



UK Extension's
**Universe of
Possibilities™**

SKILLS FOR CREATING HAPPINESS AND BLESSING OTHERS

Group Activities

A few of the following 48 group activities appear in one or more of the UK EXTENSION'S UNIVERSE OF POSSIBILITIES™ publications or Teaching Outlines. However, the vast majority of this collection of activities is not part of the basic curriculum. Rather, it is an optional set of exercises and suggestions that you might wish to draw from and incorporate, depending upon your group, your goals, and your workshop structure and setting.

You will notice that a number of the suggested activities require participants to move around the room. While you could conduct some of these activities with group members remaining in their seats, we recommend that you get them up and moving, at least occasionally. Physical movement keeps us alert and actively involved in the learning process. Equally important, as we move around, we literally see things from different perspectives. In small but important ways, this helps us open our minds to new learning, and enables us to see life from fresh perspectives.

When the location of your workshop and the time of the year allow, consider holding portions of your workshop in a natural, outdoor setting. This adds texture to the workshop, varies the environment, and allows participants to enjoy the refreshing and healing energies of Mother Nature.

If your group is small, we recommend sitting in a circle. This allows participants to see each other better and it stimulates group participation. It also encourages group members to interact more with one another and, therefore, results in a richer exchange of ideas and experiences.

With larger groups, arrange seating in a U-formation with the facilitator or speaker at the open end of the U. As with sitting in a circle, a U-shape arrangement helps to create more of a group feeling while also encouraging richer learning exchanges among participants. Really large groups will probably need to sit in traditional or theater style.

GETTING THE BALL ROLLING

Start the session off by asking group members to stand and take a big, long stretch. Smile, and lead your group in a few gentle exercises, respecting those who cannot or wish not to participate. Invite group members to say hi to their neighbors and exchange shoulder rubs. Then lead the group in one more big stretch before sitting. Next, ask participants to take two or three slow, long, deep breaths. Finally, tell a good-natured joke, or invite group members to share a joke or funny experience. Humor heals, relaxes, and opens our minds to learning.

PAIRED INTRODUCTIONS

Ask group members to mill around the room and choose a person whom they do not know, or at least do not know well. Instruct the pairs to spend a few minutes getting to know one another. Then go around the room allowing each person to introduce his or her partner to all those present.

A CUP OF COFFEE

Arrange with one participant ahead of time (such as during the sign-in period) to volunteer for this exercise. In front of the group, pour the participant a cup of coffee. Keep pouring, even after the cup is full. (You'll want a tray or something else convenient to catch the overflow. Be careful not to spill any on the participant, and make sure the coffee isn't too hot.) When the volunteer protests that the cup is overflowing, say to the volunteer: "Like this cup, too often you and I also are completely full. We are overflowing with our own ideas, opinions, and judgments. How can we really learn until we first empty our minds of our prejudices and limiting beliefs so that there's some open space for new learning and fresh ways of looking at life?" Turn to the group and say: "Let's all try our best to have

open and fresh minds during this learning experience we are about to share." [Adapted from *Games Trainers Play: Experiential Learning Exercises*, by John W. Newstrom and Edward E. Scannell. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980.]

CONVERSATION STARTERS

Ask participants to fill in their own large nametags. (Provide tags large enough for this; you might need to cut blank paper to the right size.) Have them start with their name or nickname and one other header such as hometown, occupation or place of work, or whatever else would work best with your group. Below that, ask participants to list five personal attributes or interests they are willing to discuss with group members. Then ask them to mill about the room and get to know each other, looking at one other's nametags for conversation starters. [Adapted from *Games Trainers Play: Experiential Learning Exercises*, by John W. Newstrom and Edward E. Scannell. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980.]

As an alternative, you could provide construction paper and ask participants to cut out their own nametags to suit their personalities. For instance, a football fan might create a football-shaped nametag and a born romantic might create one in the shape of a heart. Ask participants to introduce themselves, possibly addressing the entire group or introducing themselves to selected individuals. Each participant should explain the personal significance of his or her nametag as a way of sharing himself or herself. [Adapted from *Instant Icebreakers: 50 Powerful Catalysts for Group Interaction and High-Impact Learning*, by Sandy Christian and Nancy Loving Tubesing. Duluth, MN: Whole Person Associates, 1997.]

PERSONAL COAT OF ARMS

Making sure that all participants have something to write with, pass out copies of a Personal Coat-of-Arms form. You will need to create this form (a blank shield divided into four numbered sections, with instructions for filling it in) in advance, based on the needs of your class. Here's one suggestion for creating such a form:

Section 1: Three words that describe you.

Section 2: One way to damage a person's self-esteem.

Section 3: A good way to build self-confidence.

Section 4: A dream you have.

