

saint mary's press

Community- Building Ideas

for ministry with young teens

H E L P

Heads-up | Easy | Low-Cost | Purposeful

Marilyn Kielbasa

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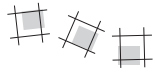
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Contents

Introduction 7

Part A: Forming Small Groups

It's a Match	15	Cereal Box Puzzles	35
Comic Strip Capers	20	Lego Puzzler	37
It's in the Cards	22	Preferences Name Tags	39
Shoe Search	25	Release Me Relay	42
Let's Make a Sandwich	27	A Baker's Dozen Short Groupers	44
Phrase Match	30	Fifty Ways to Choose a Leader	48
Word Clumps	33		

Part B: Gathering and Mingling

Me Too!	53	Name-Tag Autographs	71
On a Typical Day	56	Things in Common	73
People Bingo	59	ID Cup	75
Junk Mixer	62	Number, Please	77
The Week in Review	64	Expectations Autographs	80
In-Place Scavenger Hunt	66	Crazy Crossing	83
Collage Name Tags	69	Short Activities for Waiting Times	85

Part C: Getting to Know One Another

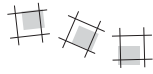
Skittles Starters	95	Dominoes Admissions	114
The Doors of Our Lives	98	Shed a Little Light	117
Blessing Banners	101	Who's Your Neighbor?	120
Suits Me!	103	Sharing Board Game	122
I Am More Like . . .	105	Four Corners	124
Pass the Basket	108	Four Sharing Formats	128

Part D: Building Teams

Blind Lineup	135	Look Very Closely	156
Human Sculptures	138	Stand in the Square	158
Over the Wall	141	Connect the Dots	161
Spaghetti Towers	144	Swamp Crossing	164
Jesus Jingles	147	Climbing the Walls	167
Yert Circle	150	Five More Team Builders	170
Group Juggling	153		

Part E: Affirming One Another

Bag of Goodies	175	You're Respect-a-Ball!	186
Balloon Affirmations	177	Spin the Compliment	188
First Corinthians Affirmations	180	Acrostic Affirmations	190
I Give You This Gift	182	A Pat on the Back	192
Compliment Contest	184	Alphabetical Affirmations	194
Appendix 1: Connections to the Discovering Program by HELP Strategy			196
Appendix 2:			
Connections to the Discovering Program by Discovering Course			200



Introduction

Community-Building Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens is one of seven books in the HELP series—a collection of **H**eads-up, **E**asy, **L**ow-Cost, and **P**urposeful activities for young adolescents. These strategies are designed to be used as part of a comprehensive youth ministry program for grades six to eight. The strategies can stand alone or complement a religious education curriculum.

The other books in the HELP series are as follows:

- ☉ *Family Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Hands-on Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Holiday and Seasonal Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Justice and Service Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Prayer Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*
- ☉ *Retreat Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens*

These books are helpful resources for anyone who works with young adolescents in a church or school setting. They can provide a strong foundation for a year-round, total youth ministry program whose goal is to evangelize young adolescents and support them in their faith journey.

Overview of This Book

Community-Building Ideas for Ministry with Young Teens may be used by a coordinator of youth ministry, a director of religious education, catechists, teachers, a parish youth ministry team, or any adult who works with young teens. Ownership of the book includes permission to duplicate any part of it for use with program participants.

The book's strategies are organized into five sections:

- ⊙ **Part A: Forming Small Groups** includes strategies to break down a large group into pairs or smaller groups in ways that are fun, objective, and non-threatening.
- ⊙ **Part B: Gathering and Mingling** includes strategies to help young people learn one another's names and find out basic information about one another. This section also offers activities for teens to do alone or with one another during waiting times, such as before a session begins, during a break, or while waiting for meals on a retreat.
- ⊙ **Part C: Getting to Know One Another** includes methods for taking a conversation between young teens to a deeper level, while preserving their need for boundaries and emotional safety.
- ⊙ **Part D: Building Teams** provides outlines for several simulation games, process questions for follow-up discussion, and scriptural connections to help the young people see themselves and their peers connected to one another and to a faith community in a broader context through the Scriptures.
- ⊙ **Part E: Affirming One Another** is a collection of strategies for building up the fragile self-images that often accompany the early-adolescent years. The activities also help young teens acquire the skill of giving compliments and encouragement to their peers.

Format of the Strategies

Each strategy begins with a brief description of its purpose. The next element is a suggested time for the activity. This is flexible and takes into account several variables, such as the size of the group, the comfort level of the participants, and whether you want to include a break. Use the suggested time as a starting point and modify it according to your circumstances. It is a good idea to include time for a break within the longer strategies.

