

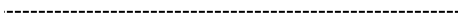
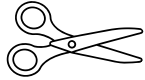
How to create card deck

1. Print:

- Choose "actual size" and double sided

2. Line up pages in order

3. Cut along dotted line



4. Line up the first 8 cards by displayed page numbers

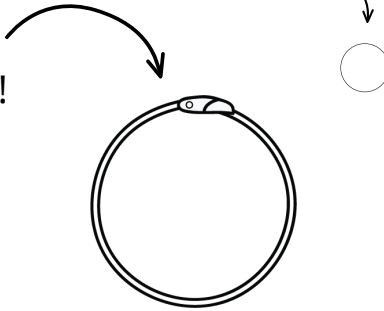
6

5. The rest of the cards can be in any order

6. Hole punch at the top left circle of the first card

7. Put the cards on a binder ring!

8. Incorporate play into every day!



BELONGING GAMES



**BELONG
partners**

*Building Equitable Learning Opportunities
and Nurturing Growth*

Who we are

BELONG Partners is an education equity non-profit committed to a future where everyone thrives because they know they belong and matter. We partner with educators* to build joyful, equitable learning communities *in collaboration with youth*.

These games were curated by BELONG Partners facilitators, Reid, Alan, Teague, Aaron, and Stacy who have been building communities and playing with youth for over 20 years. We drew resources and inspiration from Partners for Youth Empowerment, Young Women Empowered, Be the Change, Kat Velloso, and Priya Parker.

A huge thank you to educators, Deanna Tompkins, Melodie McLamb, and Dawne Cairney for providing feedback on how to keep inclusivity at the forefront of community building.

*Anyone who supports youth!



Supporting everyone's participation (2):

Processing, stimulation, and attention

- Model the game first.
- Introduce/scaffold more complex games over time.
- Adjust the pace, volume, or amount of stimulation.
- Divide into smaller groups or use a "fishbowl" format where one group plays while another observes.
- Allow youth to observe before joining.
- Offer noise-reducing headphones or earplugs.

Blind or low vision

- Use high-contrast or tactile props.
- Pair participants with a peer for games that rely on quick visual recognition.
- Describe visual cues and instructions aloud as you point or demonstrate.

Air quality/health

- All of these games can be played while wearing a mask.

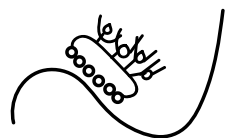


Remember: Full participation looks different for everyone! When modifications are a normal part of play, no one is singled out or "othered."

If you're unsure what would make a game more inclusive, consult a special education educator or ask the participant when appropriate.

Connection questions (cont.):

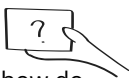
- What do you like about this time of year?
- What's a ritual that your family or community does that feels special/important to you and why?
- What's a really great gift you've given? Received?
- How are you different now than you were 2 years ago?
- How do you show gratitude to someone or something?
- What do you like to do after school/program?
- What are you looking forward to?
- What are 3 words you would use to describe yourself?
- If you could, what type of animal would you be?
- If you had a superpower, what would it be?
- Who is someone in history that you'd like to be friends with? Why?
- If you were a character in a book who would you be?
- Tell me about one of your heroes?
- What is something you are good at? How did you learn?
- Tell me about something that is hard for you.
- What's something you'd like to learn how to do?
- What is a hard thing you've had to do?
- What is something you are proud of?
- What makes you sad (or scared, happy, mad)?
- What is something you like to do with the important people in your life?
- What is a special moment you always want to remember?



Connection questions:

Incorporate these into games or use as check-ins.

- Who is someone you care about and why?
- Who is someone you know cares about you, how do they show it?
- What is something that has made you smile lately?
- What is a meal or food that feels special to you and why?
- What is something you appreciate about nature/being outside?
- Who is someone you feel comfortable being sad with?
- What qualities do you look for in a friend?
- In what ways do you like to show up as a friend?
- When is a time you took a risk?/were brave?
- If you could tell the world one important message, what would it be?
- What's the significance of/story behind your name?
- What time of day do you enjoy most? Why?
- If you could wake up tomorrow with 2 new talents, what would they be?
- What is a song that makes you want to dance?
- What helps when you're having a hard time?
- What's one thing you'd change about your classroom?
- Who do you look up to and why?
- What's something kind someone in your school/community did lately?
- What would your ideal school/program be like?



6

Resources

Some games pulled from or inspired by:

Partners for Youth Empowerment: youtube.com/pyeglobal

Young Women Empowered: youngwomenempowered.org

Be the Change: Building Intentional Communities:

bethechangeconsulting.com

Some questions pulled from or inspired by:

Kat Velloso's *Better Conversations Kit*: weshouldgettogether.com

Priya Parker's *The Art of Gathering*: priyaparker.org

Connect with us!