Ask participants to fill in each of the four sections of their coat of arms, with words or pictures, in whatever way they wish. Give the group a few minutes to complete their individual coats of arms. Then ask them to move around the room and pair up with someone they would like to know better, and to share their coat of arms and any related feelings they have. An occasional group of three is fine. After about five minutes, invite individual participants to share briefly with the full group something they learned about their partner that was particularly interesting.

SNAPSHOT OF MY WORLD

Ask each participant to bring a favorite snapshot to the meeting. It might be a picture of a baby, a family, a friend, a pet, a car, a favorite activity, or anything else. Go around the room, allowing group members to introduce themselves and tell about their picture. Those who did not bring a photo could simply tell about someone or something close to their hearts.

SEEING OUR BEAUTY AND POWER

Before your learning session, make some small sheets of paper with these words written on them: ***You are a beautiful and talented person. You can do almost anything. You are a miracle!***

Ask participants to find a partner, and to spend several minutes getting to know one another better. Then pass out the slips of paper, and ask each set of partners to take turns saying the words on the paper to one another. Allow the partners to share with

each other the feelings that arise during this activity. Invite a few volunteers to share their feelings with the total group.

Remember, being beautiful doesn't mean fitting some Hollywood image of physical perfection. We're all beautiful in our own unique ways—inside and out. We only need to begin seeing the beauty all around us, loving each other and ourselves more fully for the wonderful people we are. Each human being *is* a miracle, and we *can* accomplish almost anything when we put our hearts and souls into it.

PIPE DREAMS

In setting up the room for your session, place three pipe cleaners at each participant's place. If asked what the pipe cleaners are for, say you'll explain that later. Don't direct participants in any way what to do (or what not to do) with them until then.

At mid-morning, or halfway through the session, tell participants that the pipe cleaners are to be used in a creativity project. They may use their pipe cleaners in any way they wish, to create anything they would like to create. Urge them to be creative, but don't direct them in how they may do this.

Later in the session, ask small groups to vote on which group member(s) created the best sculpture. Participants may not vote for their own sculpture. Then get all participants together to select the overall winner. Make special mention of any group that pooled their pipe cleaners together to create a group sculpture. If some participants did not question early on what the pipe cleaners were for, ask them why they didn't. Did anyone start in on them early, without waiting to find out what they were for? Discuss with participants why they did or did not. [Adapted from *Even More Games Trainers Play: Experiential Learning Exercises*, by Edward E. Scannell and John W. Newstrom. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994.]

SENTENCE COMPLETIONS

Create a small number of partial sentences in advance. Working with one partial sentence at a time, ask members of your group to think about, or preferably to jot down, their responses. After a moment, invite

them to share how they completed each sentence. Use the variety of responses as an opportunity for elaboration and discussion. Here are some samples for you to consider:

- ◆ Having goals in life is important because . . .
- ◆ A person's attitude . . .
- ◆ One thing I really like about work is . . .
- ◆ When I am stressed out, it helps to . . .
- ◆ I feel at my best when . . .
- ◆ A good friend will . . .

REFLECTIONS

Pass out fairly large index cards to participants and make sure they all have something to write with. Instruct them to mark off their cards into three sections. Ask them to fill in the sections with responses to whatever items you come up with. Here are three suggestions:

Section 1: Three ways I can help the world:

Section 2: One good way to encourage a child's creativity:

Section 3: If I could go any place in the world, I'd...

Give your group a few minutes to fill in their cards. Then ask them to move around the room and pair up with someone they would like to know better, and to share their responses and any related feelings they have. An occasional group of three is fine. After about four or five minutes, bring the group back to their seats.

ABOUT MY FAMILY

Hand out small pieces of paper with the following three items on them. Ask participants to mill around the room. Have them form small groups of about three each. Invite them to introduce themselves to those in their group and share their responses to these three questions:

What are two things you really like about your family?

Name one aspect of your family that you'd like to be different.

Share something about your child (or another family member) that you admire.

OUR CHILDHOODS LIVE ON

Either as an entire group, or in pairs or small groups, lead participants in reflecting on and discussing the following experiences. You might find it helpful to share an example or two from your own life.

Our early life experiences tend to have a significant impact on how we think, feel, and act as adults. In your mind, take a few minutes to recall your childhood experiences. Start with your earliest memories and work through your teenage years. (Pause briefly.) See people in action. Hear the sounds, the voices. Feel your feelings. (Pause briefly.) Recall your adolescent and early adult friendships, including those with the opposite sex.

Can you see any ways—positive or negative—that these early life experiences might still be coloring your attitudes and actions today in either your work or personal life? Remember that awareness opens the door to positive change.