Next is a description of the size of the group that the strategy was written for. Most of the strategies work with a range of group sizes. If your group is large, you may have to create smaller groups to conduct some of the activities, especially those outlined in part D on team building. Be sure to recruit enough adults to help with logistics and supervision. A good rule to follow is that for every six to eight young teens, one adult should be present.

In some strategies a section on special considerations follows the one on group size. It includes things such as cautions to pay special attention to a particular developmental issue of early adolescence.

A complete checklist of materials needed is the next part of the presentation of the strategy; this section is omitted if no materials are needed. A detailed description of the strategy's procedure is then provided, followed by alternative approaches. Those alternatives may be helpful in adapting the strategy to the needs of your group.

The strategies in part D and a few strategies in other parts of the book include a list of scriptural passages that may be used with the strategy, for reflection or prayer. The list is not exhaustive; a Bible concordance will provide additional citations if you want to add a more substantial scriptural component to a strategy.

The final element in each strategy offers space for keeping notes about how you might want to use the strategy in the future or change it to fit the needs of your group.

Programming Ideas

The strategies in this book can be used in a variety of ways. Consider the following suggestions:

- ⊙ The program coordinator, catechists, teachers, and coordinator of youth ministry may collaborate to plan youth meetings and special activities that use strategies from this and other books in the HELP series.
- ⊙ Schoolteachers may use ideas from this and other books in the HELP series to supplement their day-to-day curriculum.
- ⊙ Many of the strategies in the HELP series can be adapted for use with multi-generational groups.

Standard Materials

Many of the items in the materials checklists are common to several strategies in the series. To save time consider gathering frequently used materials in convenient bins and storing those bins in a place that is accessible to all staff and volunteer leaders. Some recommendations for how to organize such bins follow.

Supply Bin

The following items frequently appear in materials checklists:

- ⊙ Bibles, at least one for every two participants
- ⊙ masking tape
- ⊙ cellophane tape
- ⊙ washable and permanent markers (thick and thin)
- ⊙ pens or pencils
- ⊙ self-stick notes
- ⊙ scissors
- ⊙ newsprint
- ⊙ blank paper, scrap paper, and notebook paper
- ⊙ postcards
- ⊙ notepaper
- ⊙ envelopes

- ☉ baskets
- ☉ candles and matches
- ☉ items to create a prayer space (e.g., a colored cloth, a cross, a bowl of water, and a vase for flowers)

Craft Bin

Many of the strategies use craft activities to involve the young people. Consider collecting the following supplies in a separate bin:

- ☉ construction paper
- ☉ yarn and string, in assorted colors
- ☉ poster board
- ☉ glue and glue sticks
- ☉ fabric paints
- ☉ glitter and confetti
- ☉ used greeting cards
- ☉ beads
- ☉ modeling clay
- ☉ paintbrushes and paints
- ☉ crayons
- ☉ used magazines and newspapers
- ☉ hole punches
- ☉ scissors
- ☉ stickers of various kinds
- ☉ index cards
- ☉ gift wrap and ribbon

Music Bin

Young people often find deep and profound meaning in the music and lyrics of songs, both past and present. Also, the right music can set an appropriate mood for a prayer or activity. Begin with a small collection of tapes or CDs in a music bin and add to it over time. You might ask the young people to put some of their favorite music in the bin. The bin might include the following styles of music:

- ☉ *Fun gathering music that is neither current nor popular with young teens.* Ideas are well-known classics (e.g., *Overture to William Tell*, *Stars and Stripes Forever*, and *1812 Overture*), songs from musical theater productions, children's songs, and Christmas songs for use any time of the year.
- ☉ *Prayerful, reflective instrumental music, such as the kind that is available in the adult alternative, or New Age, section of music stores.* Labels that specialize in this type of music include Windham Hill and Narada.
- ☉ *Popular songs with powerful messages.* If you are not well versed in popular music, ask the young people to offer suggestions.

- © *The music of contemporary Christian artists.* Most young teens are familiar with Amy Grant, Michael W. Smith, and Steven Curtis Chapman. Also include the work of Catholic musicians, such as David W. Kauffman, Steve Angrisano, Bruce Deaton, Sarah Hart, Jesse Manibusan, and Jessica Alles.

Other Helpful Resources

In addition to the seven books in the HELP series, the following resources can be useful in your ministry with young adolescents.

For Team Building

Building Community in Youth Groups, by Denny Rydberg. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1985.

Do It! by Thom Schultz and Joani Schultz. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1989.

Youth Group Trust Builders, by Denny Rydberg. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1993.

