

Small Group Activities for Girls' Groups (non-faith-based)

We've used these activities in small groups (5-10) of 5th-8th girls for a quite a few years now. We've used them with girls from all kinds of backgrounds, urban and suburban, in schools and in afterschool programs. We've also tried plenty of things that sounded great on paper, but didn't really work – so they went into the scrap heap! What's here are the “winners” – activities we've done over and over that have really engaged the girls and worked every time. Enjoy!

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GETTING TO KNOW YOU

Introductions; learn names. Leaders introduce themselves, tell about families and pets (show pictures), jobs, school, etc.

Go over group rules:

- 1) Listen and let each person finish talking
- 2) Each person is important, even though we are all different. Everyone has something to contribute.
- 3) What's said in this room stays in this room.

Art project – decorate individual folders with stickers and markers.

While girls are decorating, play “Favorites”. Each person thinks of a question for the whole group: What is your favorite _____ (color, animal, ice cream, pizza topping, school subject). Go around the room and let each person answer. Then the next person thinks of a new question, and continue until time is up.

HOW TO BE A GOOD LISTENER

Opening chit-chat

SUPPLIES

White board, markers, listening sticks (instructions under Activity section)

OPENER

Who is the person who listens to you the best, and what makes them such a good listener?

DISCUSSION

On white board, make two columns, “listening” and “not listening”.

Ask girls to tell how they know when someone is listening to them. Write answers under the “listening” column.

Examples: Making eye contact, responding to you, letting you finish, remembering what you say

Do the same for how they know when someone is not listening to them. Examples: Interrupting, getting distracted, talking to someone else, changing the subject, forgetting what you said.

ACTIVITY

Before the group, purchase inexpensive colored craft sticks at a craft store. On at least a dozen sticks, write a “finish the sentence” question. The more the better! Examples include:

One thing I worry about is...

If I won a million dollars, I would...

If I could travel anywhere in the world, it would be...

I think a fun job to have would be...

One thing that scares me is...

If I could spend the day with one person, it would be...

One word that describes me is...

One thing I wish I could change about my family is...

Something that makes me mad is...

My favorite shoes to wear are...

Someone that makes me feel good about myself is...

When I get home from school, I...

The first thing I do when I get up in the morning is ...

Display the sticks question-side down, and let each girl (and leader!) draw one. Go around the group and let everyone read their question and answer it, one at a time.

When you are done, tell the girls you are going to test their listening skills. Ask who can remember an answer that someone else gave. Let girls share what they remember until everyone’s answer has been remembered.

Then ask, “How did it feel when someone remembered what you said?” Use their answers to reaffirm that they can be a good friend by being a good listener.

Have the girls put their listening sticks back in the pile, then continue the activity for a few rounds or until you’re out of time.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

After you’ve brainstormed “Listening” and “Not listening” qualities, have two girls role play them. Let the girls come up with a problem that one girl tells her friend about, while the other girl demonstrates the “listening” column and the “not listening” column.

LISTENING AND EXPRESSING FEELINGS

OPENER

Feelings cards

Prepare 20-30 index cards with an emotion written on each one – Happy, Annoyed, Bored, Scared, Lonely, Nervous, Hopeful, Excited, Tired, Angry, Confused, Loved, etc. For some of the more common emotions, it's a good idea to write several cards.

Have students spread the cards out word-side-up on the table. Let each student pick one or more cards that describe how they are feeling today. Go around the table and let everyone share which cards they picked and why.

ACTIVITY

Mad/Sad/Glad

There are two rules to Mad/Sad/Glad. 1) When it is someone's turn, they have the floor and everyone else listens. 2) When the person is done sharing, someone else must ask "Is there anything else?" Then the person sharing can add something else, or they can respond with, "No, that's all."

Let each person finish the following sentences:

Round 1: One thing I'm mad about... (let each person answer before starting Round 2)

Round 2: One thing I'm sad about...

Round 3: One thing I'm glad about...

When you are finished, ask the students how it felt when it was their turn.

GROUP SCULPTURE

Supplies: Pipe cleaners (enough for 3-5 of the same color per student), one piece of Styrofoam

Objectives: Each student will express their values creatively in a visual and tactile way; will appreciate differences and similarities of others in group.

Arrange pipe cleaners with 3-5 of each color grouped together – base the number of pipe cleaners per person on the number of questions you plan to ask.

Let each student choose the color they want. *Each student has 3-5 pipe cleaners of the same color.*

Ask the following questions one at a time, and tell the students to make something out of the pipe cleaner that represents their answer. Some students will easily think of something; others who are more concrete thinkers will have difficulty. You can suggest that if they can't think of anything, they can always make a letter that stands for their answer. There are no “wrong answers.”

