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**Strengthening Connections to School by Improving Student Relationships
Presented by Chuck Saufler at the International Bullying Prevention
Conference, Pittsburgh PA. 2009**

The following is a compilation of games and activities that come from numerous sources and years of experience working as a guidance counselor, staff trainer and consultant often working in an adventure based counseling format. They are not individually cited as I have no idea where or when they originated but the majority have been used in the adventure field for many years. Most of these games go by more than one name so there is no one source to cite anyway. The object of these activities is building relationships by having fun together. Nothing builds relationships between people, or cohesion in a group, better than having fun together. I have used all of these games in classroom and group circles k-12, as well as staff and parent meetings. Modify them to suit the needs of the group. These activities are also useful as an adjunct to the classroom meeting component of any community building program k-12.

Toss-a- name:

Participants stand in a circle. Each person in the circle says his/her name in a loud clear voice, in turn, around the circle one time. The leader has an object (ball, bean bag, rubber chicken etc.) and calls the name of a person across the circle from him/her and then tosses the object to the named person. That person catches the object and says back to the thrower, "Thank you (thrower's name)" and the thrower replies, "You're welcome (catcher's name)". The game continues in this manner until all have had at least one turn and there is some familiarity developing. At that time the leader adds another object to the game and it continues with two objects. Always reminding players to use the "Thank you (name)" and "You're welcome (Name)" format. After a few more minutes a third object is added and the game continues until the leader stops it and asks for a volunteer or two to try to name all the participants.



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Closing or review activity extension:

Stand in a circle. The first person states a fact or summary statement about something they learned today and then calls a name and tosses the object to that person who says, "Thank you (name)". Then that person states a fact or summary statement about something they learned today and then calls the name of another person and tosses the object to that person. "Thank you" and "You're welcome" are always appropriate. Continue until all have had a turn.

Name game review

Circle formation with participants sitting, legs out straight and toes toward the ceiling. The "It" person is standing in the center with a "noodle" in hand. They choose someone to start. The starter person calls the name of anyone on the circle. "It" must tag the named person's feet with the noodle before the named person can call someone else's name. If the named person calls another's name prior to being "foot tagged" by "It" then "It" has to try to tag that newly named person before they can call another name and so on. IF "It" successfully tags someone before they can call a name then that tagged person becomes "It" and goes to the middle and the old "It" sits in their vacated space.

Peek-a-who

Split the group into 2 groups and have them sit as 2 bunches facing each other 4-5 feet apart. Extend an opaque sheet (a tarp works) between the groups and instruct them to sit so that they can't see the other team and can't be seen either. Have one person from each side approach the sheet and sit facing the sheet. Count to 3 and drop the sheet. The person who says the name of the person that they are facing first wins that person for their team so that person goes on their side. Play until just before they lose interest.

Categories: Ask a group to organize themselves into smaller groups, based on different criteria (such as left/right handed, number of siblings, favorite color, shoe size, etc.).



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Common Ground

Directions – Group sits in a circle of chairs with one person standing in the middle (no empty chairs). The person in the middle says “I seek common ground with... people who were born east of the Mississippi!” Anyone who was, including the person asking the question, must get up and run across the circle to find a new seat. You can’t take the seat of the person next to you! There will be one person left in the middle who must ask the next question. Possibilities include: people who... wear glasses! Likes vanilla ice cream better than chocolate! You can also guide the questions a little deeper... “I seek common ground with people who ... takes medicine every day, knows someone in jail etc.” The facilitator may choose to ask the first few questions to get the game going and set the tone.

Have you ever...?

Form a circle with spots to mark places for people to stand. The “It” person stands in the middle with no spot under them. “It” says, “Have you ever ... (name something they have done themselves like “been in a canoe”). Then everyone on the circle who has been in a canoe has to find a new spot to stand on. Just like in musical chairs there will be one person without a spot left and that person is now “It”.

Zip Zap Zoe

Stand in a circle with one “IT” person in the middle. “IT” approaches someone and points at them and says, “Zip!”. The person pointed at has to duck immediately while the 2 adjacent players turn toward each other, point at each other and say, “Zap!” It is a race to zap the other player first so whoever loses becomes IT and IT takes the vacant spot on the circle. IT has the choice of saying “Zoe” instead of “Zip” when pointing at a player. If this happens the pointed at player may not move a muscle. If they even flinch toward ducking, they are then IT. As the game progresses you can add a second and third IT to the game for more action and laughs.



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Everybody's It

World's fastest tag game. When I say, "Go!" everybody's it. If you tag someone they are out (they sit where tagged). If they tag you, you are out. If you both tag each other, you are both out. If you argue about it, you are both out. Go!

Variation: Called Octopus Tag. When you are out and sitting you may still tag people you can reach (without diving for them) who run by you.

