

Building Strong Relationships

As our society becomes more and more dependent on technology, many experts believe we must make a special effort to emphasize the importance of face-to-face human interaction. Children and youth especially need opportunities to explore what's involved in creating and nurturing relationships that are based on mutual respect and consideration. The activities and handouts in this section focus on friendship, cooperation and concern for the needs and rights of others.

Hint

Be aware that some of these activities are especially appropriate for older (high school aged) youth

Brown Bags

Age

Any age

Teaching context

The activity works well as an ice-breaker at the beginning of retreats or weekend programs where it is important for youth to be positive and affirming throughout the remainder of the program.

Time needed

The activity takes from 15–20 minutes initially. Youth are then encouraged to continue adding notes to the bags throughout the remainder of their time together.

*Dear Morgan,
It took real courage
to do what you did
today and I admire
you for it.
—Janie*

Description

This activity helps to create a supportive and affirming climate for youth in order to help them trust and “bond” with one another in group settings.

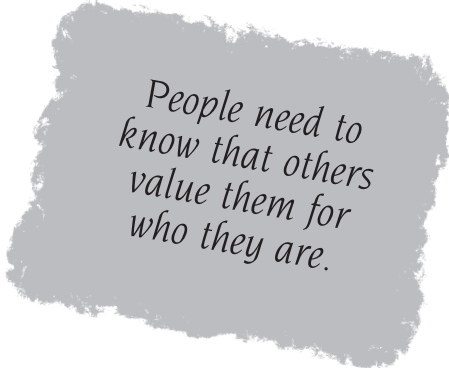
Advance preparation

1. Make sure the following materials will be available:
 - Small brown paper lunch bags
 - Masking tape
 - Colored marking pens
 - An ample supply of note paper
 - Stickers (optional)
 - Copies of the personal profile sheet (attached)

Directions

1. Distribute a copy of the attached profile sheet to each participant. Allow 10 minutes for youth to answer the questions. When they’ve finished, tell them to put the page away somewhere because they won’t need it again until it’s time to go home.
2. Distribute brown bags and markers. Tell youth to print their names vertically down the outside of the bag. Each letter can then be used to spell out something unique or descriptive about who they are. Allow five to 10 minutes (depending on group needs) to complete this part of the activity.
3. Point out that while many people don’t know each other very well right now, during the time they’re together they’ll be getting much better acquainted. The things we say and do reveal things about the kind of people we are. For example:
 - At first, most of us reveal things we’d like others to know about us. These things usually have to do with our “outer” selves and are similar to the kinds of things we’ve written on the outside of the brown bags. Usually they have to do with the way we look and act, our special talents and abilities, the kinds of things we enjoy doing, etc.
 - As we begin to trust others, we start feeling more comfortable revealing other things about us. These things are more like the things on the personal profile sheet—our attitudes, beliefs, fears, hopes, feelings and secret concerns. Sometimes we deliberately hold back this information because we’re afraid of what others may think of us. It can be scary to share these kinds of things unless we feel we’ll be accepted.
4. From now on it will be up to this group to create a trusting and supportive environment so people can get to know one another from both the inside as well as the outside.
5. Explain how important it is to let others know we appreciate and value them. Unfortunately, in our culture it’s more common to dwell on things we don’t like about people instead of focusing on positive traits and characteristics.

6. Since we all need to feel valued and accepted, the purpose of this activity is to make sure that happens. Explain the following procedure for using the brown bags:
 - Everyone will take a turn to introduce themselves by explaining what they've put on the outside of the bag. Afterwards all the bags will be taped to a wall.
 - The bags will stay taped to the wall so that people can use them to leave personal notes for one another in order to comment on positive traits, behaviors and characteristics. Encourage youth to write at least one note for each participant. When it's time to leave, everyone can take down their bag and read the messages when they get home.
7. At the conclusion of the event, before youth depart for home, allow some time for them to finish any notes they had intended to write.
8. Before taking down the bags, remind youth of the personal profile sheets they filled out when they arrived. Ask youth to think about whether or not they were able to share this part of themselves with any of their new friends.



People need to know that others value them for who they are.