We want to hear how these games are going for you and your communities. Reach out to us with ideas and/or celebrations at:

belongpartners.org

hello@belongpartners.org

[@belongpartners](https://belongpartners.org) on
Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn



8

Belonging Games



Play helps youth learn. It increases participation, strengthens connection, regulates bodies, and builds social-emotional skills. And when adults join in, play **deepens adult-youth relationships** and brings more joy and trust to the learning environment.

This deck has **24 easy-to-lead activities** that are organized into four categories: **Learning Games**, **Deepening Connection**, **Building the Collective**, and **Quick Energizers**. Each card includes **instructions, tips, adaptations**, and optional **debrief questions**.

These games are **intentionally non-competitive**. No one is ever "out," and there are no winners or losers. Since win/lose anxiety may still arise, we encourage you to model that we're here to **play, support**, and **connect**.

Play LOTS of games at the beginning of the school year or program, then continue to make play a regular part of your time together. Many of these activities can be **led by youth**, helping them develop leadership and a sense of ownership over the community.

Feel free to modify the games to best fit your group. And, most importantly, **have fun!**

2

Supporting everyone's participation:

Games are most powerful when *everyone* can participate. Just like with academics, we set youth up for success by finding what works for their bodies and minds. Here are a few ideas to spark your inclusive creativity:



Age

- Younger kids may need more guidance, prompts, partnering, visual supports, simplified language, or shorter play sessions.
- Older youth may enjoy more independence, complexity, and opportunities to co-create the experience. That said, when a safer space is created, simple, silly play can be powerful at any age.

Language

- You may need to translate instructions or materials, use a translator, or use images instead of words.
- For non- or minimally speaking youth, consider partnering them with a peer, pre-loading AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) devices with key words and names, providing sign language, or using images instead of words.

Physical ability

- All of these games can be played sitting or standing.
- If a movement (like clapping, snapping, walking) isn't accessible, substitute a different movement or use a sound maker.

4

Learning names

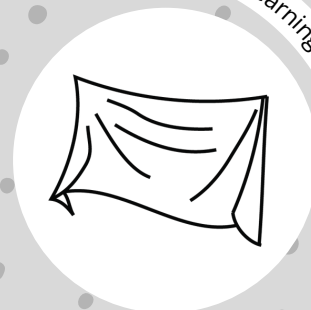


NAME & ACTION

- Each person chooses a simple action to go with their name (claps, wiggle, shoulder shake, etc.).
- The first person says their name and does their action, and the group repeats it.
- The next person goes, and the whole group repeats their name and action.
- Start back at the beginning repeating name and action for each person, in order as a whole group.
- Continue until the last person goes, and the group performs everyone's name and action.



Learning names



PEEK-A-WHO?

- Divide group in half.
- Two people hold a sheet in between groups so they can't see each other.
- Each group sends one person to the front near the sheet.
- At "3-2-1", the sheet is dropped down.
- The first person to say the other's name "wins" and "gains" that player on their team, high-fiving and making sure they both know each other's name before they go.
- Play until each person has gotten a chance to "go up", one team gains all players, or when it feels right.
- Have whole group high-five to re-unite at the end.



Learning names



NAME TOSS

- Circle up.
- One person starts with a ball, says the name of someone in the circle, and gently tosses the ball to them.
- The receiver names a new person who has not yet received the ball and tosses it to them.
- Optional: The receiver adds, "Thank you, name."
- Continue until everyone has received the ball.
- Increase the challenge by adding more balls, tossing in reverse order, and/or time the group and reflect on strategies to try to beat your time.



Learning names



NAME & RHYTHM

- Circle up.
- Start a steady, 4-beat rhythm like: Slap knees; Clap; Snap right; Snap left.
- Once the rhythm is going:
 - Person A says their name on the snaps
 - The group repeats it on the next snaps
 - Person B says their name on the next snaps
 - The group repeats it on the next snaps
- Continuing with names on snaps, the group says A's name, then B's name.
- Person C says their name and the group repeats
- Go back to the beginning, say all names in order
- Continue this pattern around the circle, adding each new name, always on the snaps.
- Then, go around the circle again, saying each name once on the snaps.



PEEK-A-WHO?

Age: 5+
Group size: 8+

Materials:

- blanket or sheet

A fun way to encourage knowing each other's names!

Tips

- Play after a few repetition-based name games (like Name & Rhythm, Action, and Adjective).

Adaptations

- Determine if the speed or processing time will be a barrier for some youth.
- A slower, more collaborative version: you could ask questions about who is on the other side, like "Guess Who".
- Mix up the circle order and repeat the full group sequence.
- Remove competitive element and have players say each other's names at the same time when they're ready.

Debrief options

- What's the importance of learning each other's names?
- How does it feel when someone knows your name and how to pronounce it correctly?
- What should we do if we can't remember someone's name?



NAME & ACTION

Age: 5+
Group size: 5+

Whole group mirroring and repetition (rather than putting one person on the spot to remember) reduces anxiety. It can also boost connection and regulation, which helps our brains remember names!