From Saint Mary's Press

All the books in the following list are published by Saint Mary's Press and can be obtained by calling or writing us at the phone number and address listed in the "Your Comments or Suggestions" section at the end of this introduction.

Catechism Connection for Teens series, by Lisa Calderone-Stewart and Ed Kunzman (1999).

That First Kiss and Other Stories

My Wish List and Other Stories

Better Than Natural and Other Stories

Straight from the Heart and Other Stories

Meeting Frankenstein and Other Stories

The five books in this collection contain short, engaging stories for teens on the joys and struggles of adolescent life, each story with a reflection connecting it to a Catholic Christian belief. Each book's faith connections reflect teachings from a different part of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

The Catholic Youth Bible, edited by Brian Singer-Towns (2000). The most youth-friendly Bible for Catholic teens available. The scriptural text is accompanied by hundreds of articles to help young people pray, study, and live the Scriptures.

Faith Works for Junior High: Scripture- and Tradition-Based Sessions for Faith Formation, by Lisa-Marie Calderone-Stewart (1993). A series of twelve active meeting plans on various topics related to the Scriptures and church life.

Guided Meditations for Junior High: Good Judgment, Gifts, Obedience, Inner Blindness, by Jane E. Ayer (1997). Four guided meditations for young teens, available on audiocassette or compact disc. A leader's guide includes the

script and programmatic options. Other volumes in this series, called *A Quiet Place Apart*, will also work with young teens.

Looking Past the Sky: Prayers by Young Teens, edited by Marilyn Kielbasa (1999).

A collection of 274 prayers by and for young adolescents in grades six to eight.

One-Day Retreats for Junior High Youth, by Geri Braden-Whartenby and Joan Finn Connelly (1997). Six retreats that each fit into a school day or an afternoon or evening program. Each retreat contains a variety of icebreakers, prayers, group exercises, affirmations, and guided meditations.

Prayers with Pizzazz for Junior High Teens, by Judi Lanciotti (1996). A variety of creative prayer experiences that grab young teens' attention. The prayers are useful in many different settings, such as classes, meetings, prayer services, and retreats.

ScriptureWalk Junior High: Bible Themes, by Maryann Hakowski (1999). Eight 90-minute sessions to help bring youth and the Bible together. Each session applies biblical themes to the life issues that concern young teens.

Connections to the Discovering Program

The Discovering Program, published by Saint Mary's Press, is a religious education program for young people in grades six to eight. It consists of fourteen six-session minicourses. Each session is 1 hour long and based on the principles of active learning.

The strategies in the HELP series cover themes that are loosely connected to those explored in the Discovering Program, and can be used as part of a total youth ministry program in which the Discovering curriculum is the central catechetical component. However, no strategy in the series presumes that the participants have taken a particular course in the Discovering Program, or requires that they do so. The appendices at the end of this book list the connections between the HELP strategies and the Discovering courses.

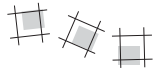
Your Comments or Suggestions

Saint Mary's Press wants to know your reactions to the strategies in the HELP series. We are also interested in new youth ministry strategies for use with young teens. If you have a comment or suggestion, please write the series editor, Marilyn Kielbasa, at 702 Terrace Heights, Winona, MN 55987-1320; call the editor at our toll-free number, 800-533-8095; or e-mail the editor at mkielbasa@smp.org. Your ideas will help improve future editions of these books.

Part A

Forming Small Groups

The strategies in part A can be used to divide a large group of young people into smaller groups. Such activities are often called groupers. Using groupers can help build community because many of them direct the participants to mix with people outside of their regular group of friends. Grouping activities also preserve the emotional safety in a group of young teens by allowing the small groups to form objectively rather than by personal choices based on popularity.



It's a Match

OVERVIEW

This grouping activity randomly creates pairs by assigning everyone half of a famous duo, fictional or historical, and directing them to find someone holding the match to their person.

Suggested Time

About 10 minutes, depending on the size of the group

Group Size

This strategy can be done with any size group.

Materials Needed

- ☀ one copy of resource 1, "Famous Pairs," cut apart as scored
- ☀ a scissors
- ☀ a bowl or a bag

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Resource 1 provides thirty famous pairs that are likely to be known by young people. Select the pairs that you would like to use and mix up those name slips in a bowl or a bag. Set aside the rest for future use. If you have more than sixty young people, think of other famous pairs that are popular with them and write name slips for each of those people or characters. You might use the names of characters on television shows that the young people watch, local personalities, or characters from popular video games.