5th/6th grade-level questions – use 3 for a larger group, 5 for smaller:

1. Who is an important person in your life? (Give time for everyone to make their answer without talking)
2. What is something you are proud of about yourself?
3. What is something the rest of the group might not know about you?
4. What do you like best about our school/group?
5. What is something you dream about doing someday?

Other questions – possibly for older youth.

What is an important piece of advice you try to live by?

What is a good habit you would like to start doing?

What is an important value you have?

When everyone has finished crafting their answers, take the Styrofoam base. The leader can begin with their answers – telling the group what they made and what it represents. After they explain each answer, they should stick it into the Styrofoam. When they're done sharing their answers, they pass it to the next person who explains and adds their answers.

When everyone in the group has gone, you will have a “pipe cleaner sculpture” made by the group. It represents everyone's differences, but also shows how much our differences add to the group.

You can ask: “If everyone's answers were the same, how would our group look?”

“How do you think it helps our group that everyone here has their own unique contributions to add?”

DECISION MAKING

Supplies: White board and markers, option play scenarios cut into strips

INTRO TO OPTION PLAYS

“Option plays” are a tool developed by youth ministers Mike Yaconelli and Duffy Robbins in the 1980s to help kids learn to make good decisions. We have a copy of their now out-of-print book that is literally falling apart! Since you can’t buy the book anymore, here’s a summary of how to use Option Plays. We have never seen this activity not work with kids!

Begin by introducing the idea that in any situation, you always have options. Kids choose to get up in the morning and go to school, even if they don’t like it – because they don’t want the consequences that will come if they choose the option of staying home or cutting school.

For this activity, take turns letting one student choose a scenario that you’ve cut out ahead of time (examples are below for urban middle school students), and letting one student be the writer on the white board.

There are two phases to this activity. After one scenario is read, let the group brainstorm all the options – **both good and bad** – they can think of in this scenario. Have the writer list them on the board. Then let the group choose three of those options. Encourage them to pick three options that are different.

Write down the first chosen option on the board, and draw a bracket that looks something like this:

OPTION 1 _____
/ _____
\ _____

Let students brainstorm three **possible** consequences of choosing each option, writing one on each line.

OPTION 2 _____
/ Consequence 1 _____
/ Consequence 2 _____
\ Consequence 3 _____

So an example could look like this:

Ask boy to stop _____
/ Boy stops bothering me _____
/ Boy doesn’t like me anymore _____
\ Boy gets in trouble _____

Repeat the brackets for Option 2 and Option 3. When you are finished, ask the students what they think the best option is.

Try to help students understand that no matter how good an option, it may still bring an unwanted consequence. (Your friend may get mad at you, you may have to compromise.) This is part of what makes decision-making so hard. But this exercise can help kids think through long- and short-term consequences.

When you're done with an option play, you can go around and let each student say what they think is the best option, based on the consequences. You might want to question them about why people don't always pick the best option. They may have some great responses!

OPTION PLAY SCENARIOS (print these out and cut into strips)

Yesterday your shirt went through the laundry and it came out of the dryer with a sock stuck to the back of it. You wore it half the day before you noticed it. Now it's a day later and your friends are still teasing you about it. It's starting to get on your nerves. What are your options?

During class almost all the kids were talking, but the teacher only told you to be quiet. You think she doesn't like you. What are your options?

There is a girl at school that you don't really like. Your friend tells you a rumor about her family, but you happen to know that it's not true. What are your options?

Your sister and you are fighting over which TV show to watch. Your mom comes in and says that if you can't figure out a solution, no one will get to watch TV. What are your options?

Someone starts a rumor that you want to fight someone else after school. You don't really want to fight, but you're afraid of what the other kids will think. What are your options?

There's a boy in your class that you like, and you think that he likes you too. Lately he has been making comments about your body that make you feel uncomfortable, but you don't want to say anything because then he might not like you anymore. What are your options?

You and your friend are out Christmas shopping. You see a necklace you really want, but you don't have enough money for it. Your friend wants to put it in her coat and walk out the door, and wants you to help her. What are your options?

MY LIFE LINE

Supplies: M&M's, copies of My Life Line work sheet, colored pencils or pencils

Objectives: To help girls identify significant events in their lives; to learn about others' lives; to build group empathy; to build empathy toward others outside the group

Opener: M&M game

Let each girl (and leader) take between 1 and 10 M&M's, setting them aside. After each girl shares how many M&M's she took, explain the rules. For each M&M they took, each person must share one thing about themselves with the group. (brothers and sisters, favorites, etc.) Go around the room and let each girl tell about themselves (and then of course, eat the M&M's.)