Tips

- Model that actions can be simple/slight or big and bold - either is great!
- Break big groups into groups of 6-8 to play simultaneously and then mix up. (Model as a big group first).

Adaptations

- Leader prompts or models previous actions.
- Actions can be sounds, facial expressions, pointing to a picture or symbol, AAC device, etc.
- Reset the repeat after 6-8 people.
- Use "fishbowl" style.
- Pause partway and come back later.

Debrief options

- How do you feel after playing this game?
- What is this doing for us as a group?



NAME & RHYTHM

Age: 7+
Group size: 5+

Patterned name games are excellent for learning names because they include repetition, rhythm, and movement.

Tips

- Break big groups into groups of 6-8 to play simultaneously and then mix up. (Model as a big group first).
- Remind your group it's okay if you don't hit the beat every time – focus on the group finding a flow rather than any individual getting it "right".

Adaptations

- Reset the repeat after 6-8 people.
- Use "fishbowl" style.
- Pause partway and come back later.
- Make the sounds gentler or do 4 motions without sounds.
- Use different motor skill instead of snap.
- Use 1-2 motions like clap to a 4 beat rhythm or clap and knee slap only.
- Adjust pace.

Debrief options

- Work together with a pair to see if you can name everyone (share out).
- If someone forgets your name, what can you do?



NAME TOSS

Age: 5+
Group size: 8+

Materials:

- balls
- stuffies

Beyond learning names, this game can help groups learn how to problem solve, work as a team towards a common goal, and respond to unexpected challenges.

Tips

- Since you're mostly learning a few names in this game, pair with whole-group repetition name games.

Adaptations

- Names may be spoken, signed, shown on cards, or shared via AAC.
- Roll instead of toss or assisted pass.
- Assign a helper to cue the next person.
- "Balls" could be beach balls, stuffies, koosh, etc. – whatever feels best for your group.
- Use brightly colored or high-contrast balls

Debrief options

- Look around, whose names are you still learning?
- How did adding more balls change the game? How did you adapt?
- What helped us go faster? (if timed)



Learning names



NAME & ADJECTIVE

- Circle up.
- Everyone comes up with an adjective (describing word) that starts with the same sound as their first name (Super Sylvia or Terrific Teague) and a motion.
- Someone starts by saying their adjective and name and does their motion.
- The group repeats the participant's adjective, name, and motion.
- The person next to them goes and the group repeats.
- Then go back to the beginning, repeating each person's name, adjective, and motion in order as a group adding each new person as you come to them.



Deepening connection

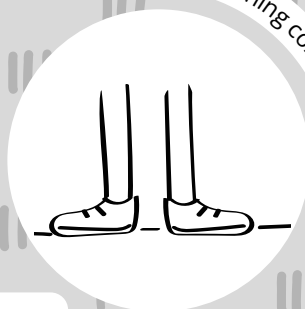


GROUP COMMONALITIES

- Get into groups of 3 or 4.
- Groups find 3 commonalities they all share. Encourage them to avoid easy ones like "we all breathe" or "same class".
- Groups can signal that they are ready by sitting down, putting their hands on their heads, etc.
- Have a few groups share out.
- Next, combine into groups of 6 or 8.
- These groups now find 3 things they have in common.
- Each group comes up with a group name and "cheer" to present themselves based on their commonalities.
- Have groups present in a fun and celebratory way (i.e. doing "lights, camera, action!" before they present).



Deepening connection

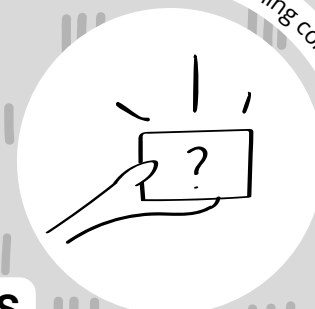


COMMON GROUND

- Group forms a circle.
- Someone enters the circle and says:
"My name is _____ and I share common ground with anyone who _____." (A true statement for them that you can't tell just by looking at them).
- Anyone who shares that common ground moves to a different spot in the circle (not directly next to them).
- The last person without a spot stays in the center, the group applauds them, and they share their name and a new common ground statement.
- Statements may start light ("anyone who likes ice cream") and move towards a little heavier ("anyone who has a hard time with math") depending on comfort levels.



Deepening connection



CURIOSITY CARDS

- Each person writes a "get to know you" question on an index card (i.e.: What's a great gift you've given someone? or Who is someone you admire?).
- Participants then pair up. Each person asks their partner the question on their card and listens to the answer (one question and one answer each).
- Next, partners swap index cards, find a new partner, and ask their new question.
- Continue swapping cards and meeting new partners for a set amount of time, or until everyone has connected with at least three different people.



GROUP COMMONALITIES

Age: 7+
Group size: 8+

Materials:

- paper & markers (optional)

This activity builds connection through collaboration. As groups grow larger, participants practice listening, negotiating, and finding shared identity beyond the surface.