Let the young people each draw a name slip from the bowl or the bag of slips that you prepared. If you have an odd number of participants, ask one adult leader to take part in the activity. When everyone has a name, explain the process as follows:

- ⎵ ⎵ When I give a signal, start looking for the match to your famous person or fictional character. For example, if the name on your slip of paper is Adam,
- • you should look for Eve. If you have Mickey Mouse, you should look for Minnie Mouse.

When you find your partner, sit down with that person and wait for the next instructions.

When you are sure that the young people understand the task, give a signal to start. You may need to help some people figure out who their match is.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ⊗ If you have a large group and suspect that the process might take a while, give a common task to each pair as soon as they find each other. You might give them a puzzle to do, such as one of those found in part B of this book. An immediate task can reduce feelings of discomfort between people who do not know each other.
- ⊗ Use this strategy as a focusing activity for a biblical lesson by creating pairs of biblical characters. Use it as a focusing activity for a lesson on media by creating pairs of famous television partners.
- ⊗ Rather than forming pairs, form groups of three or four people by creating your own list of famous trios or quartets. Some examples follow: Peter, James, John; Donald Duck, Goofy, Pluto; Charlie Brown, Lucy, Linus, Snoopy; Teresa of Ávila, Joan of Arc, Elizabeth Seton, Frances Cabrini
- ⊗ Instead of giving each person a slip of paper with a name, write the names on self-stick name tags. Distribute the name tags when the young people arrive and direct them to wear the tags in a prominent location on their clothing for the opening activity.

- ☺ If you plan to distribute folders or books to everyone as part of the gathering, tape a name in an unobtrusive place in each folder or book before the session. When it is time for the grouping activity, direct the young people where to look for their person or character. You might also tape the names underneath chairs ahead of time.

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.

(This strategy is adapted from *More Attention Grabbers for Fourth–Sixth Graders*, by David Lynn, p. 21.)

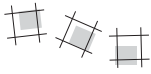
Famous Pairs



Kermit the Frog	Pat Sajak	Adam
Miss Piggy	Vanna White	Eve
Bert	Batman	David
Ernie	Robin	Goliath
Dorothy	Charlie Brown	Elmer Fudd
Toto	Lucy Van Pelt	Bugs Bunny
Winnie the Pooh	Snoopy	Garfield
Tigger	Woodstock	Odie
Piglet	Mickey Mouse	Abraham
Eeyore	Minnie Mouse	Sarah



Lucille Ball	Barbie	Fred Flintstone
Desi Arnaz	Ken	Wilma
Quasimodo	Romeo	Pocahontas
Esmerelda	Juliet	John Smith
Paul	Jack	Sylvester
Barnabas	Jill	Tweety
Ariel	Scarecrow	Harry Potter
Prince Eric	Tinman	Ron Weasley
Mary	Buzz Lightyear	Simba
Joseph	Woody	Nala



Comic Strip Capers

OVERVIEW

The young people form small groups by finding other people who have complementary panels of a comic strip.

Suggested Time

About 10 minutes, depending on the size of the group

Group Size

This strategy works best with groups larger than ten people.

Materials Needed

- ☀ several comic strips from newspapers, with the panels cut apart, one panel for each person
- ☀ a scissors
- ☀ paper clips
- ☀ cellophane tape, one roll for each small group (optional)

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Gather a variety of comic strips from newspapers. Cut apart the panels of each strip and clip them together. Separate the strips into piles, according to the number of panels in each. Most daily strips have two to four panels; Sunday strips often have more. Keep in mind that the number of panels will determine the size of the small groups that are formed when you do this activity. So, for example, if you want three-person groups, use three-panel comic strips.

1. Get an accurate count of the young people as they arrive, and decide which of the comic strips that you prepared will be used to create the groups. For example, if you have twenty-six participants, you may want to use five four-panel strips and two three-panel strips.

2. Unclip the comic strip panels that you have decided to use, mix them up, and distribute them randomly among the participants. Tell the young people that their task is to find the other people whose panels, when combined with theirs, complete a comic strip. When they have accomplished the task, direct them to sit down with their small-group members and wait until all the strips are complete.

You might give each small group a roll of cellophane tape and tell the group members to tape their strip together. The re-formed strip can be used to label a group task; for example, if the groups' next task is to create a newsprint list, they could each tape their strip to their work. Or for the remainder of the meeting, you could refer to the groups by their comic strip's name.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

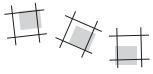
☉ To make the task more difficult, use different installments of the same comic strip. For example, cut up the panels from different "Hi and Lois" strips and tell the participants to find the panels that go with their piece. This alternative works especially well with smaller groups, where the task of finding complementary panels of different comic strips may not be challenging enough to be fun.

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.



(This strategy is adapted from *More Attention Grabbers for Fourth–Sixth Graders*, by David Lynn, pp. 25–26.)



