



Tips for Planning & Running Youth-centered Activities

- Find out what students in your group **want to learn about or do**, then plan activities around those areas of need/interest.
- When planning, ask yourself: **What new facts, ideas, perspectives, or connections will participants gain from this activity?** If the answer is “none”, then keep trying!
- Make sure that the activity you have planned will **build bridges** rather than create divides between groups. The purpose of our group is not to complain about current circumstances or separate ourselves from others who believe differently than us; our purpose is to connect, build understanding, and create positive change within our group, our school, and our community.
- If you want or need help, ask your adult ally asap! **Ask for and welcome guidance, support, advice, and feedback.**
- During the activity, **engage as an equal member** of the group—don’t stand at the front of the room or separate yourselves as superior/observer.
- **Prepare the activity’s materials** at least a day early. Ask for help from friends a few days early so you don’t have to do it alone.
- After the activity, **always reflect** with your peer youth leaders and your adult ally with questions like these:
 - *Were students engaged? Did anyone seem on the margins? What can we do to improve connectedness and collaboration in the future?*
 - *Did students generally gain new facts, ideas, perspectives, or connections? How do we know?*
 - *If we had the opportunity to do this activity again, how would we do it differently? Why?*
 - *How can/should the preparation process be strengthened for next time, if applicable?*
 - *What next directions are important to go in for the group? Why?*

Different Approaches to Leading Discussions or Reflection Circles

- Use small groups, then share out.
- Let students write out their thoughts first in a free-write, and/or have them draw and brainstorm their ideas about questions/topics/issues.
- Use post-its: People write their ideas, put them in the middle, then you talk through them.
- Give a goal during the discussion, such as trying to all be really good listeners, letting the quietest people talk first, or trying to generate at least 10 ideas as a team.
- Discussion and reflection questions should be open-ended (not yes/no questions). They could begin like this:
 - Why do you think...
 - How would you explain...
 - What is the meaning of...
 - What is the importance of...
 - What is similar/different between...
 - What is meant by the quote...
 - What is the cause of...
 - How can we respond positively to...
 - What ideas do you have to...
 - What might people who think differently say about this?
- Remember, the goal of discussions is to reach more understanding of the topic and of each other, and to cultivate a safe space for people to share and learn. The goal is NOT to be right! Cultivate these values within the group.

Ice Breakers

Funny Faces

Note: This activity is particularly good for a group with mixed English-language levels.

Everyone gets one sheet of paper and any type of writing/drawing utensil (pen, pencil, crayon, marker – whatever each student wants. The more random, the better!).

Each person writes her or his name small in the top corner. Everyone should get in a circle. Sitting down works best. It'd also be helpful if everyone had something hard to draw on, like a desk or a notebook.

Once everyone is in a circle with their piece of paper with their name on it, everyone passes their paper to the left.

Tell everyone to look at whose paper they have. Draw the outline of that person's head on their paper. Pass the paper left again.

Tell everyone to look at whose paper they have. Draw that person's hair. Pass the paper left again.

Continue this pattern, having everyone draw one body part at a time of the person whose paper they have each round. Continue this until all facial features have been completed. Ask people if you forgot anything, or you can ask each round which part they want to do next. Some will include the following:

Ears, eyes, nose, mouth, extra marks.

Afterward, everyone should give the paper back to its original owner. Ask what this activity could represent for the group, or why they liked it (for example, it's cool because they worked together to make a picture for each of them).

To end, ask everyone to write three words that describes them. Go around and have everyone share out, explaining at least one of their words in more detail.

Concentric Circles

Students divide into two equal groups. They get into two circles: one inner and one outer, with the inner circle facing out and the outer circle facing in. Each student pairs up with another student (one on the inside paired with one on the outside). Tell them you'll ask a question, then each student should talk for a set amount of time (you decide – this is usually about 1 minute, depending on the question). You can always rotate circles to talk with new people, too.

Questions can be anything like the following:

- What's your favorite thing to do outside of school? Why?
- Do you think you're shy or outgoing? Explain.
- Describe your perfect dinner.
- What would you do with a million dollars?
- What's one thing you're good at?
- What brought you here today? Why'd you come?
- What do you hope to get from being here?

Yarn Web Icebreaker

Stand in a circle. The first person holds onto a ball of yarn. They share one attribute or statement with the group. Everyone who relates to this attribute raises their hand and the individual holding the yarn picks one of them to throw the ball of yarn too while holding the end of the string. This continues throughout the exercise as everyone follows what the first person did until everyone is holding the string which will form a web. The web represents how we are all interconnected by commonalities and experiences and allows for members of the group to learn more about each other. This always serves as a nice closing exercise at retreats.

Starburst Activity

Pass around a bag of starbursts without any instructions. Students should simply think they are getting a treat! Once everyone has taken a couple, then the facilitator can explain that, for every starburst taken, a student will have to share something about them, depending on the color:

Red: Favorite childhood memory

Pink: Favorite recent memory

Yellow: Unusual Talent

Orange: A life goal