Tips

- Play after doing a “similarities and differences” lesson with Venn diagrams. They could use some of those examples during the game and create new ones.
- This can be a great way to form small groups that meet regularly.

Adaptations

- Provide visuals and/or an anchor chart
- AAC devices could be pre-loaded with simple prompts like, “I have ___, who has ___?” (dog, cat, bike, etc.).
- Give groups a time limit like a visible countdown.
- Offer sentence starters like “We all like ___” or “We have all been to ___.”

Debrief options

- What was it like to work together to find commonalities?
- What did you appreciate about your group’s process of coming up with a skit?



NAME & ADJECTIVE

Age: 7+
Group size: 5+

Whole group mirroring and repetition (rather than putting one person on the spot to remember) reduces anxiety. It can also boost connection and regulation, which helps our brains remember names!

Tips

- Break big groups into groups of 6-8 to play simultaneously and then mix up. (Model as a big group first).

Adaptations

- Reset the repeat after 6-8 people.
- Pause partway and come back later.
- Actions can be sounds, facial expressions, pointing to a picture or symbol, AAC device, etc.
- Provide visuals for choosing an adjective.
- Instead of adjectives, use animals, rhyming words, etc.
- Allow pre-planning or extra think time.
- Name & Emotion: Share name, an emotion, and make a shape to represent that emotion. The group repeats their name, feeling, and gesture and that of each person that follows.

Debrief option

- What is this doing for us as a group?



CURIOSITY CARDS

Age: 8+
Group size: 8+

Materials:

- index cards
- pens

This game helps groups access and develop their creativity, curiosity, and listening skills. The magic comes from having structure but also space for the group to co-create the experience.

Tips

- Encourage your group to think beyond typical get-to-know-you questions like “What’s your favorite color?”

Adaptations

- Play in pairs so they can create a question together.
- Pre-load AAC device with questions.
- Pre-make simple questions they can choose from. Over time, they can start to make their own.
- Questions can be shared verbally or written in large print or braille.
- Allow a “pass” option if a question feels too personal.
- Reduce the number of partner swaps.

Debrief options

- What was one of your favorite Qs?
- What was it like to be listened to?
- What was it like to listen with curiosity?



COMMON GROUND

Age: 4+
Group size: 8+

This game helps participants discover connections they might not otherwise notice. It can be light and playful or lead to deeper conversations that build empathy.

Tips

- Be sure to celebrate the person who remains in the center - they aren’t “out” or the “loser”.

Adaptations

- Switch up the “last person” rule to make sure everyone that wants to gets a chance to contribute a statement.
- Rather than switching spots, people can just move into the circle, acknowledge each other, and move back out.
- Participants can raise a hand, stand, use AAC, or hold up a card to indicate the statement applies to them.
- Offer a few pre-written statements to choose from or facilitator leads all.

Debrief options

- What was it like when people shared your experience? And if they didn’t?
- What did you learn about yourself during this game?
- What did you learn about our group?



Deepening connection

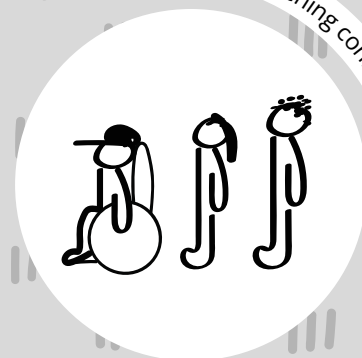


THIS IS NOT A...

- Person A holds the pen and says, "This is not a pen, this is a... (fill in the blank—comb, for example)."
- They demonstrate using the pen as a comb, adding matching movements and sounds.
- Person A passes the "comb" to Person B.
- Person B says, "This is not a comb..." and copies Person A's movements and sounds as closely as possible.
- Next, they give the pen a new identity (like, "...this is a magic wand"), demonstrate it with movement and sound, and pass it to Person C.
- Continue around the circle with each person first recreating the previous object then inventing a new one.



Deepening connection

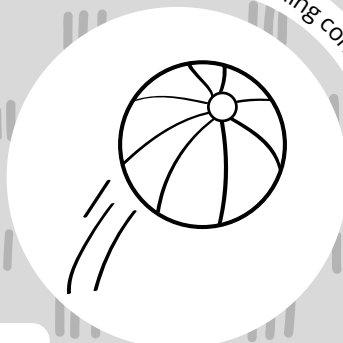


LINE UP BY...

- Tell the group they'll be lining up in different ways—without talking.
- First, have them silently line up by height.
- Then try more challenging prompts, like:
 - How far from here they were born
 - How far from here they live
 - Birthday
 - Number of languages spoken
 - Energy level in this moment
- Discuss after each round to see how they did, what their strategies were, and follow-up questions about the prompt (when applicable).