FOUR CORNERS

Hang these four signs, one in each corner of the room: *How to Help Create a Better World*, *Ways to Build Self-Confidence*, *How to Be Assertive*, and *What Makes a Really Good Friend?*.

Divide your group into four sub-groups. Direct each sub-group to gather toward one of the four corners. Select a group to start with, and ask them to begin spontaneously giving responses to their sign while the other sub-groups listen.

Welcome participants from any of the other corners to make comments, ask questions, and enter into the discussion in any way they wish. When you sense the time is right, direct participants from another corner of the room to respond to their sign.

TAKE A STAND

Make two signs—one that says “Strongly Agree” and one that says “Strongly Disagree.” Hang the signs at opposite ends of a long wall. Instruct participants to stand along the wall. Then, one at a time, read several short, provocative statements concerning individual and collective well-being. After reading each statement, ask those present to stand along the wall at a position that indicates the

extent to which they agree or disagree with the given statement.

Once everyone has taken their positions, invite comment and discussion among the differing clusters of people. Ask questions that encourage participants to better understand, accept, and learn from one another. Here are six sample statements:

- ◆ A life full of challenges helps to build character and self-confidence.
- ◆ An adult's self-esteem depends upon how he or she was treated as a child.
- ◆ Dressing well plays an important role in determining how a person feels about himself or herself.
- ◆ Your attitude is one of the most important factors in determining whether or not you get sick.
- ◆ How well I care for my health is my own personal business.
- ◆ The most important thing in life is having a good time.

MOTHER ALWAYS SAID

Separate into small groups and engage in roundtable discussions on some of the best things we were taught as children. Participants should begin their statements with something like, "My mother always said...", or "My father always told me...", or something similar, using another relative or mentor whom the participant loves and respects. Ask participants to pass on their life lessons and explain how they apply to today's world.

THE RHYTHM OF PEACE

This exercise works best with smaller group meetings and in open settings that allow for some volume. The instructor and participants gather in a small circle, sitting close together. The "rhythm" is a set of hand claps and other movements; instructors should feel free to improvise the beat for this session. A beat that's easy to follow is a double pat on the thighs, followed by a hand clap, then two snaps with both hands. *Pat, pat, clap, snap, snap – pat, pat, clap, snap, snap*. Start off slowly and softly so that everyone can get into the same rhythm. While engaged in this rhythmic

movement, have participants go around the room making affirmative, positive statements. Smile, laugh, improvise, enjoy! Show how movements such as these *connect* people; it can be fun and uplifting, and can change how you feel inside.

FEELING THE MUSIC

Have participants gather in a circle. On a tape recorder or boom box—or on your own instrument if you are musically inclined—play a lively instrumental song, something fun and energetic, leading and encouraging the group to move freely, as they are able. Participants may dance, raise and sway their arms, turn around and around, and laugh with others; they should feel free to express themselves, clap, and sing along, letting go of nervousness and other anxieties. The exercise encourages body awareness, physical movement, and camaraderie.

ALPHABET SOUP

Cut out slips of paper with letters of the alphabet written on them and drop them into a hat, a bucket, or a bin. Pass the hat around the room, asking participants to draw a letter from the hat. Whichever letter is drawn, the participant has to come up with an appropriate word, idea, or thought, and explain what it means and how it relates to positive thinking (or any other topic being covered). If the participant cannot think of a word beginning with the letter he or she has drawn, such as "z" or "x," you might suggest that he or she can draw again or ask the group for help. Or you could leave the most difficult letters out of your alphabet.

A DOLLAR OR YOUR THOUGHTS

Ask if any participant has a dollar in their pocket. If only one does, ask if they have a quarter; you need at least two participants with the same denomination of money in their pocket. Ask one participant to lend you his or her dollar and hold it up before the group; then ask another participant for their dollar and hold it up for all to see. Give the first dollar to the second participant and the second dollar to the first participant. Neither has their

original dollar. Ask them if either of them is better or worse off than before. One of them might get a crumpled or worn bill in return for their new one, but it will buy just as much.

Point out to the group that, if these two participants had exchanged positive, creative ideas instead of money, both would be better off; and anyone else who hears of these ideas as a result would also be better off. The impact of shared ideas can immediately grow exponentially in ways that money cannot. [Adapted from *Games Trainers Play: Experiential Learning Exercises*, by John W. Newstrom and Edward E. Scannell. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980.]

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Ask participants to write down the most memorable or influential books that they have read, limiting themselves to just a few choices. After that, have them note their other favorite sources of inspiration and mental stimulation, other than books. Invite participants to share their choices with others in the group, either one-on-one, in small groups, or as a class; then ask them to explore the topic further with those whose choices sound interesting to them. Encourage participants to find new sources of inspiration and mental stimulation that they can use to enrich their own lives and to help others. [Adapted from *Instant Icebreakers: 50 Powerful Catalysts for Group Interaction and High-Impact Learning*, by Sandy Christian and Nancy Loving Tubesing. Duluth, MN: Whole Person Associates, 1997.]

SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS

Engage participants in a discussion of success and what it means to be successful. When they were growing up, how did they define success? Who were their models for success? By the time they completed high school, how had their definition of success changed, if at all? What about when they finished college or had worked for a while? And what is their definition of success now? What factors have changed their view of life and their definition of success? In sharing with the group, what lessons have been learned? [Adapted from *Still*

More Games Trainers Play: Experiential Learning Exercises, by Edward E. Scannell and John W. Newstrom. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1991.]

GET YOUR PRIORITIES STRAIGHT

Pose the following thoughts to your group: How many of us are spending our time and our lives in ways that are unproductive or personally unrewarding? Many of us actually believe we don't have the time to do what we really want.

Divide into small groups to discuss the value of getting our priorities straight. Ask each participant to discuss with their group what their own priorities are, what they think they should be, or what they want them to be. Is there some conflict here? Are participants actually getting these things done? Are they making progress toward meeting their life goals?

Also discuss these questions: What do others say you should do, and what do you really want to do? Are these two very different things? Do you feel some conflict or tension here? Based on what you really want, do you think you would do better to change your priorities? How do you really want to spend your time? Could you spend less time on what's unimportant and more time on what you like best? What might happen if you did what you really wanted to do in life? Are you already living this way?

After group discussions, invite participants to share their thoughts with the entire group. What lessons have they learned?

BE TRUE TO YOURSELF

Individually, in pairs, in small groups, or as a total group, lead participants to consider one or more of the following questions:

- ◆ What do you do best of all?
- ◆ What activities energize you?
- ◆ Is there an older person in your family or community who could benefit from your company and talents?
- ◆ If you had money and time to meet all your basic needs, how could you reach out in service to make your community a better place to live?

- ◆ If you died tomorrow, what would you regret not having done?
- ◆ What action steps could you take today that could lead you more in the direction of all that you love?

FRONT AND CENTER

Ask the members of your group to file out of their seats, each stopping briefly at the front center of the room. If there is a speaker's table or a podium, let that be the place where each participant pauses for a moment as he or she looks out on the group and completes this statement: *"I love to . . . because . . ."*

This is a good way to focus on the activities that we have a passion for doing, helping us to build positive attitudes and to give others potentially useful ideas. Also, because speaking in public is difficult for many, the *Front & Center* exercise is a gentle way to challenge this fear and to strengthen self-confidence.

MASKED FOR LIFE?

Ask participants to pair off and discuss with each other the "masks" they wear when they are with others in various life situations. Pose the following questions: Are there ways that we hide our true selves? If so, what might happen if others found out? What are the personas that we try to project in our various roles?

You might ask how many participants were told as children that, if they kept making faces, their faces would freeze that way. Has this, perhaps, really occurred for some of the participants who seem to be stuck with the masks they wear?

Are participants truly comfortable with themselves and with the disguises they wear to get through life? How might they begin to drop the masks and be totally themselves with others? What might be the benefits of living a more authentic life?

Reconvene the entire group and discuss what people found out from each other. What are the lessons learned?

HEALTH, HAPPINESS, AND SERVICE

Either in small groups, or as a class, ask participants to discuss the following questions about the really important things in life: (1) What is happiness? (2) What does it mean to be healthy? (3) How can we best help others to be healthy and happy? (4) What's something fun that you enjoy doing for others? (5) When you think about helping your family and community, where do you see the biggest need? (6) How might you help to address one of these needs? (7) How can you serve others by your own example? [Adapted from *Instant Icebreakers: 50 Powerful Catalysts for Group Interaction and High-Impact Learning*, by Sandy Christian and Nancy Loving Tubesing. Duluth, MN: Whole Person Associates, 1997.]

SUCCESS STORIES

Ask group members to think about a situation in which one person made a really big and positive difference in the life of another. Invite several participants to share their own success stories. You might also want to have a success story of your own ready, in case you decide to share it.

PEOPLE WE ADMIRE

Say something such as the following to those in your learning session: "Think about a person whom you admire—someone who is confident and has given of his or her talents. It should be someone who takes good care of himself or herself, who is well-balanced physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually. It can be someone you know personally, or it might be a historical, political, or religious figure. It can even be an idealized person whom you create in your mind.

"Now reflect on this individual and on his or her sense of confidence and purpose. How does this person think, speak, and act? What is it exactly that enables him or her to be so balanced, giving, positive, and effective?

Then invite the members of your group to share the keys to the success of the person they admire. You might wish to jot down their responses on a flip chart or chalk board.

