, nicknames, etc. A good way to end when they run out of string is, "Please call me . . ." (Cain, Hannon, & Knobbe, 2009). A nice follow-up to this activity is to have each camper create an outline on the floor using their string to tell something about where they are from.
 - Four of a Kind
This is an exercise to discover as many similarities (excluding physical traits or stating the obvious) in camper pairs as possible. Examples: both campers have two sisters, a cat for a pet, and like to read Harry Potter books. It is also fun to combine two groups of two into groups of four to see if the new group can find commonalities (Cummings, 2007). Why not go for a group of eight?!

Problem Solving:

- Don't Spill the Beans
Camper pairs carry an object

through a ready-made obstacle course (around a chair, over a log, etc.) — use a taut bandana or piece of paper and cup of water or dry beans balanced on top (Cavert & Frank, 1999).

- Shoelace Tie
Try to tie the shoelace of one person's shoe using only the right hand of each camper pair. Repeat using only the left hand of each camper. Try tying the shoelace blindfolded for the third attempt (Frank, 2001)!
- Step Through the Hole
Have campers try to make a hole in an index card using a pair of scissors so that it forms an opening they can put their entire body through without tearing the card (Bowman, 2003). Check out <http://pbskids.org/zoom/activities/games/stepthroughhole.html> as well.

Trust:

- Blind Trust Drive
Partner who is "driving" has control of speed, but eyes are closed (and "bumpers up"); partner who is in the "backseat" (hands on shoulders of driver) has GPS navigational capabilities and can see to guide driver through "traffic." Switch positions at some point to give each partner a chance to drive. Goal is to get to "destination" safely (without having an accident) (Cain, Hannon, & Knobbe, 2009).
- Come To Me
Partners stand about 10–15 feet apart (one has eyes closed) and the sighted person moves towards partner until told to stop. How close can moving partner get (Rohnke & Butler, 1995)?
- Mousetrap Sequence (recommended for older campers)
Campers practice setting and unsetting a mousetrap with a partner (eyes open first, then try eyes closed). Work up to having one person verbally guide hand of blindfolded partner to hover just above loaded mousetrap (Cummings, 2005).