Deepening connection



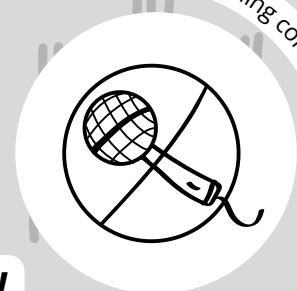
QUESTION BALL

Prep: Write different "get to know you" questions on a large beach ball.

- Circle up.
- Call someone's name and toss them the ball.
- When they catch it, they look at their right thumb and answer the question in that section. (If they'd prefer not to share, they can say, "Pass," and toss the ball to someone else.)
- Continue on until everyone has gotten a chance to share at least once.



Deepening connection



SILENT INTERVIEW

- Everyone pairs up and will "interview" each other—silently!
- One partner starts by silently miming three things they like to do (i.e.: playing guitar, reading, sleeping).
- While they watch, the other partner keeps their guesses in their mind about what the three activities might be.
- They switch roles, and the 2nd person mimes their 3 things.
- Remember: stay silent during the activity—just observe and remember what you *think* your partner enjoys.
- When everyone is finished, circle up. Each person introduces their partner to the group by sharing their guesses:
 - "This is Jayden. He likes eating, running, and sewing."

Jayden can then confirm or correct the guesses. If the guesses are off, that's okay. It's a chance to laugh and connect anyway!



LINE UP BY...

Age: 7+
Group size: 5+

Materials
(optional):

- markers
- paper
- objects
- visuals

This activity helps build an understanding of the nuances of communication. Groups learn creative problem-solving, empathy, and more about one another!

Tips

- Start with simple prompts like height and get more complex/deep as you go.
- Over time, invite youth to come up with the prompts.

Adaptations

- Show visuals for each prompt.
- Instead of physically lining up, participants can arrange name cards, photos or objects on a table or whiteboard.
- Participants can observe instead and share their noticings in the debrief.
- Pair blind participants with a sighted peer who can quietly describe the line's current order.

Debrief options

- What strategies did you use to communicate without talking?
- What did you learn about someone else in the group during this game?
- What did you learn about yourself?



THIS IS NOT A...

Age: 5+
Group size: 5+

Materials:

- pen (or other object)

This game sends the message that your imagination and creative risks are welcome and encouraged here.

Tips

- Encourage participants to trust their intuition with "first idea, best idea" - no need to overthink! The rest of the group supports them by mirroring the previous action as closely as possible, without judgment.
- If someone says all their ideas were taken, encourage them that there are an infinite number of possibilities!

Adaptations

- "Movement" can be very simple and/or described aloud.
- Use an object that's easy to hold.
- Pre-load an AAC device with the sentence stems and a few object ideas.

Debrief options

- How has your emotional or physical state shifted after playing this game?
- What made this hard/easy to do?
- What are you appreciating about our group?



SILENT INTERVIEW

Age: 8+
Group size: 4+

We love how this game gets groups to connect in new ways, use their imagination, and practice curiosity.

Tips

- Make sure pairs know each other's name and pronouns to be used when introducing to the group.
- Celebrate the guessing process. The goal is not to guess perfectly—it's to practice curiosity, noticing, and learning about each other.

Adaptations

- Non-visual-reliant alternative: play "taboo" style where you describe your interest(s) without actually saying what it is so your partner still has to guess.
- Offer communication alternatives: pictures, drawings, an AAC device, or objects.
- Scaffold with only one thing to mime and build up over time.
- Pair intentionally.
- Show-and-tell style: Partners share an item or picture that is meaningful to them. At the end, each person introduces their partner and shares what they learned about their item.



QUESTION BALL

Age: 5+
Group size: 8+

Materials/prep:

- beach ball w/ questions written on it

A low-stakes and creative way to get to know one another! The varying questions help keep groups engaged and curious about who is going to get what question.

Tips

- Leave some blank space so the group can add questions or make a ball with 100% group-created questions.
- You could build a question ball around a particular theme or lesson your group is working on.

Adaptations

- You can pass or adjust the question to work for you.
- Roll or hand-pass the ball.
- Peer or educator can tell a blind or non-reading participant what question is under their thumb.
- Allow think time.
- You may not get to everyone, and that's okay! You can pause and come back!

Debrief options

- (If someone passed) What was it like to pass or to see someone else pass?
- What questions did you like? What might you add?



Building the collective



BIGGEST FAN

- At "go", each person finds a partner to play "rock, paper, scissors" with (make sure they know how).
- The loser then becomes the BIGGEST FAN of the winner, walking behind them and cheering them on as they challenge a new opponent.
- Continue on with the "losers" becoming the fan club of the "winners" until the final two opponents face off with a wildly supportive crew behind them.
- The winner of that round "wins all" but, really, everyone wins at this game.