It's in the Cards

OVERVIEW

This strategy uses playing cards to form groups of any number of sizes.

Suggested Time

About 5 minutes, depending on the size of the group

Group Size

This grouper works best with groups of eight or more participants. If you have more than fifty-two participants, use a second deck of cards.

Materials Needed

- ☀ a deck of playing cards
- ☀ double-stick tape (optional)

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Count out enough playing cards so that each participant gets a card that fits into a grouping sequence. For example, if you have twenty participants and you want groups of four, you could use all the cards from ace through five.

1. As the young people arrive, give each of them a playing card and tell them to keep it in a safe place. You may want to have them attach the card to their clothing with double-stick tape.

2. Choose one of the following methods to direct the participants into small groups:

- ⊙ Tell everyone to gather with people holding cards of the same suit as their card. You can limit the number in a group by saying something like, "Form groups of five by gathering with four other people whose cards are in the same suit as yours."
- ⊙ Have everyone gather with people holding cards of the same number or figure (jack, queen, or king) as their card. If you are using only one deck of cards or a partial deck, this method will result in groups of four or fewer.
- ⊙ Before the session put together a deck of cards with one or more examples of a common poker hand. For example, if you have twenty participants and you would like them to form four groups of five, you might create a deck of cards with four straights (five-card sequences), straight flushes (five-card sequences in the same suit), or full houses (two of a kind and three of a kind). After distributing the cards, call out the hand you have chosen, and tell the young people to gather with others to create that combination.
- ⊙ Gather the participants according to odd numbered, even numbered, or face cards.
- ⊙ Form pairs by having the young people find a matching number or figure.
- ⊙ Create groups with numbers that add up to a designated number. If you are using face cards, count them as ten points. For example, you might tell the young people to form groups by finding people whose cards, along with their own, add up to twenty-five. A group might consist of five people holding a five, a two, a nine, a six, and a three. If you use this method, the number of participants in each group will vary.

**ALTERNATIVE
APPROACHES**

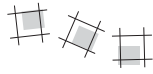
- ☉ Use the playing cards as name tags. Write each person's name in big, bold letters on a separate playing card so that it is easy to read. Attach a safety pin or double-stick tape to the back of the card.
- ☉ Once the groups are formed, use the playing card mixer "Number, Please" from part B of this manual, or "Suits Me!" from part C.

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.



(This strategy is adapted from *Attention Grabbers for Fourth–Sixth Graders*, by David Lynn, pp. 26–27.)



Shoe Search

OVERVIEW

This strategy has the young people form groups by finding their shoes in piles of shoes that you have created randomly, and joining with others whose shoes were in the same pile.

Suggested Time

About 5 minutes, depending on the size of the group

Group Size

This activity works best with between ten and forty people.

Special Considerations

Young teens are frequently self-conscious about their body. This grouper might be uncomfortable for some of them because it involves revealing a part of the body that may be a source of embarrassment. For example, some young people may be embarrassed by foot odor; others may be reluctant to reveal holes in their socks or socks that do not match. It is best to use this grouper with people who know one another well or are comfortable enough with one another that they will not experience a high degree of anxiety.

PROCEDURE

1. Gather the young people in a circle. Ask them to remove their right shoe and put it in the center of the circle.

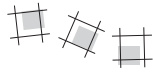
2. When everyone has done this, randomly choose the same number of shoes as you want people in a small group. Display the shoes to the group, and put them in the area in which the small group will meet. Do this for each group of shoes.

3. When you have finished dividing the shoes, tell the young people to go to the area where their shoe is located. They may then put on their shoe.

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.





Let's Make a Sandwich

OVERVIEW

The young people form groups by gathering with other people to make a "sandwich."

Suggested Time

About 5 minutes, depending on the size of the group

Group Size

This grouper works best with a minimum of twelve people.

Materials Needed

- ☀ a copy or copies of resource 2, "Sandwich Ingredients," cut apart as scored
- ☀ a scissors
- ☀ newsprint and markers
- ☀ masking tape

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Decide how many people you want in each group and for each group cut out a set of ingredients from resource 2, using only as many ingredients as group members. For example, if you want six people in each group, eliminate two ingredients. Cut out a few extra ingredients so that you have some flexibility in forming groups if needed.

List on a sheet of newsprint the ingredients that you have chosen to make up a sandwich. Post the newsprint and cover it until it is needed.

1. Randomly distribute the ingredient slips, one to each person. If the group does not divide evenly by the number you have chosen for the group size, use as many of the extra ingredient slips as you need to make sure that everyone has one.