Note: You can slow this game down for the classroom by having each player wear a beanbag on his or her head. If they touch or drop the beanbag they are out.

People to People

Form pairs facing each other. A single player at the end of the line is designated the "caller." As the caller yells "toe to toe," "knee to knee," "elbow to foot," etc., the pairs perform the described connection. On the call "people to people" the players switch partners. The player without a new partner becomes the new caller. You can't have the same partner twice, unless it's a small group. And try to think of a new combination every time!

Impulse

Have the group form a circle. Have the group hold hands around the circle. Ask them to send a pulse signal through the group. Time it. Challenge the group to do it faster. Note: If you allow them several opportunities to try this, make sure you have a timer that will display hundredths of a second.

Pairs Tag

This is a WALKING tag game. Participants are paired up. The person that is "it" needs to try to tag their partner on the starting signal. When a person gets tagged, they need to turn around 3 times and then they try to tag their partner. Everyone is playing the game at the same time within defined boundaries. Everyone must walk and stay within those same boundaries. Because it this game is played in a very confined space it is important to remind players that in order to be safe everyone must walk during this game. Expect to be bumped and have close contact with others in this game.



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Categories

Ask a group to organize themselves into smaller groups, based on different criteria (such as left/right handed, number of siblings, favorite color, shoe size, etc.).

Stand-up is a powerful activity with the potential to unite any group of students.

Description – Have all participants sitting. Introduce the activity by saying, “Our class (group) is a diverse group of participants, and throughout this year we’ll be exploring and experiencing our diversity. Let’s begin with this activity. Throughout this activity we will explore the obvious differences between people. We want to acknowledge and address those differences but also bring to the surface similarities that we might not have recognized. This process might be difficult or awkward at first; however we want to break down stereotypes and make it easier to know one another as full human beings.”

Then explain the guidelines: Listening, Respect, No Pressure, Recognize Grey Areas.

Two rules: No Interruptions, and don’t ask Questions During Activity.

Remember the group norms.

Simple category: *Stand up if you wear glasses or contact lenses.*

Sample questions: (add your own according to your classes maturity and ability to understand)

- You are not from Portland (or wherever *here* is).
- If you feel your home is the Northeast. (*Remind about Grey Areas.*)
- You take pride in the people around you.
- You know little about your cultural heritage.
- You feel you are not accepted because of your race.
- You’ve experienced racism.
- You’ve experienced discrimination because of your race.
- You value and are strengthened by a strong sense of ethnic identity.
- You have ever felt embarrassed because of your family’s economic class.
- You find yourself thinking about food more than you want.
- You plan to go to college.
- You plan to drop out of school.
- You don’t live with your parents.



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- You talk, pray, meditate, sing, or spend time alone in your own way, regularly.
- You know that in 50 years this world will be a better place to live.
- You have cried at least once this year.
- You have laughed at yourself once this year.
- You know that you can change the world.
- You have parents and/or a family who strongly support you.

Please, Please Smile

Everyone is seated in a circle with a volunteer standing in the middle. The volunteer leans down to the person of his or her choice, looks at them deep in the eye, and says "Honey, if you love me, would you please, please smile?" The recipient of this proposal simply replies, "Honey, I love you, but I just can't smile." That easy - except that the recipient CANNOT SMILE, smirk, turn up the corners of their mouth, or snicker. And the volunteer in the middle can't touch the recipient in any way- but can do anything else. The volunteer continues until someone smiles, and then trades places with the person who finally smiles.

The Jumping Game

Have students partner up and face their partner. Decide who is "Same" and who is "Different". In unison they jump and count aloud together "1-2-3-4-5". On landing "5" they each place one foot out farther than the other. If the feet are on the same side (my left foot and my partner's right foot) then same gets a point. If the feet are on different sides (my left foot and my partners left foot) then different gets the point. Play till one partner gets 5 point and then change partners.

Marble Jousting

Partners face off each having a plastic spoon in both hands. Place a marble in each player's non-dominant hand spoon. Object is to make your partner drop their marble before you do by dueling with them. No thumbs on marbles to hold it in the spoon.

Elephants and Giraffes



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Chuck Saufler received a M.Ed. from Northeastern University in Community Mental Health in 1979. He has been a guidance counselor and staff trainer in Maine since 1989. As co-coordinator of the Maine Project Against Bullying he coordinated a statewide bullying prevention project. He is currently the lead trainer for bullying education at the Maine Law and Civics Education Program, University of Maine School of Law and a trainer/consultant for the Restorative School Practices Collaborative of Maine. He is a founding member of the International Bullying Prevention Association and is drawn to this work by a firm belief that community building, prevention and early intervention are our best hope of creating a civil society for future generations.