Building the collective

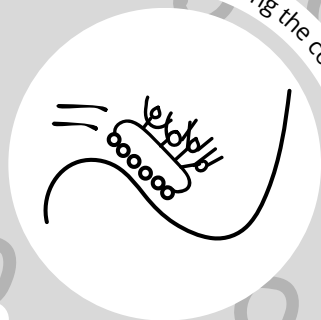


YES GAME

- Explain the game, then invite a volunteer to move out of earshot/sight.
- While the volunteer is gone, the rest of the group chooses a simple, specific task for them to complete when they return (i.e.: pick up a pencil from the floor, sit on the bean bag).
- Say, "When the volunteer comes back, we'll guide them toward the task. But here's the catch: we can only say one word: 'Yes.'"
- Ask: "If we can only say 'yes,' what do we do when they move in the wrong direction?" (Answer: We stay silent.)
- Invite the volunteer to return and see if they can figure out the task with positive encouragement from the group. If they do, celebrate! If not, that's okay! There's still great learning and metaphor in the experience.



Building the collective



GROUP OBJECT

- Form groups of 5-7 people.
- Give each group the name and image of a commonly known object like: blender, elevator, helicopter, seesaw, roller coaster, refrigerator, or television.
- Each group has 5-10 minutes to come up with a skit that demonstrates the object. When presenting, they are allowed to make sound effects, but no words. Each group member should be involved in some way.
- The groups then perform their skits one at a time.
- After a group is completely done with their skit, the audience can guess what they are demonstrating.



Building the collective



DANCE CIRCLE

- Circle up and explain that you'll be putting on some music for a dance circle. Acknowledge that some people LOVE to dance while others find it intimidating and both are welcome.
- One person will begin by moving just a bit into the circle and leading a repetitive dance move for ~10-15 seconds while everyone else joins in with the same move.
- That person moves back into the circle and the person to their right steps in and leads a new move and the group joins.
- The leadership passes around the circle until everyone has had a chance to lead.
- Say, "Your dance move could be big like this (model) or something really simple like this (model a lil finger waggle). Do whatever feels right for you, just remember to own it!"
- Remind everyone to mirror the move back however feels best in their body and make alterations as needed.
- Begin! Have a blast and encourage along the way.



YES GAME

Age: 8+
Group size: 8+

This game sets the tone of collective encouragement in groups. Through a simple metaphor, we see what success looks like when we're being supported rather than discouraged.

Tips

- The task is more achievable if it involves engaging with an object rather than something abstract like "say the alphabet."
- Model first, including getting it wrong.

Adaptations

- Could be done in pairs to reduce stimulation.
- Consider nonverbal response (like green cards for "yes").
- Adjust complexity of task.
- Choose a task based on touch rather than sight.

Debrief options

- What was it like to be guided by the group?
- What was the impact of only hearing "yes"?
- How might this apply to (recess, friendships, or how adults talk to kids?)



BIGGEST FAN

Age: 8+
Group size: 10+

This game resonates with many groups because it boosts energy, connection, and encouragement. Everyone stays engaged—even after they "lose"—by taking on a new role supporting someone else.

Tips

- Make sure everyone understands how to play Rock, Paper, Scissors. Practice together and agree on when to reveal your choice (e.g., after "Rock, Paper, Scissors, GO!").

Adaptations

- If loud cheering is too overwhelming, try silent cheering, whisper encouragement, or visual celebrations like jazz hands.
- Use visual cards for rock, paper, and scissors.
- Call out your choice verbally at the same time rather than relying on hand shapes.

Debrief options

- If loud cheering is too overwhelming, try silent cheering, whisper encouragement, or visual celebrations like jazz hands.
- Use visual cards for rock, paper, and scissors.
- Call out your choice verbally at the same time rather than relying on hand shapes.



DANCE CIRCLE

Age: 4+
Group size: 8+

This game builds: trust in our instincts; personal presence and leadership; and an opportunity for the group to delight in each other's creativity.

Tips

- Emphasize that this is a unique, supportive dance circle where all comfort and skill levels are welcome.
- Model small and big moves.
- Keep the instructions brief.
- The group will match your energy. Lead with confidence and lean into the belief that your group is capable of playing and supporting in this way.
- Remind group to mirror the dance in the way that feels best in their body.

Adaptations

- Use sound, facial expression, etc. instead of movement.
- Can be done seated.
- Incorporate verbal cues and descriptions for blind participants.
- Facilitate turn taking if needed.
- Use the same format to do a stretch circle. Play with gentle music, quiet for centering, or have the group answer a check-in question while they lead their stretch.



GROUP OBJECT

Age: 6+
Group size: 8+

When you invite young people's imaginations into the room, they get the message that their whole self is welcome. This game can unlock play, focus, team building, creative risk taking, and personal presence.

Tips

- Select objects that are meaningful and recognizable to your participants.

Adaptations

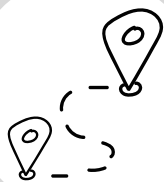
- Give groups a simple planning sheet with prompts like: What parts does this object have? How does it move? What sounds does it make?
- Instead of calling out answers, participants can hold up picture cards, point to a choice board, write their guess, or discuss with a partner before sharing.
- Guessing can rely on sound alone or a partner's quiet description.