2. Display the newsprint list of ingredients that you created before the session. Direct the young teens to make a sandwich by gathering with other people who have complementary ingredients.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ⊙ Form groups by making pizzas, banana splits, tacos, or another teen favorite. Create a master list such as the one in resource 2.
- ⊙ If you plan to distribute folders or books to everyone as part of the gathering, tape a sandwich ingredient in an unobtrusive place in each folder or book before the session. When it is time for the grouping activity, direct the young people where to look for their ingredient. You might also tape the ingredients underneath chairs ahead of time.
- ⊙ Form pairs or groups of two or three by using food combinations such as peanut butter and jelly; bacon, lettuce, and tomato; or spaghetti and meatballs.
- ⊙ If you are using this grouper in a format where you will be providing a meal or a snack, provide food that corresponds to the item the groups create. For example, provide the ingredients for sandwiches or tacos, order pizzas, or create the "world's longest banana split."

For the banana split, have on hand the necessary ingredients and a section of rain gutter purchased at a building supply store to serve as the dish. Be sure to wash out the gutter with hot water before using it. Let everyone participate in creating the ice cream concoction.

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.

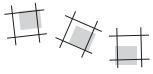


Sandwich Ingredients



bread	bread	bread
ham	ham	ham
cheese	cheese	cheese
lettuce	lettuce	lettuce
tomato	tomato	tomato
mustard	mustard	mustard
mayonnaise	mayonnaise	mayonnaise
pickle	pickle	pickle

bread	bread	bread
ham	ham	ham
cheese	cheese	cheese
lettuce	lettuce	lettuce
tomato	tomato	tomato
mustard	mustard	mustard
mayonnaise	mayonnaise	mayonnaise
pickle	pickle	pickle



Phrase Match

OVERVIEW

The participants form groups by reconstructing a popular saying, song title, or scriptural verse.

Suggested Time

About 10 minutes, depending on the size of the group

Group Size

This strategy works best with groups of ten or more.

Materials Needed

- ☀ slips of paper, one for each person
- ☀ a pen
- ☀ small prizes (optional)
- ☀ cellophane tape (optional)

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Brainstorm popular sayings, song titles, or scriptural verses, as many as the number of small groups you want to form. You may want to tailor these to the content of what follows in your session (several examples follow). Divide each saying, song title, or verse into words and phrases equal to the number of people you want in each group. Write each word or phrase on a separate slip of paper (if you use any from the list below, do not include the bracketed note after each); clip together the pieces of each saying, song, or verse; and label each batch of slips with the number of slips in it. This will enable you to determine later which combination of sayings and verses to use in order to be sure everyone gets a slip. You may want to make up a few more sets than you think you will need, in a variety of sizes, to accommodate any number of participants.

For a session on friendship

- ⊙ "A friend in need is a friend indeed" [English proverb].
- ⊙ "Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful" [1 Cor. 13:4].
- ⊙ "Love one another as I have loved you" [John 15:12].
- ⊙ "The only way to have a friend is to be one" [Ralph Waldo Emerson].

For a class on the Eucharist

- ⊙ "Do this in memory of me."
- ⊙ "I am the bread of life" [John 6:35].
- ⊙ "He had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread" [Luke 24:35].
- ⊙ "This is my body. This is my blood."

For a meeting during Advent

- ⊙ "Prepare the way of the Lord, / make his paths straight" [Matt. 3:3].
- ⊙ "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" [song title]
- ⊙ "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you" [Luke 1:28, NAB].
- ⊙ "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness" [Matt. 3:3].

1. Determine the number of people participating and select which sets of paper slips you will use so that each person gets one slip. Randomly distribute the slips of paper, one to each participant. Tell the young people to find the other people who hold words or phrases that when combined with theirs make up a familiar saying, song title, or Scripture verse. Explain that when they think they have found everyone in their group, the group members should put the slips in order and read the saying or verse aloud together. You may want to award small prizes for the first group to complete the task.

2. If you like, direct the groups to tape together the pieces of their saying or verse and post it near their small-group meeting space.

**ALTERNATIVE
APPROACHES**

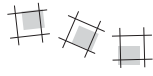
- ⊙ If you have a large group, it might be helpful to write all the sayings on a sheet of newsprint so that the participants have a clue about what words or phrases they are looking for.
- ⊙ Before the session assign each participant to a particular group, write a name tag for each person, and separate the name tags into the groups you have assigned. Then, using a different saying, song, or verse for each group, write a word or phrase on each person's name tag. This way when you distribute the name tags and tell everyone to search for the other words and phrases that go with their slip, they will form the groups that you planned on.
- ⊙ Use all songs titles or all lyrics. If you use lyrics, instruct the participants to form a group by reconstructing the song and singing it together.

