



Experiential and Improvisational Activities to invite the stranger

Come to the center if...

This is an excellent large group opening activity to relax a group and establish a fun atmosphere. It is great for a retreat or multi-day event where there are many people who do not know each other. It shows the diversity within the unity of the group, illuminates shared experiences and perspectives, and gives the group members an opportunity to learn something about each other in a non-threatening, kinesthetic manner. Plus you can do it outside if the weather is nice! This exercise can be done in 10-15 minutes.

1. Have participants stand in a large circle with an unencumbered view of each other.
2. The facilitator stands to the side and calls out some distinguishing characteristics. If this characteristic applies to a person, he or she comes to the center of the room, acknowledges their "peer" group, and returns to the edge of the circle. Some examples of things to call out are, "Come to the center of the circle if you..."
 - Were born in this city
 - Moved here in the last year
 - Have a child(ren) in school
 - Have ever been in a car accident
 - Have participated in some kind of stage performance
 - Have a college education or higher
3. The facilitator can ask questions that are designed to have only a very few respondents, such as "shop at consignment stores" or "have a developmentally disabled relative" or everyone in the group, such as "have a mother."
4. You can ask questions that illuminate the theme you are gathering around, for example for environmental or sustainability related gatherings, such as come to the center of the circle if you:
 - Carpool
 - Bike commute
 - Have an organic garden
 - Keep bees
5. Toward the end, the facilitator can open the floor to anyone in the group who wants to call out a category.
6. You can deepen the experience of the group by asking riskier questions as the group progresses and asking debrief questions such as:
 - What did it feel like to be on the outside of the circle?
 - What surprised you?
 - How do our identities connect us; how do they separate us?



Experiential and Improvisational Activities to invite the stranger

Walk Into the Circle

This is a group activity that breaks the ice and introduces people's names, making them easier to remember by attaching a physical movement to the name.

1. Everyone stands in a circle.
2. The facilitator begins by walking into the center of the circle modeling a particular walk. It can be funny, straightforward, whatever.
3. When the facilitator gets to the center, s/he looks around the circle and says, "Hi, my name is ____." Then s/he walks with the particular walk back to his/her place in the circle.
4. Everyone else in the circle then walks to the center of the circle mimicking that person's walk, turns to the person and says, "Hi, ____." They then return to their places in the circle.
5. One by one, moving around the circle, participants repeat the process until everyone has introduced themselves.

Yes, and...

This theater improv/story telling game sets the tone for positive brainstorming in a group, and also puts people into the posture of accepting an offer from someone, and building on it. The idea is for people to accept the reality offered in the story, so the group weaves a magical reality together.

1. Get into small groups of five to six people.
2. One person begins to tell a story...any story.
3. After two or three lines, the first person stops and the next person picks up with the words, "Yes, and..." They add a few lines to the story and then pass it on to the next person, continuing until the last person concludes the story in some relevant way.
4. After practicing in small groups, you can come together in a large circle and pass one story around the entire circle.
5. You can also have the, "Yes, and..." championships where groups come to the front and demonstrate their story telling ability against another team.



Experiential and Improvisational **Activities to invite the stranger**

What are you doing?

This theater/improv game sets the tone for accepting someone's offering and building on it, being creative in the moment, and using motions. The idea is to get people to listen to each other and accept what they say, even though their body is doing something different!

1. Get into small groups of five to six people.
2. Someone starts by doing a motion that is fairly obvious, such as putting on mascara.
3. The person next to them asks, "What are you doing?"
4. The first person explains they are doing something entirely different from the motion, such as, "I'm mowing the lawn."
5. The second person then starts the motion of mowing the lawn, and the third person asks, "What are you doing?" That person says they are doing something else, such as, "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas."
6. Continue around the circle, with each person doing the motion the other person has said, but then offering up an action that is different than what is being said.

This Could Also Be...

This improv/theater game is an excellent warm up to brainstorming, or thinking creatively about several possible solutions to problems.

1. Get into small groups of five to six people.
2. The leader takes a prop and demonstrates how it can be used. For example, a bright scarf can be used as a skirt, a veil, a towel for wrapping wet hair, a noose, etc. The leader does this action, until the second person jumps in.
3. The second person says, "This could also be..." and demonstrates a new use of the same prop.
4. Continue around the circle until the prop's uses are exhausted, then get another one!