Debrief options

- How did your group decide who would do what?
- When watching the skit, what helped you know what the object was?



Building the collective

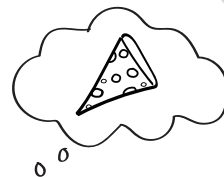


COMMUNICATION COURSE

- Create an obstacle course in an open area using small objects (books, stuffed animals, rope, etc.).
- Choose two pairs. In each pair, one youth is blindfolded and the other is the guider.
- Everyone else observes quietly, noticing communication strategies that are helpful and ways partners could communicate more effectively.
- Guiders stay outside the course and use verbal directions to help their partner navigate. If the blindfolded partner touches an obstacle, they return to the starting point.
- Continue until one participant successfully completes the course.
- Debrief (ideas on back of card).
- Repeat with new pairs as time allows.



Quick energizers



YES, LET'S!

- Invite the group to begin moving through an open area.
- Someone in the group initiates an action by saying, "Hey everybody, let's _____" (jump up and down, walk on tip toes, make pizza, etc.)
- The group responds, "Yes, let's!" and does the suggested action in a way that feels good in their body.
- After a short bit, someone else shakes it up by saying, "Hey everybody, let's _____" (fly like a bird, sing Happy Birthday in a whisper, etc.).
- The group replies, "Yes, let's!" and does the action.
- Continue until everyone that wants to gets to go (as time allows).



Quick energizers



WHOLE BODY COUNTDOWN

- Circle up or spread out so everyone has space
- Explain that you'll be shaking out each part of your body while counting down together.
- Everyone shakes their right arm and count out loud down from 8 (then left arm, right leg, and left leg - all counting down from 8).
- Repeat the same pattern, counting down each round:
 - 4 shakes each
 - 2 shakes each
 - 1 shake each
- Keep the energy up and the counting loud as you go faster each round!
- After the last shake, shake out your WHOLE BODY.



Quick energizers



CLAP CIRCLE

- Circle up.
- Person A turns to the person next to them (Person B). Together, they try to clap at the exact same time.
- Person B then turns to the next person in the circle and they try to clap together.
- Continue passing the synchronized clap around the circle.
- The clap won't always sync—and that's okay! Laugh about it and keep going!
- After going around once, check in, and then see if you can go around again even faster.
- When you're ready to finish, invite everyone to clap together into the center of the circle.



YES, LETS!

Age: 6+
Group size: 8+

When young people know their ideas matter and trust that the people around them will encourage and support them, they begin to take ownership. The program no longer feels like something being done for/to them—it becomes something they help create.

Tips

- Remind the group to trust their instincts with “first idea, best idea.”

Adaptations

- Some groups may benefit from having pre-planned actions to choose from.
- Pre-load “Yes, let’s!” and some potential action ideas on an AAC device.
- Actions can be shown on a card or signed.

Debrief options

- What is the value of accepting each other’s ideas?
- How did it feel to have your ideas accepted?
- How does it feel when you have an idea, and others don’t like it or put it down?
- How might we apply this in other ways during our time together?



COMMUNICATION COURSE

Age: 5+
Group size: 8+

Materials:

- books
- socks
- stuffies
- balls
- rope
- etc.

Tips

- This game works best once some foundational trust is already in place. If you try and it feels like the group isn’t ready, that’s okay! Spend more time building trust and communication skills, then come back to this activity later.
- Begin with a shorter/simpler course and add complexity after more practice.

Adaptations

- Simplify course.
- Pre-load an AAC device with directions: left, right, forward, stop, turn, etc.
- Participation choices: observe; help design the course; help facilitate; etc.).
- Play on a tabletop where a participant navigates a small course with their hand while guided by a partner.
- Invite blind participants to help design the course and then serve as a guider or check in with them about what would make this activity meaningful for them.

Debrief options

- What was it like to lead? Be led?
- What helped you feel safe and/or successful?
- How might this show up in other ways during our time together?



CLAP CIRCLE

Age: 4+
Group size: 5+

We love how this game provides a quick way to focus, sync up, and laugh! This is a great one to remind us that mistakes are opportunities to learn and we’re here to connect and learn - not be perfect.

Tips

- After one full round, ask the group:
 - What might help us sync better? (eye contact, slowing down, speeding up, focusing)
 - What might help us move the clap faster around the circle?
- Bigger groups may choose to play in small groups or segments.

Adaptations

- Provide other choices besides clapping.
- For an alternative to sight-based play, participants can say “1, 2, 3, clap!” to sync by sound and rhythm.
- Emphasize synching the hand motion connection rather than the sound.

Debrief options

- How did the group’s energy change as the clap moved around the circle?
- What was it like when the clap synced perfectly? And when it didn’t?



WHOLE BODY COUNTDOWN

Age: 4+
Group size: 4+

By using voice, movement, mirroring and both sides of the body this quick activity has the power to energize and regulate at the same time.