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.



(This strategy is adapted from *Attention Grabbers for Fourth–Sixth Graders*, by David Lynn, pp. 23–24.)



Word Clumps

OVERVIEW

The young people are each assigned a letter, and then they form groups by forming words. This activity can be used several times in a meeting to mix and remix the participants.

Suggested Time

About 5 minutes, depending on the size of the group. However, this activity could take longer if you use it as a mixer and do it several times.

Group Size

This activity works best with a large group.

Materials Needed

- ☀ 3-by-5-inch index cards
- ☀ markers

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Write one letter of the alphabet on an index card for each person. You may repeat letters—especially vowels—and you may avoid less frequently used letters such as *H, K, J, Q, W, X,* and *Z*. Be sure that the cards you end up with have enough flexibility to construct a variety of words. You might want to consult a Scrabble game for hints on frequency of letters.

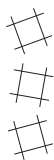
1. Give each participant one of the index cards you prepared. Explain to everyone that you will announce a number and they are to form words made up of the same number of letters as the number you call out. You may want to set some guidelines, such as no proper names and no foreign words.
2. Begin by calling out a relatively low number, such as four or five, and give a signal to start. When the participants form a word, they are to shout it out together and sit down. You are likely to have some young people left over after the words have been formed. Have them form a group by themselves.
3. To use this activity as a mixer, go through the same process as often as time allows, changing the number each time (use higher numbers for more of a challenge). You may want to give the first groups to form a short question to answer while they are waiting for everyone else to form words. If the group members do not know one another, this would be a good time to share names, schools, grade levels, hobbies, and so forth.

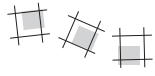
ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ☉ If you have a large group, hold up a large, bold number card corresponding to the number you call out. This will help those who may not be able to hear you.
- ☉ Attach a seasonal or a learning connotation to the activity. For example, challenge the participants to form words that have to do with Easter or the Scriptures, or have them form the names of saints.
- ☉ To further develop this strategy as a community builder, challenge the entire group to create a giant crossword puzzle, somewhat like the word game Scrabble, by arranging their small-group words in intersecting horizontal and vertical lines. This can be done by laying the index card letters on the floor, or by having the young people line up with their letter.

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.





Cereal Box Puzzles

OVERVIEW

The young teens create groups by putting together puzzles created from the fronts of empty cereal boxes.

Suggested Time

About 5 minutes, depending on the size of the group

Group Size

This strategy works well with at least fifteen people.

Materials Needed

- ☀ several empty cereal boxes, one for each small group and a few extras
- ☀ a scissors
- ☀ large paper clips
- ☀ cellophane tape or masking tape, one roll for each small group
- ☀ blank self-stick name tags, one for each person
- ☀ markers, one for each person

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Decide what size you want the small groups to be. Divide the expected number of participants by the ideal size of the small groups and round up. That is the number of different cereal boxes you will need, plus a few extra boxes if you might have more participants. Cut up the fronts of the cereal boxes into the same number of pieces as your ideal group size, and clip together the pieces from each box.

1. When you know how many participants you have, select enough puzzles so that each person can receive one piece. Mix up the pieces of those puzzles and randomly distribute one to each person. (If you have pieces left over, hang on to them until later.) Explain to the participants that their task is to reconstruct the front of a cereal box by finding the other people who have pieces to the same front.

2. As the groups form, give each one a roll of cellophane tape or masking tape, and enough name tags and markers for everyone in the group. Direct the groups to tape together their box front. If you are holding extra puzzle pieces, distribute them so that every group can complete its puzzle. Then have everyone make and put on a name tag with their first name, the name of their group's cereal, and their last name, such as Maria Cheerios Baxter or William Fruit Loops Collano.

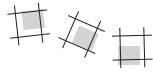
ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ⊙ To make the task more difficult, use the same type of cereal box for everyone, but be sure to vary how you cut out each box front. If you use this option, eliminate the name tags or give out premade ones as people arrive. This is a good alternative to use if you are forming pairs or triads and cutting each box front into only two or three pieces.
- ⊙ Another way to make the task more difficult: For each box front, cut out a mystery piece, that is, a piece that does not look like the others. You might use a piece that shows only the brand name, or a corner, and so forth.
- ⊙ Use something besides cereal boxes to create the puzzles. You may want to tie the puzzles into a theme. For example, use empty detergent boxes to tie in to a session about the sacrament of Reconciliation (also called Penance), old birthday cards to begin a lesson on using the gifts God gave to each of us, or magazine covers as part of a study of media.

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.





Lego Puzzler

OVERVIEW

The participants form groups by copying a structure you have created out of Lego blocks.