ROLE PLAYS

Invite several volunteers to come to the front of the room and jointly act out a scenario that demonstrates a particular quality or principle pertinent to your learning session. When the volunteers have finished role playing, give them enthusiastic applause and ask for input and discussion from the audience.

(Obviously, you'll want to give the volunteers a little time to prepare, perhaps during a refreshment break. However, not having too much time to prepare helps to keep the skit fresh and spontaneous.)

THE SYMBOL FOR CHOICE

Because we are often constrained by all of our responsibilities and feel that time slips away from us so quickly, it is easy to become disillusioned, to feel that we are hardly in control of our lives. That's not true, though. We do have the power within us to make desired positive changes. We are powerful and insightful beings with the ability to strongly influence what goes on around us, as long as we remain focused and positive. With that said, take a moment to draw a picture that represents the power of choice. What does this power mean to you?

CASTING A VISION

Ask each participant to ponder these three questions: "How would you like your life to be different a year from now? What's your vision? What might you start doing in the next week or two to help bring your vision to life?" Slowly repeat these three questions. Then ask participants to pair up with someone else in the room, preferably a person they do not know well, and exchange their visions.

GEORGE & RUBY—A PICTURE OF HEALTH?

Before reading the following story to your group, instruct them to be ready with pen and paper. Your job is to read the story without stopping; the group's job is to write down everything they notice that might be a health problem. Remind them to think of health in a broad sense—mental, social, and spiritual health, as well physical health.

George kicks off his shoes and settles into his recliner chair. The television blares out the theme song of a popular comedy show. He unbuckles his belt and lights a cigarette. Whew, he thinks, that was a good supper of pork roast, and mashed potatoes and gravy, all topped off by a double chocolate dessert! As he sips on a beer, he lets his mind wander back to the work week with displeasure. He remembers the argument he had with his boss, and now he can't even concentrate on the TV show.

He would love to change jobs, but he and his wife, Ruby, live from paycheck to paycheck. He feels the pressure build up inside him, but he knows he should not mention their money problems to Ruby. Just as he thinks about their finances, George feels that shooting pain go up his arm and across his chest again. As he wishes the pain would just go away, he promises himself he will run an extra mile on Saturday, his regular workout day. George smiles as he plans to reward his extra effort with a breakfast of bacon, eggs, and doughnuts.

Lighting another cigarette, George glances over at Ruby. She is already in the living room with him, after having quickly cleaned up the kitchen from supper. She sits on the edge of the couch, reading a news magazine. Because of her constant dieting, Ruby is very thin, and lately she seems nervous and touchy. George notes that she doesn't laugh much anymore, but then neither does he, for that matter. She constantly worries about everything, from their children to their money. If Ruby just wouldn't spend so much on clothes and shoes, his paycheck would go much further.

And those health food kicks of Ruby's are more than George can handle. She sips on a glass of cabbage juice, which she says is all the daily nutrition she needs. George remembers some of the awful things Ruby has tried to get him to eat and drink. He promises himself never to eat another vegetable! The TV show is still on, but George is not amused. He becomes bored, quiet, and lonely. Soon he has drifted off to sleep and is snoring.

Ruby looks up and frowns at her snoring husband. She remembers how fun and romantic

he used to be. He actually used to take her dancing. That was a long time ago—before that nasty car accident. They had been out drinking with friends and her leg was broken in the crash. Even after Ruby was hurt so badly, George still won't wear a seat belt. Ruby rubs her leg. The place where the pin remains in her leg has begun to ache.

Come to think of it, Ruby is reminded that she has not been feeling good lately. She pushes the thoughts out of her mind; it costs too much to go to the doctor. Besides, she's not sure she really wants to know if something is wrong with her. A familiar song on the television reminds her of old times and old friends. She suddenly gets lonely and wonders if George might take a walk with her. She glances at him and shakes her head. He's fast asleep by now. Picking up a romance novel, Ruby settles in for another quiet evening at home.

After you finish reading the story, ask those present to share the health “red flags” they noticed as you read the story. Allow participants freedom to discuss issues as they are brought up. Finally, as a group, design a balanced, healthy lifestyle for George and Ruby.

SLEEPY AMERICA

Make some introductory comments, such as: “Whether we are adults or children, to be at our best we need to be well-rested. Far too often, however, many of us try to function without sufficient sleep; and it doesn't work well at all. Millions of Americans are seriously sleep-deprived, and about half of us fail to get enough rest.”

Lead your group in discussing the many problems that result from insufficient sleep. Next, guide participants in brainstorming solutions. Try to come up with a wide variety of suggestions for correcting this problem.