Sum it up.

End by thanking everyone for helping to create the kind of place where everyone could feel comfortable being themselves and getting to know new friends. Point out that friendships built on mutual trust and respect allow people to share who they are on the inside as well as the outside.

Personal Profile

1. Something I like about myself:
2. Something I would like to change about myself:
3. Something I'm proud of having done or accomplished recently:
4. Something I would like to do over:
5. Something I am hoping for:
6. Something I am dreading:
7. Something that made me very happy:
8. Something that happened once that made me very sad:
9. A private goal I've set for myself:
10. Someone who means a lot to me and one thing I love about him or her:

Classified Ads

Age

10 and older

Teaching context

It can be an effective way to supplement other activities that focus on peer support or cross-age mentoring, including camp counselor training and youth leadership development programs. The attached worksheet could be part of the application process for counselor positions, trips, awards, etc.

Time needed

15–20 minutes

Description

Intended to encourage discussion about what it takes to be a good friend, this activity takes a slightly different approach to the topic.

Advance preparation

1. Duplicate the attached Classified Ad Worksheet.
2. If desired, locate a few appropriate “personal” newspaper ads placed by individuals seeking companions and friendship.

Directions

1. Introduce the activity with a reference to the personal ads that some people place in newspapers in order to meet other people. (Consider reading a few examples that you’ve found previously.)
2. Be sure youth understand the following:
 - The purpose of this activity isn’t to place a real classified ad.
 - The best way to find new friends is to meet people and get acquainted with them face to face.
 - Classified ads illustrate what people think is important about friendship and relationships.
 - Writing your own imaginary classified ad will give you a chance to take a closer look at what it means to be a friend.
3. Ask for a few examples of what it takes to be a good friend (kindness, trust, etc.). Then get a couple of other examples of things good friends do not do to one another (lie, talk behind their backs, etc.).
4. Distribute the worksheets and allow five to 10 minutes for youth to make up their own ads.
5. Collect all the ads and select a few to read to the entire group. (Be sure not to reveal the identities of those whose ads you read.)

Follow-up Discussion

Ask youth for examples of how to meet people and form friendships instead of placing ads in newspapers.

Sum it up.

Point out that no matter who we are, we all need friends to share the happy and the sad times in our lives. Remind youth that friendship is a two-way street. The things we need from others are the same qualities they need from us. Each of us has the ability to be the kind of friend someone else needs us to be.

Classified Ad Worksheet

Wanted:

1. Describe the kind of person you would like your friend to be:

Someone who is _____, _____, and _____
to be my friend.

2. List other qualities that describe the kind of friend you want and describe the way you would like to be treated by your friend:

Must have _____ and be the kind of person who will _____

3. List hobbies, 4-H projects and other interests you would like in a friend:

Prefer someone who is interested in _____

4. Describe the kinds of behaviors and actions you don't want in a friend:

Persons who _____
need not apply.

5. Describe something important about yourself:

If you're someone who's looking for a _____
person to be friends with, I'm that person!

Examples:

Wanted: Someone who is happy, cheerful and good natured to be my friend. Must have a kind heart and be the kind of person who will be nice to me, talk to me, keep secrets and listen when I have something to say. Prefer someone who is interested in dogs, collecting stickers, and playing soccer. Persons who are mean, tell lies, and act stuck up need not apply. If you're someone who's looking for a fun-loving and honest person to be friends with, I'm that person!

Wanted: Someone who is carefree, energetic and full of fun to be my friend. Must have a great sense of humor and be the kind of person who will never let me down. Prefer someone who is interested in roller blading, eating pizza, and going to the mall. Persons who smoke, whine a lot, and make fun of other people need not apply. If you're someone who's looking for a totally awesome person to be friends with, I'm that person!

Thinking about Friendship

Age

Middle school and older

Teaching context

These discussions can be included in a variety of programs and training sessions that focus on relationships, teamwork and peer support. They would work especially well with leadership training and camp counselor training sessions.

Time needed

Varies because the activities can be worked into a variety of teaching formats.

Description

These are some suggestions for using the attached handouts and materials to help youth explore what friendship means to them.

