

TEAMBUILDING GAMES & ACTIVITIES

Teambuilding activities are loads of fun, but they can also be tools for strengthening your group. They can be good icebreakers for the beginning of a meeting or a way to build stronger ties with members you already know. Some involve a lot of teamwork and can result in tighter friendships among the people with whom you work.

There are many gradations of teambuilding activities. We've broken them down into three rough categories. Many were hard to choose a specific category for, so use your own judgment and understanding of your group when you do these activities.

- **Beginning** – focus on remembering names and getting acquainted
- **Middle** – focus on having fun and getting along
- **End** – focus on strengthening the team, understanding others strengths and weaknesses
- **Cheers** – use for stretching, to keep the group upbeat, and to have fun

Beginning

These games and activities would regularly be used at a first meeting, at the beginning of a gathering, or at the start of a student conference or workshop. With little physical contact, these games help loosen people up, remember names, and get more comfortable with people they've just met.

Pass the Clap

Focus: Having fun, Visual communication

Stand in a circle. One person has the “clap” in their hands and turns to face a person next to them. About when they make eye contact or just when they are facing each other, they clap simultaneously. Then, that next person has the clap and turns to pass it on. After it has been passed around once and everyone has the hang of it, begin to time him or her. Encourage people to move around, jump into a different part of the circle, and reverse it.

Whose Shoes?

Focus: Introductions

Have everyone sit or stand in a circle. Ask them to take their shoes off and *immediately* toss them into the middle of the circle. Begin by having one volunteer pick a pair of

shoes; describe the owner (without knowing who it is). Ask for things such as age, hobbies, or attitude. When he is done describing the owner, he must guess whom the shoes belong to. Then, the real owner comes forward and continues the activity.

Blindfolded Animals

Focus: Separating into groups

This activity can be used to separate people into pairs or a large number of students into different groups. With a small group, write the name of however many animals on two different pieces of paper and have the participants draw one out. With a large group, have students count off to a certain number and assign a certain animal for each number. When you say “go”, participants will close their eyes and are only allowed to make the noise of their animal in order to find their other group members. Animals such as cows, pigs, dogs, chickens, elephants, cats, and horses all make for a fun, and noisy, activity.

Action Intros

Focus: Learning Names

Make a standing circle. Have one person start by saying an action and their name. The action should start with the same letter as their name, like energetic Eric or jumping Jill. When they say their action and name, they can also act out their action. So, jumping Jill would jump up and down. Have the entire group go around and repeat everyone’s actions and names each time a new person introduces him or herself.

TAG!

Focus: Get Moving

Here are two variations of tag that will keep participants upbeat and interested.

Hospital Tag Every participant is “it” and also has three lives. When a player is tagged once, he must put this hand on the part of his body where he was tagged. The second time, he puts his other hand on that spot. The third time he is tagged, he is out.

Participants will get a kick out of watching people run around with their hands on ankles or backs while trying to tag others.

Clothes Pin Tag Bring enough clothespins for every player to have at least three.

Again, everyone is it. Give them a certain amount of time to tag as many people with clothespins as they can. When time is called, players with one or no clothespins on them are still in the game and can again play for one more round. There are many ways to mix this game up, but remind players that they’re not allowed to take the clothespins off once they have been tagged.

Concentric Circles

Focus: Get to Know One Another

Divide everyone into two groups. Have one group make a circle facing outward. The second group then makes a circle around the first group and faces inward. Everyone should be facing someone from the other circle. Each person can talk to the person across from them for a minute or two before you yell, "SWITCH", and have one circle move to the left or right a few steps. If participants seem shy, give them a topic to talk about each rotation, such as movies, DECA, college, food, etc.

Move It Buddy

Focus: Memorizing Names

Stand in a circle, with one person in the middle. When the person in the middle says so, participants will be given 30 seconds to one minute to memorize the first, middle, and last name of the person to their left and right. After the minute is over, the person in the middle will point to somebody and say "left" or "right". If he or she pauses or stumbles saying the full name, he or she is then in the middle. If everyone seems to know each others names right away, the person in the middle can call out, "Move It Buddy!" and everyone must rush to a new space and begin memorizing names again.