SPIRIT MATTERS

In our fast-paced world, many of us suffer from spiritual malnutrition. Too often, we give our bodies plenty of food while our souls are starved for spiritual nourishment. In small groups or as a large group, lead

participants in responding to the following three questions:

- ◆ What activities nourish you spiritually?
- ◆ How often do you do them?
- ◆ Are there changes you'd like to make in this area of your life?

THE COUNSELOR AND THE KINDRED

Have each participant pair off with a partner, preferably someone he or she has not worked with in previous group activities. One partner will play the “Counselor” and the other will play the “Kindred.” In this exercise, the Kindred sits opposite the Counselor and discusses feelings, concerns, hopes, and dreams that are relevant to the topic. The Counselor should respond with *affirming* statements and demonstrate *active* listening skills to help the Kindred move forward positively. Discussion should be honest and open, with partners switching roles during the exercise. Group discussion can follow, with participants sharing the experiences they had with the exercise, their observations, any surprises, as well as lessons learned.

THE UNHAPPY LEMON

Read out loud the following story, “The Unhappy Lemon.” Then ask for comments and discussion from your group.

Once upon a time, a lemon was unhappy because two people kept fighting and fighting, each one wanting the lemon. Their arguing, which lasted for several days, finally came to an end when the combatants decided to cut the lemon in half. One of them went home and, after juicing her half, made a weak batch of lemonade, drank it, and threw the peel away. The whole time, she was wishing for the other half of the lemon. The other person, after peeling his half of the lemon and using the peel for his special recipe, threw the insides of the lemon away. Although the recipe called for an entire lemon peel, he hoped it would still turn out okay.

As a way of concluding the discussion, you might want to express in simple terms, and in your

own words, thoughts similar to these: “A critical step in dealing with conflict is to determine exactly what the two parties want and why they want it. Asking these questions requires that we focus on the other person’s needs, and thus promotes feelings of goodwill and understanding. When we can go beyond superficial issues we may be arguing about and really try to understand one another’s needs, we are much more likely to move toward a mutually satisfactory resolution of the conflict.

DIFFERENT VIEWPOINTS

Although the following fable, “The Elephant Tale,” may be familiar to many adults, we all can benefit from hearing its compelling message again and again. Tell or read this story, then invite participants to discuss its implications with regard to promoting tolerance, understanding, and peace.

Years ago, in a small Indian village, a mother brought her six blind sons together to wash the new family elephant.

After the boys had finished washing the elephant, they began talking with each other.

“Now I know what an elephant is like,” said the first son, who had washed the sides of the elephant. “It’s like two huge walls.”

The second brother, who had washed the trunk, said, “No, the elephant is like a long, fat pole.”

Breaking out in self-righteous laughter, the third brother countered, “It is like a big, soft roof standing on four columns.”

As blind as the rest of his brothers, the fourth son shouted in disagreement, “No, no! “The elephant is like two huge banana leaves!”

The fifth son spoke softly, asking his brothers to calm down. “I know the truth from my own personal experience. The elephant is like two huge bones pointing toward the earth.”

“All of you must be crazy,” shouted the youngest and smallest of the six blind sons. “The elephant is just a piece of rope hanging from the sky!”

The wise mother, listening with amusement from the edge of the path, asked her dear sons to sit down around her. She then spoke lovingly, but

with authority: “Each of you is right, and each of you is wrong. You each correctly described the part of the elephant that you washed, but it is a mistake to say that your brothers are wrong. They are right, too.

“Always remember that there may be other ways of understanding things that make just as much sense as yours. We grow when we are willing to listen and learn from those whose experiences are different from our own.”

As a way of drawing the discussion to a close, you might express in your own words some thoughts such as these:

“How often we get locked into our own point of view. How often we fail to entertain the possibility that another idea might work just as well as ours, or even better. How often we blindly assume that our beliefs, our way of doing business, or our way of solving the problem is the only right way. How often we are blinded by our limited sphere of experience and the prejudices that we unknowingly carry with us. The result: unnecessary conflict, violence, pain, and an untold loss of individual and collective creativity.

“The frequent assumption that ‘my viewpoint is the only correct viewpoint’ can promote misunderstanding and ill will while impeding conflict resolution. This is certainly true for us as adults. And, unfortunately, children begin modeling this same tendency at a strikingly early age.”

CIRCLE WAVE

Invite all those in your group, including yourself, to stand in a circle and join hands. Start a “wave” by lifting your right hand, which will lift the left hand of the person next to you. As you do this, tell that person to “pass it on.” That person then lifts his or her right hand, which raises the next person’s left hand, and so on. Allow the wave to flow around the circle several times. Now ask someone on the other side of the circle to start a wave in the same direction. Finally, ask someone else to begin a wave in the opposite direction.