Advance preparation

1. Look over the following handouts and determine which one works best with the material you'll be presenting.
 - Tips for Reflective Listeners (pg. 29)
 - How do you rate as listener? (pg. 30)
 - What's a Friend For? (pg. 57)
 - Stuff that Gets in the Way of Friendship (pg. 58)
 - Old Year Resolutions (pg. 59)
 - What to do if a Friends Needs Help (pg. 60)
2. Make sufficient copies of necessary materials.
3. Draw a small smiley face in the center of a large sheet of flip chart paper. Draw a frowning face in the center of another sheet of flip chart paper. Tape both sheets to the wall.
4. Be sure to have enough markers or crayons available.
5. Be sure to allow sufficient time for youth to "process" or discuss what the worksheet is all about and how it relates to other activities and experiences you're providing.

Directions

1. Distribute a marker or crayon to each youth. Have youth use the smiley face sheet of paper to jot down words and phrases that describe qualities and behaviors associated with friendship. The other sheet of paper can be used to describe people who are not acting out of friendship. Allow five or six minutes for youth to finish.
2. Distribute any worksheets or handouts you've chosen and allow sufficient time for youth to complete it.

Follow-up Discussion

When youth are finished with their worksheets, take a few minutes to discuss some of the following questions:

- Why is it sometimes hard to find a really good friend?
- Is there a difference between “being popular” and being a really good friend?
- Is it ever okay to lie to a friend? Explain your answer.
- Explain why it is or is not okay to repeat something a friend told you in confidence.
- What do you think is one of the most important things a friend can do for a friend?
- In your opinion, what is one of the nicest things a friend can do for his or her friend?
- How can you tell if a person is really your friend or not?
- Tell why you agree or disagree with this statement: *“You can’t be a good friend unless you start out by liking yourself.”*
- Can you be a friend to everyone? Explain.
- Should you be a friend to a person who doesn’t have all the “friendship qualities” you’d like him or her to have? Explain.

Sum it up.

End by reminding youth that the gift of friendship is one of the most wonderful gifts we can ever give or receive. Like other gifts, we need to treasure it and take care that we avoid destroying it.

What's a Friend For?

We all need friends. The problem is, we don't always pay attention to what friendship really means. Sometimes we let people do or say hurtful things to us because we want that person to like us—even though he or she isn't really much of a friend to begin with. Other times we forget that having a good friend means being a good friend as well. Here's a way to take a closer look at friendship.

Things that matter in a good friend

Part A:

Look through Column A. Add other things you think should be on the list. Then use this scale to rate how important it is for your friends to have those qualities

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 – Extremely important | 3 – Not very important |
| 2 – Important | 4 – Totally unimportant |

Column A:

- fun to be with
- common interests
- generous
- unselfish
- adventuresome
- trustworthy
- a sense of humor
- loyal
- appearance (looks cool)
- honest
- a good listener
- has a positive attitude
- courageous
- kind
- respects others' rights
- popular with other kids
- intelligent
- good personality
- _____
- _____

Column B:

- fun to be with
- common interests
- generous
- unselfish
- adventuresome
- trustworthy
- a sense of humor
- loyal
- appearance (looks cool)
- honest
- a good listener
- has a positive attitude
- courageous
- kind
- respects others' rights
- popular with other kids
- intelligent
- good personality
- _____
- _____

Part B:

Look at the qualities listed under Column B. Add any others you think should be on the list. Then check off the qualities you yourself possess. Are they the same ones you rated highly in Column A?

Stuff That Gets in the Way of Friendship

Part A:

Look at Column A. Add whatever else you think gets in the way of friendship. Then use this scale to rate how much of a problem those things can be.