My Life Line:

Distribute copies of My Life Line. The worksheet can be confusing at first, so walk the group through one step at a time.

Start by writing their current age at the bottom at "My Age Now". Then divide their age in half and write it at the middle marker. Use the other two markers to mark a quarter of their age and three-quarters of their age. (It doesn't have to be exact – the purpose is just to help them think through events in their lives.)

Walk through the exercise as a group, but wait to share answers until the end. You can let each girl read a letter and instruction: "S" Put an S by a SAD time in your life. Then take a moment to let girls write in their answer on their life line.

When you have finished all five letters, go around the room and let each girl share her lifeline. (As much as she is comfortable sharing.) It helps if the leader starts by sharing theirs.

Ask something like, Did you learn something about others in the group today? You may want to ask for examples, or you can wait until the end for responses.

Turn the page over and read the quote on the back. Talk about the first half: "Be kinder than necessary." Ask the girls what they think that means. Then do the second half: "Because everyone you meet is fighting some kind of battle." Again, ask what they think it means.

This is a good point to go around the room and ask each girl to share one thing she learned that day. Try to draw out that each person has been through difficult things in their lives and is unique, but that you never know what each person is dealing with on the inside.

ME AND MY VALUES

(This activity was inspired by an activity in the Bible study curriculum *Girls*, written by Helen Musick, Dan Jessup, and Crystal Kirgiss – now out of print.)

Supplies: Values worksheets, markers or pencils, different colored beads and bead cord, scissors.

ACTIVITY: Me and My Values

Ask the group who knows what “values” are. (Answer: Basically, things that are important to you.) Distribute the “Me and My Values” worksheet.

Challenge the girls to read all the sample values on the worksheet, and circle the ten that are most important to them. After giving everyone time to complete the activity, let girls share what they chose. After everyone has shared who wants to, challenge them to narrow it down to their top five values. Again, let everyone share when they’ve decided.

Help clarify for the girls that these are the things that are most important to them. Different people will have different values, and that’s OK.

Now the fun starts. Put all the beads in the middle of the table. Tell each girl to choose five beads in five different colors, one to represent each of her values. Help girls cut the bead cord to make a bracelet for her wrist, and put the bracelets together. You can make an extra knot on either side of the beads so they stay in place. Let each girl share what her beads represent. You can wrap up with sharing how important it is to keep our values in front of us whenever we’re making a decision – especially things like choosing a boyfriend, or whether or not to even have a boyfriend; choosing or keeping friends; or things that will really influence the course of our life.

ENCOURAGEMENT NOTES / LAST DAY

(Great day for a pizza party!)

Supplies: Notebook paper, one paper bag (lunch size) per person, markers or pencils

ACTIVITY: Encouragement notes

Give each girl one paper bag and tell everyone to write their name (and decorate a little if they want). Then give each girl a sheet of notebook paper and have her rip it into the same number of pieces that there are people in the group. Have everyone set their bag with their name on it in the middle of the table.

Then everyone's job is to write an encouraging note to each person in the group. Try to encourage girls to write something about a quality that person has (like kind, friendly, good sense of humor, etc.) and not just that they like their shoes or clothes. The encouragement notes go in each person's bag (e.g., a note to Jane goes in Jane's bag. Jane should have a bag full of notes for her when you're done.)

When everyone is done writing, they can take the notes out of their bag and read them. It's a nice time to ask, "How did it feel to read your notes?" Encourage the girls to keep their bag someplace they can look at it from time to time when they're having a bad day.

QUESTION BALL

The question ball is a winner for kids of all ages. (We've even seen adults have fun with it.) It's a great icebreaker or opening activity.

Buy a big, cheap-o, light-colored ball at WalMart or the dollar store. The bigger the better!

Use a Sharpie to write get-to-know-you questions all over the ball. Draw boundary lines in between – don't worry if it doesn't look too perfect! Just channel your inner artist.

Here are some possibilities to write on the ball:

Name your favorite (color, book, movie, TV show, song, school subject, pizza topping, fruit)

Scream your favorite ice cream

Tell your middle name

Everyone sing happy birthday to the person with the closest birthday

Say your favorite person to spend the day with

Say where you would go on vacation

Give someone a compliment

Everyone laugh for 10 seconds

Say what you ate for breakfast

Give everyone a high five

If you have space, include a few active things:

Everyone do 10 jumping jacks

Walk like a crab across the room

Everyone hop on one foot for 10 seconds

Play a 30-second game of tag. Go!

Everyone switch places with someone. Go!

Everyone act like a monkey

To play Question Ball, have everyone sit in a circle. You can either pass the ball around, or better yet toss it to someone across the circle and say their name as you do. When you catch the ball, your question is the one that your LEFT THUMB lands on. Have fun!