Tips

- Remind participants to move in the way that feels best for their body.
- This is a great one to ask youth to lead once they know how it goes.

Adaptations

- Provide alternatives for movement like rhythm sticks, drums or voice.
- Count down from higher or lower number.

Debrief options

- What, if anything, has shifted in your body and/or mood from the start to the end of the countdown?



SOUND & MOTION

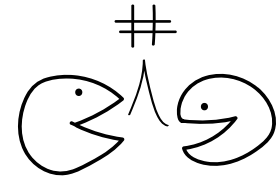
Quick energizers



- Circle up.
- Person A turns to the person next to them (Person B) and makes a sound and a motion.
- Person B repeats the same sound and motion to the next person, passing it around the circle.
- Continue until it returns to person A who will complete the circle by passing their sound and motion one more time to Person B.
- Person B creates a new sound and motion for the group to pass around.
- The leader can pause the group and ask:
 - "What might help us do this even faster?" (focus, anticipate the sound as it's getting closer, etc.).
- Play until everyone has had a chance to create a sound and motion or as time allows.



Quick energizers



TUNED IN 10

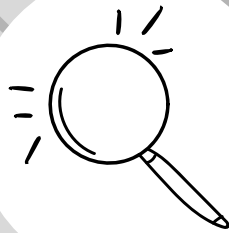
The goal of this game is simple: count to 10 as a group. Easy, right? Not quite—there are a couple of rules:

- You can't plan the order ahead of time.
- Only one person can say a number at a time.
- If two people say a number at the same time, the group starts over at 1.

Work together to see if your group can make it all the way to 10! Once you've achieved that, what's the next highest number you think your group can do?



Quick energizers



DISCO DETECTIVE

- Circle up and choose one player to be the "detective".
- Send the detective out of ear/sight range.
- The rest of the group then chooses someone to be the leader. They pick a simple dance move or motion, and everyone copies them.
- When everyone is dancing, the detective is brought back into the room.
- The leader will continue to subtly switch up the dance moves as time goes on.
- The detective has three guesses to choose who the leader is.
- Choose new detectives as time allows.



Quick energizers



WAIT A MINUTE...

- The facilitator invites the group to take 30 seconds to notice everything they can about their outward appearance (clothes, jewelry, objects in hand, etc.).
- Next, have the group close their eyes while the leader changes one thing about their appearance (turns their hat around, removes a bracelet, etc.).
- Have the group discuss with a partner what they think changed. Invite answers.
- Continue and add complexity as you go.
- Switch up the leader or play in pairs.



TUNED IN 10

Age: 6+
Group size: 6+

This game can be a great way to shift the group from high energy to a more calm, focused tone.

Adaptations

- Could use cards with numbers on them.
- To get the same effect of focus and calm but remove the potentially stressful challenge, take turns naming colors, animals, foods, or other themes.



SOUND AND MOTION

Age: 4+
Group size: 8+

This is a great opportunity for groups to build trust in their intuition and to connect in an embodied way rather than with talking.

Tips

- Break big groups into groups of 6-8 to play simultaneously and then mix up. (Model as a big group first).
- Encourage participants to trust their intuition with "first idea, best idea" - no need to overthink! The rest of the group supports their decision by immediately passing it around the circle.

Adaptations

- Consider only one sound or one motion.
- Participants can use an AAC device, sound button, picture card, or gesture instead of making a vocal sound.

Debrief options

- What was it like to come up with a unique sound and motion?
- What helped you trust your instincts?
- What helped our group move the sound and motion around?



WAIT A MINUTE...

Age: 3+
Group size: 4+

Materials (optional):

- props

By practicing careful noticing in a playful way, the group builds focus and discovers how much they can learn just by paying close attention to each other.

Tips

- Model a few examples first (start with obvious then subtle).
- Celebrate careful noticing rather than who "wins".
- Add some whimsy by using ridiculous items that are hard to miss like a goofy hat or the class guinea pig!

Adaptations

- Play with objects on a desk or in a small area rather than appearances.
- Adapt the "noticing" skill to be about sound or touch instead of sight: change something about a sound pattern you make or an object's position that can be identified by touch.

Debrief options

- What helped you notice the change?
- What made it easy or hard to remember what someone looked like at the start?
- How might this kind of attention to detail apply in other parts of your life?



DISCO DETECTIVE

Age: 5+
Group size: 6+

This is a great opportunity to build skills around connective play rather than winning or losing. If you keep it light and focused on tuning into each other, groups can really sync up and get creative with this one!

Tips

- The leader doesn't have to make large movements. Small gestures, facial expressions, or hand movements work just as well.
- Encourage everyone to adapt each movement so it feels comfortable for their body.

Adaptations

- Can be played with or without music.
- Reduce group size for the detective's first attempt.

Debrief options

- What strategies did you use to figure out who the leader was?
- What was it like to be the secret dancer?
- How did the group work together to keep the leader a secret?