1 – A big problem

3 – Not much of a problem

2 – Somewhat of a problem

4 – Doesn't matter that much

Column A:

- is bossy
- is selfish
- has a bad temper
- is conceited
- is self-centered
- is overly critical
- argues and fights
- insist on having his/her own way
- acts gross
- is moody
- complains a lot
- insecure
- depressed
- talks all the time
- tries to get the other person to do stuff he/she doesn't want to do
- won't listen
- can't be trusted
- acts mean
- is spoiled
- is sarcastic
- tells lies
- _____

Column B:

- bossy
- selfish
- bad temper
- conceited
- self-centered
- overly critical
- argues and fights
- insist on having your own way
- acts gross
- moody
- complains a lot
- insecure
- depressed
- talk all the time
- try to get the other person to do stuff he/she doesn't want to do
- won't listen
- can't be trusted
- mean
- spoiled
- sarcastic
- lies
- _____

Part B:

Look at Column B. Add whatever else you think should be on the list. Check off anything that probably applies to you. (Be honest!) Do you think other people have noticed them too? What should you do about it?

What to Do If a Friend Needs Your Help

Being a good friend, means wanting good things to happen to the other person, and feeling bad when things go wrong. It's tough knowing someone you care about is having a rough time—especially if that person has been hurt by someone.

It can be hard to know how to help when a friend has a problem or is in trouble. Here are some important things to keep in mind:

Listen to your friend.

It's important for people to talk about things that trouble them. Sharing feelings, reactions, and worries can be a tremendous relief. Often when people get things out in the open, they end up discovering they already know what needs to be done about them.

Resist the temptation to criticize or blame your friend for what he or she has done.

If your friend has a problem and is feeling badly about it, you aren't going to help by pointing out how stupid it was to make that kind of mistake. He or she needs to know you care and are concerned even though you don't like what you are hearing.

Keep in mind that it's not up to you to solve other people's problems.

One of the most important lessons to be learned in life is how to deal with our problems and how to support other people as they deal with their's. Instead of telling your friend what he or she ought to do, it's better to listen carefully to his or her ideas for handling the situation. You can let your friend know what you think but avoid pushing your ideas on him or her.

Encourage your friend to get help if it's needed.

Knowing when to ask for help is a sign of strength not of weakness. Sometimes the most important thing you can for a friend is to encourage him or her get help. This is especially true if your friend is in serious trouble or in danger of being hurt emotionally or physically. Finding someone who will know what to do is a sign of maturity.

Help your friend identify a trusted adult in your community to talk to. It could be a school guidance counselor or teacher, a minister or priest, or some other adult who has been trained to help people deal with whatever is troubling your friend. If he or she is reluctant about talking to that person, offer to go along to make it easier.

Understand when you need to reveal something that was said in confidence.

It's a tough spot to be in, but sometimes the best thing you can do for your friend is break a promise you made about "not telling anyone." If he/she is suicidal or in danger of being physically assaulted, do not hesitate to reveal this information to an adult that you know you can trust.

Age

Middle school aged youth and older

Teaching context

Intended for small groups of no more than 20 in settings intended to build trust and promote understanding, this activity can be used with camp counselor, peer education, and leadership training events.

Time needed

It will depend on the number of youth in the group and how well they know each other.

Description

This exercise provides a structured environment in which youth can experience and express empathy.

Advance preparation

1. Read through the activity carefully in order to be able to facilitate it without needing to rely on notes. Be prepared to contribute a secret of your own and participate in the activity with the other group members.
2. Write the following on a chalkboard or piece of flip chart paper: *"If I were this person I would feel . . ."*
3. Make sure the following materials will be available:
 - Index cards
 - Pens or pencils

Directions

1. Have everyone sit in a circle and ask them to define what "empathy" means. Point out that an empathetic person makes an effort to "walk in another person's shoes" by trying to:
 - Think and feel with another person
 - Look at things through the other's point of view
 - Relate to what the other person is experiencing without telling him or her what to do about it.
2. Explain that this activity will give everyone a chance to experience empathy—from the perspective of receiving it as well as expressing it.
3. Distribute index cards and pens. Tell youth to write a short secret about themselves that no one else in the group knows about. It can be something simple ("I had Cornflakes for breakfast") or something more serious ("I don't have a date for Homecoming). Youth should refrain from putting their names on the cards.
4. When everyone is ready, have youth fold their cards and give them to you. Be sure to let them know that you are adding a secret of your own.
5. Shuffle the cards and place them in the center of the circle. Explain that group members will be taking turns selecting a card to read aloud. (It's okay if a person draws his or her own secret since no one is supposed to know who wrote it in the first place.)
6. Remind everyone of the phrase you've copied on the flip chart paper. Stress that empathy involves identifying with the other person's feelings rather than trying to tell him or her what to do about them. So after reading the card, youth are to describe how that person might be feeling about the secret, and then ask others in the group to add to the list. (For example, "If I were this person, I would feel . . . depressed about not being able to go to the dance and envious because my friends all have dates.")