Now release hands. While still standing in a circle, lead a discussion about how any group such as the family or a work team operates as a system, with each member affecting all the others. Ask some questions such as: When one member of our group started a wave, did that affect others in the circle? In a family, do you think the actions of one member similarly ripple out and affect others? Have you seen this happen in your family? Can you give an example of a negative ripple affecting other family members? Give two or three examples of how one family member could do something positive that, like a wave, flows out and benefits others in their immediate and extended family.

Here are some examples of how the behavior of one person affects—for better or worse—all family members: When 8-year-old Matthew starts playing his drums, each family member responds to that change in a unique way. Similarly, what the rest of the family thinks, says, and does influences Matthew. When the family's dog gives birth, those puppies touch the hearts and routines of all. If Mom receives a promotion and a large boost in salary, the effect of that welcome change ripples and rebounds throughout the family.

Not only does each family act as a system, so do various community groups, organizations, nations, and even our entire world family. When we really begin to understand how systems work, we realize that each of our thoughts, words, and actions has an effect, however small, on all the systems of which we are a part. A Chinese proverb expresses it this way: "If you cut a blade of grass, you shake the universe."

Each of our choices makes a difference, and the choices of all those around us influence us also. This is especially true in our most intimate system, the family. When we send out a wave of understanding and love to others, the results of that kindness sooner or later ripple back to us. We are far more interconnected than most of us realize.

BUCKET AND DIPPER

(To help participants visualize this discussion, you might want to have on hand a couple of small buckets of water and a dipper or cup.)

We each have an invisible bucket of self-esteem. The fuller our bucket, the better we feel about ourselves and the more easily we get along with

others. Our Self-Esteem Bucket is filled, dipper by dipper, each time someone treats us kindly or we succeed at a challenge. When another person treats us in a harsh way, or we give ourselves a hard time, an invisible dipper goes in and robs our bucket of a little of its self-esteem.

Ask your group some questions: Do we have any control over whether or not a big dip comes out of our bucket? If someone treats us in a mean way, need that lower our feelings of self-worth? Can you give some examples of how we ourselves take dips out of our own buckets? What are some ways we can put dips back into our own buckets? When we compliment, smile at, or warmly touch another person, does that have an effect on our own self-esteem? To what extent do you agree with this statement: "How we treat others is how we treat ourselves, and how we treat ourselves is how we treat others?"

Now consider children, who are so powerfully influenced by their parents and other significant adults in their lives. Ask participants to share a variety of things that can take dips out of a child's Self-Esteem Bucket. Spend even more time discussing specific ways to fill the Self-Esteem Buckets of our children, from babies to teens.

THE HEALING GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

Bring to mind a time when someone hurt you, or something you've done for which you feel bad or ashamed. Choose a situation in which you are ready to forgive the person(s) or yourself for what happened. Using just a few words or a symbol, jot down what you want to forgive on a piece of scrap paper. Pass a small box around the room. As each person receives the box, that person can choose to share their forgiveness situation or to remain silent. Either way, the person then tears his or her paper into tiny pieces and puts them into the box, at the same time mentally extending forgiveness to the person(s) involved and/or to himself or herself.

As the activity concludes, encourage group members to smile, let these past events go, and enjoy happy thoughts in the present moment. If it seems appropriate to you, invite participants to comment on or discuss their reactions to this exercise.

GLOBAL AWARENESS

Prepare slides, pictures, or other media ahead of time, showing people of many cultures displaying various emotions and expressions. Ask participants to interpret these people's feelings and emotions. Are the people in the pictures happy, sad, confused, stressed out? What environmental factors and situations might contribute to these moods and feelings? If the moderator wishes, he or she can ask further questions, probing for knowledge of the cultures represented in the pictures. What are some good ways to relate to people of other cultures? How might we grow closer together, helping to meet the needs of others throughout the world?

FAVORITE SOURCES OF PEACE

Ask each workshop participant to write down activities or experiences that help him or her feel peaceful. It could be spending time with a special friend, walking in the woods, listening to uplifting music, praying, meditating, enjoying an inspirational book, having a family picnic, reading to a child, or singing. Obviously, participants are likely to have their own favorite peaceful activities, beyond those listed here.

After several minutes, let participants form small groups and share their favorite ways of getting in touch with their inner peace. Then invite the groups to share a few of their suggestions with the total group.