Suggested Time

About 10 minutes, depending on the size of the group and the size of the structure you create

Group Size

This strategy works best with groups of six through thirty.

Materials Needed

- ☀ a variety of Legos
- ☀ zipper sandwich bags, one for each person
- ☀ small prizes (optional)

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Create something out of Legos. The simpler the item is, the less time it will take for the small groups to reproduce it.

Decide how many small groups you will need. Make one pile of Legos for each small group. Each pile should contain exactly the same number and type of items you used in your Lego creation. It will simplify matters greatly if you use the same colors in each pile that you used in your creation. For example if you used three square black bricks, four rectangular red bricks, a blue single-line brick, and two wheels in your creation, you should put those same items in each pile.

Decide how many people will be in each small group. Divide the items in each pile by that number, place each smaller pile in a zipper sandwich bag, and seal the bag. Make sure you have one bag for each participant.

1. Distribute the bags of Legos among the participants. Show them your Lego creation and explain that their task is to find the people whose bag contains the pieces necessary to reproduce the structure. Let them know how many people are in each small group so they know when they have a complete set of pieces. Explain to the young people that when their small group is complete, they are to reproduce the Lego structure as quickly as possible, but they may come up and examine the model only one time, together.

2. When all the groups have finished, compare the results to the original model. You may want to award small prizes to the members of the group that finished first, the group that came closest to the original model, and so forth.

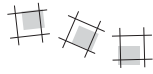
ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ⊙ This activity works equally well with toy-building materials other than Legos.
- ⊙ To use this activity as a team builder, create a bigger structure and give each participant more pieces. You may want to number the bags in a way that the young teens know which group they belong to. Or you can use a simple method of creating groups, even predefine them, and just give each team the necessary Legos. You might also increase the number of times they can examine the structure.
- ⊙ If you have a large group, construct several identical toy structures and place them around the room for reference. Again, you may want to number the bags in a way that tells the young teens which group they belong to.

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.





Preferences Name Tags

OVERVIEW

The young people identify certain preferences on their name tags. When it is time to form small groups, the participants gather with others who expressed the same preference in a category that the leader calls out. This strategy works best if you have several small-group activities planned and want to form different groups each time.

Suggested Time

About 10 minutes to make the name tag and 1 or 2 minutes more each time you form small groups

Group Size

This strategy works with any size group.

Materials Needed

- ☀ 4-by-6-inch or 5-by-8-inch index cards, one for each person
- ☀ a variety of markers
- ☀ newsprint
- ☀ masking tape
- ☀ pieces of double-stick tape, straight pins, or safety pins, one for each person

PROCEDURE

Preparation. Decide how many times you will regroup the participants, and how many small groups you will need. Then identify a category for each regrouping, and a set of items for each category. For example, if you will regroup four times and need six small groups, identify four categories with six items in each. You may select categories and items from the list below, modifying them as necessary to suit your needs, or create your own. Always include the item “other or none” for those who have no preference.

Next create a mockup of a name tag on newsprint, positioning the paper horizontally. In the middle write, “Name,” in large letters. Then write the categories and their items on separate sections of the newsprint. For example, if you have four categories, you might write each category and its items in a separate corner of the newsprint. Post the sample name tag in a prominent place.

Favorite Sesame Street character

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Bert | <input type="radio"/> Cookie Monster |
| <input type="radio"/> Ernie | <input type="radio"/> Elmo |
| <input type="radio"/> Big Bird | <input type="radio"/> other or none |
| <input type="radio"/> Oscar | |

Favorite childhood superhero

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Batman | <input type="radio"/> Power Rangers |
| <input type="radio"/> Batgirl | <input type="radio"/> Xena, the Warrior Princess |
| <input type="radio"/> Spiderman | <input type="radio"/> other or none |
| <input type="radio"/> Ninja Turtles | |

Favorite flavor of ice cream

- | | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> vanilla | <input type="radio"/> rocky road |
| <input type="radio"/> chocolate | <input type="radio"/> chocolate chip |
| <input type="radio"/> strawberry | <input type="radio"/> other or none |
| <input type="radio"/> cookie dough | |

Favorite sports team

[List college or professional teams that are popular in your area. Include a category that says something like, “not into sports.”]

Favorite candy

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Hershey’s bar | <input type="radio"/> Reese’s peanut butter cups |
| <input type="radio"/> Snickers | <input type="radio"/> Starburst |
| <input type="radio"/> Skittles | <input type="radio"/> other or none |

Favorite childhood cartoon or children’s show

[List cartoons and children’s shows that were popular in your area six or seven years ago. Include the category “other or none.”]