7. Ask if anyone has any questions. Then demonstrate how to proceed by taking one of the secrets, reading it aloud and describing how you think that person would feel.
8. Continue until everyone has chosen and responded to a secret. If necessary remind people not to give advice, but only to describe how they think the person whose secret they've drawn might be feeling.

Follow-up Discussion

1. Once everyone has drawn and responded to a secret, ask the group members the following questions:
 - What was it like hearing other people respond to your secret?
 - What was it like trying to describe how other people might be feeling rather than giving them advice about what to do?
 - Why do you think empathy is important?
2. Point out that empathy and confidentiality go hand in hand. That's why the things that have been shared during this exercise should not be talked about outside this room.

Trying to look at things through another person's eyes is a mark of real concern.

Sum it up.

Remind youth that expressing and giving empathy is an important part of building strong relationships. Trying to solve another person's problems isn't always that helpful. But the ability to empathize lets people relate to what others are going through and strengthens bonds of friendship and understanding between friends.

Friendship Circle Ceremony

Age

Any age

Teaching context

This activity works best with groups of youth who have already had an opportunity to develop a strong feeling of trust and commitment. It can be used with campfire ceremonies, inspirational services or as a way of bringing closure to a group experience.

Time needed

It will vary on the size of the group and whether individuals will be invited to share personal thoughts, poems, songs, etc.

Description

This is a lovely way to end a group experience where bonding has occurred by focusing on the gift of friendship.

Advance preparation

1. Make copies of the attached ceremony and give it to whomever you have asked to help read the various parts.
2. Make arrangements if you will be including special readings, songs or poems. (Consider inviting youth to bring something with them to share if they would like.)
3. Consider bringing a “talking piece” (stone, stick, pine cone, etc.) to pass around the circle in order to encourage each person to share a comment or two about what the experience has meant to them.

Directions

1. Assemble the entire group and have them stand or be seated wherever they like. Proceed with the friendship ceremony as outlined in the following sheet.

*Good things happen
when friends are part
of each other's lives*

Sum it up.

Consider following the ceremony with a group hug. Instruct youth to stand close together with their arms around each other. On the count of three, take a big step into the circle.

Friendship Circle

Leader: Friendship is like a circle—it keeps people together. Just as a circle can expand and grow, there’s always room in our lives for more friends.

So let’s start our own circle of friends here today and see how large we can make it grow.

Leader: Some friendships start in childhood and continue all through life.

So if you have a friend who was your friend when you were in kindergarten, please come up and join our circle.

Leader: Friendships are full of happy times and sad times, hellos and goodbyes.

So if you have had a friend and lost that friend because he or she died, or moved away, please come up and join our circle.

Leader: Friendships happen anytime and anywhere—all it takes is two people who discover that being together is twice as much fun as being apart.

So if you made a new friend this year, please come up and join our circle.

Leader: A friend is a person you can trust; someone you can rely on for a smile or an encouraging word; someone who will listen to what’s on your mind or in your heart; and who will be there when you need a helping hand.

So if you’ve helped friend this past week, please come up and join our circle.

Leader: Friends are people who care about each other. Having a friend is one of the nicest things that can happen to you. And being a friend is one of the best things you can be.

So if you have a friend and are a friend, please come up and join our circle.

Sharing time:

Invite people to share any special readings or poems they have brought with them, or sing a favorite song together. Or, pass a “talking piece” (stone, stick, pine cone, etc.) around the circle. As each person holds the talking piece he or she can briefly share something they want to say.

Leader: Thank you for joining our circle. Each of us has helped it grow just by being part of it. It’s the same way with friendship. Good things happen when friends are part of each other’s lives.