Middle

These activities and games are for people that have become more comfortable with each other. People aren't as concerned about looking silly as long as other people are doing it too. More contact-oriented games are sometimes okay, but this must be gauged by watching the participants and their reactions. Sometimes these activities are good for the end of a shorter meeting. Keep in mind there is a substantial difference between a meeting early in the year and a meeting in the middle or towards the end of the year.

Blindfold Birthdays

Focus: Verbal Communication

There are many variations of this game. Begin by asking everyone to blindfold themselves (or close their eyes, but it's oh-so-tempting to peek!). Then give them the task of lining themselves up in order of their birthdays. Variations include lining them up by height or weight or by allowing them to see, but not talk.

Two Truths and a Lie

Focus: Getting to Know One Another

Go around the group and have everyone say two true statements about themselves and one false. The rest of the group has to guess which one is false. If participants find it hard to think on the spot, give them index cards and let them write it down. Then, toss the cards into the middle of the circle so you have to guess who the person is *and* what is false. You may be surprised. You can learn some crazy things about each other!

Count Off

Focus: Non Verbal Communication

Begin by having the group stand in a bunch or sit on the ground in no order. The goal of this activity is to count to a number twice the number of people in your group. Participants can only say two numbers during the entire game. Also, only one person can say a number at a time. If two people say the same number, the group must begin counting again. Begin by giving them no prep time, but allow the group a minute to plan if they are having trouble.

I'm Making a Triangle

Focus: Brainteaser

This game may confuse and frustrate those who don't understand at first. Choose three people in the group by saying, "Amanda, Collin, and Karie". Then ask the question, "Whose triangle is it?" Participants will spend lots of energy and time trying to find a specific pattern, but there's an easy solution. The first person to speak after you ask the question is who the triangle belongs to. It may take the group a long time to understand, so if needed, be very, very obvious. No matter how obvious you are, there will still be people who won't get the pattern!

Floor Designs

Focus: Having Fun, Communication

This activity requires one package of computer or copier paper and a large, open floor space. Have one participant in the group draw a picture on a piece of paper of anything they'd like. Then, give the group the stack of paper and tell them to mimic the drawing on the floor. To make it more interesting, silence certain people in the group. For instance, only allow one person to do the talking and instructing or, perhaps, only the guys. If there is a large number of participants, divide the group in half and have the groups compete to see who can lay out a more accurate picture. This activity is especially fun if timed and allows for a fun photo opportunity at the end.

60 Second Speeches

Focus: Getting to Know One Another, Speaking Skills

Have different topics pre-written on pieces of paper about all sorts of different things (candy, state advisors, television, summer, DECA blazers, parents). One by one, participants will pick a topic from you and must give a 60 second speech however they would like. The only rule is that they must not stop talking or hesitate for the entire minute. You'll be amazed at what some people end up talking about in just one minute!

End

Near the end (or sometimes middle) of the outing, conference, meeting, or among people that have spent a lot of time together, these activities are a great wrap up. Some are very physical and require lots of trust among the group. Make sure all participants are responsive to the activity before proceeding.

Human Knot

Focus: Teamwork

Everyone stands in a circle and puts their right hand into the middle. They clasp hands with someone across the circle. Then, everyone puts their left hand into the middle of the circle and clasps the hand of a *different* person. The group is now in a "knot". The object is for the group to untangle itself without releasing anyone's hand.

Have You Ever

Focus: Get Moving, Get To Know One Another

This is not a game for the first night! In two facing lines, tape small pieces of paper to mark spots for people to stand on. If you have 20 people, make 19 spots. Leave enough room between the lines for plenty of movement. The person without a spot stands in the middle and asks a question. "Have you ever eaten a kiwi?" Anyone who can say, "Yes", must then leave their space and find a new one. They can't stay in the same spot or move to a spot immediately to their left or right. Whoever is left without a spot now asks the next question. As a moderator of the game, don't be afraid to "accidentally" not find a spot and be in the middle. In doing so, you can change the tone of the game to more serious questions or more humorous questions, depending on the group dynamic.

Highs and Lows

Focus: Getting Personal

An activity like this is good for a small group or a group that is coming to the close of a year. Hand out pipe cleaners to each participant and begin by doing the activity yourself. Start by tying a knot on one end and saying where you born, when, and to whom. Then, go through your past and identify the highs and lows you've experienced, while moving

the pipe cleaner to display the ups and downs. Other variations that can make people more comfortable with the activity include describing only high school or this past year.