INCREASING YOUR PERSONAL ENERGY

Using your own wording if you wish, say the following to your group: "Think about what gives you energy and what takes your energy away. Then, working by yourself, make a list of Energizers and Energy Zappers. Energizers might include being with a special friend or having a peaceful walk in the woods. Energy Zappers might include overeating or useless complaining." After most participants have finished their lists, allow them to share their lists in pairs, small groups, or as one large group. Then remind everyone to do their best to avoid

unnecessary Energy Zappers and to try to build as many Energizers into their lives as they possibly can.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

Why not let your group members assist directly in the teaching process? This strategy is particularly useful when you are conducting several sequential learning sessions. Here are a few idea starters as you consider various possibilities for homework assignments:

Ask participants to go to a local library and see what information they can find on managing stress, being at one's best, or peacemaking. Or suggest that each participant interview two adults and two children about their suggestions for staying healthy—physically, socially, and spiritually. Another possibility is to assign small groups to study and present information dealing with loss, addressing hunger and poverty, or living in environmentally friendly ways. The group might also wish to invite a guest speaker to join in their presentation.

QUOTATIONS TO PONDER & DISCUSS

Here are several quotations you can share with your group. Present one quotation at a time, allowing group members to react and discuss what it means to them. (*You might also ask them to share any sayings or quotations that help them successfully meet the conflicts, problems, challenges, and opportunities of life.*)

"You can have anything you want—if you want it badly enough. You can be anything you want to be, do anything you set out to accomplish if you hold to that desire with singleness of purpose."

— Abraham Lincoln

"The two terrors that discourage originality and creative living are fear of public opinion and undue reverence for one's own consistency."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That is why it is called the Present."

— Eleanor Roosevelt

“Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who mind don’t matter and those who matter don’t mind.”

— Dr. Seuss

“If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

“How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.”

— Anne Frank

*These quotations and many more are available on the quotation pages of our **UK Extension's Universe of Possibilities** website: http://www.ca.uky.edu/agcollege/fcs/possibilities/quotations_page.htm*

PUTTING NEW CONCEPTS TO USE

Have participants join in groups of three to four persons each to draw cartoons illustrating real-world uses of the concepts learned in this educational session. Instruct them to draw a large square on a sheet of paper and then draw two lines through it to form four square panels, just like in a comic strip. Emphasize that the quality of the artwork doesn't have to be good; stick figures are fine. The main point is for participants to create a cartoon in which the characters put the workshop's lessons to good use. If the cartoon is funny, so much the better. [Adapted from *Even More Games Trainers Play: Experiential Learning Exercises*, by Edward E. Scannell and John W. Newstrom. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994.]

NEVER SELL YOURSELF SHORT

We all can be and do far more than most of us realize. Read the following story out loud to your group. Then involve the group in discussing what it means to them and how it might apply to their lives.

Since the days of the early Greeks, athletes had tried to run a four-minute mile. Experts said it could not be done. They contended that it was physically impossible to run, much less break, a four-minute mile. On May 6, 1954, Roger Bannister proved everyone wrong.

*In his book, *The Four Minute Mile*, Bannister recalls one of his early experiences in running: “I found a new source of power and beauty, a source I never dreamt existed.” In other words, Roger Bannister tapped more deeply into his positive self and found resources he didn't know he had. You can do the same.*

Even more fascinating, in 1955, the year after Bannister's feat, more than 30 runners broke the four-minute mile. In 1956, some 300 runners accomplished “the impossible.” Today, the impossible has become the expected.

As you conclude this activity, you might want to make a positive statement, such as the following, to your group: “Never sell yourself short. You have the power to realize your dreams, and the ability to scatter kindness and joy wherever you go. You are an incredible person! You'll see it as you believe it. Remember, almost nothing is impossible—unless you think it is. Be all you can be, and help others do the same. That's what being your best is all about.”

FINISH WITH A BANG

This is a lively way to end a learning session. On a small sheet of paper, ask each participant to jot down something important that he or she has learned about self-confidence or about making a difference (or any other subject covered in your class). Then pass out balloons. Direct participants to insert their pieces of paper into the balloon, and then to blow up and tie the balloons. Invite group members to volunteer to blow up balloons for any participants who aren't able to do so.

After all the balloons are inflated, signal the group to simultaneously toss the balloons high into the air. Instruct them to bounce the falling balloons high into the air once again, trying to keep them all above head level. After doing this for a minute or so, tell participants to retrieve one balloon apiece, pop it open, and

read the message. Invite all or a sample of those group members to throw the balloon pieces into a present to read their messages to the full group. (Ask recycling or trash bag as they exit.)

CREDITS

The majority of these activities were created by the authors. When an exercise was adapted from one of the sources below, the source is acknowledged at the end of the particular activity. There is a possibility that some of these activities have not been properly credited; if this is the case, it was unintentional and we apologize for the oversight.

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*Together,
let us envision and build
a world where all people enjoy
optimal well-being. Let us strive
to awaken fresh thinking, new
enthusiasm, and abundant love.*

*Let us create a world of
unimagined possibilities.*

It can be done!