Replication

Focus: Working Together

This game usually takes about half an hour. The organizers of the game begin by finding multiples of objects. If you plan to have 3 groups, then find 4 objects (i.e. 4 binders, 4 pens, 4 pinecones, etc.). Then, where none of the participants can see, arrange one set of the objects. Maybe place the pen horizontally in the middle of the binder open to page 4 and put the pinecone centered above the binder. Then gather the participants, split them up into three groups, and explain the game. Each group has 2 builders, 1 or 2 runners, and 1 looker. The looker of each group gets to see the original model. Each group's builders get a pile of the objects in a space away from the other teams' builders. The interaction works like this: The lookers look at the original display and go halfway to the builders' location, where the runner will be positioned. The looker tells the runner all of the details he can remember about the model. Then, the runner goes to builders. When the runner(s) get(s) to the builders, the builders can only ask the runner yes or no questions. "Does the pen go here? Is the binder open? Is it open to this page?" When the runner can't remember anymore details or wants to confirm a detail, he goes back to the point where he can meet the looker. He can converse freely about the details. This goes on until all of the groups feel they are done or are pretty much done. Then, everyone gets together and looks at each groups finished model. Replication builds communication skills and is a good teambuilding effort. It's fun, too, to look at the different results.

Essence Circle

Focus: Wrapping Up

This is great in the dark under a sky full of stars or at the end of a hard year of organizing. Everyone sits in a circle and puts their name into the middle (a hat or box). The person that begins chooses a name to describe but does not say the name. He doesn't describe the person's appearance or clothes; he describes the person's essence. He talks about how this person (trying not to reveal gender) always helps make everyone feel better, is always willing to take the time to listen, etc. After a good description, people can say who they think it is. (Try to describe in enough detail that it really singles them out, or at least narrows it down to a few people.) Then the person they were describing describes the essence of another and so on until everyone has been described. It's basically half an hour of compliments and can feel very motivating.

Cheers & Stretches

If you are in a long meeting, you can use these to get people's blood flowing and spirits up.

- **Trees Up Here Good** – Group repeats the words and motions of the leader
Leader: “Trees up here good!” Jumps up and puts hands high above head.
Others: Repeat
Leader: “Trees down here bad.” Squats down and puts hands on ground.
Others: Repeat
Repeat this whole cycle 3 or 4 more times, then end on “Trees up here good!”
- **Ozone Up Here Good** – Done the same way as “Trees Up Here Good”, but with the words, “Ozone up here good. Ozone down here bad.”
- **Banana Cheer** – Everyone get into a circle. One person volunteers to lead the cheer. This is a lead/follow cheer. The leader should speak loudly and military-style.
Leader: “Bananas, atten-shun!”
Others: “Bananas, atten-shun!”
Leader: “Bananas of the world unite!” Leader raises arms high above head and touches the palms of hands together. Leader leans over to the right.
Others: “Bananas of the world unite!” Mimic actions of leader.
Leader: “Bananas stand up straight!” Stands up straight.
Others: Repeat.
Leader: “Bananas have no thumbs!” Hides thumbs in space between palms.
Others: Repeat.
Leader: “Bananas do not smile!” Puts a “serious” look on face. No smile. Frown is good.
Others: Repeat.
Leaders: “Bananas – Are you ready!?”
Others: “Ready!”
Leader: (Quietly) “Peel bananas, peel peel bananas” Slowly pulls apart hands and makes motions with arms as if peeling off a big banana suit.
Everyone (including Leader): Repeat.
Everyone: Repeat.
Everyone: Repeat.
Everyone: “Go bananas!! Go Go Bananas!!” Jump around and act crazy.
Everyone: Repeat.
Everyone: Repeat.

These are only a handful of ideas that can work in a teambuilding situation. Remember: every team is different! If one activity does not go as planned, this is not in any way a signal that the team won't work out. Communication, instructions, and energy are three very important factors that will affect any icebreaker or activity. As facilitator, it is your job to make sure the lines of communication are being open and everyone is participating. You should also clearly define how the game is played so there will be no

confusion. Finally, do what you can to keep people upbeat. In meetings and at the end of long days, the group may not be as energetic as you would like.

Whether you use these activities in DECA, school, or any group atmosphere, we hope that they can serve you well and bring your *group* one step closer to becoming a TEAM!

*By Joe Wittneben, Courtesy of: SSC Teambuilding Games and Activities
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