

**VOV ACTIVITIES**  
**Strengthening Your Sense of Self-Identity**  
**Grades 7-12**

**Adjective Name Game**

**Purpose:** To introduce a positive side of ourselves to others.

To develop community.

**Time:** 10-20 minutes depending on the size of the group.

**Materials:** Just people.

**Directions:** Ask participant to say their first name and a positive adjective that describes them. The adjective should start with the same letter or sound as their first name, as in “Caring Cathy” or “Agitating Alex.” Each person repeats the names of all those who went before, and add his/her own adjective name to the list. The first person then repeats the adjective names of the whole group. Ask participants to address each other with their adjective name throughout the workshop.

**Variations:** Being put on the spot to remember names, especially in a large group, can be stressful. To reduce the stress, the whole group can all out the names, or participants can say just the names of the three people who came before them.

Jack in the box: Form a circle. Explain the directions: the first participant will say their adjective name and make a gesture. (example: touch the floor, spin around) to go along with their name.

**Notes:** If a participant has difficulty coming up with a positive adjective, ask the group to help the person choose one.

**Affirmation Posters**

**Purpose:** To practice affirming others and to learn how others see us.

**Time:** 30 minutes plus free time and breaks.

This activity takes 10 minutes to introduce and 20 minutes to bring to a close. It should be introduced at the beginning of one of the last sessions, so that participants have time to do it during breaks and free time.

**Materials:** White poster sheets and markers.

**Directions:** Give each participant a sheet of paper and a magic marker. Ask them to write their adjective name at the top and tape their posters up on the wall around the room. Instruct the participants to write affirmative statements on each person’s poster. Emphasize the rules of the statements: They can be signed or anonymous; they can only be positive; they should reflect something

positive you have seen in the other person. Close this exercise by asking each person to share something on their poster that is especially meaningful to them, and explain why it is so.

**Variations:** This activity works well as a final closing activity. Have participants read aloud one affirmation from the poster that is especially meaningful to them.

**Notes:** This activity works best if the group is already well bonded.

### **Appreciation Activity**

**Purpose:** To practice voicing appreciation toward others.

**Time:** 5 minutes.

**Materials:** Just people.

**Directions:** Divide the group into pairs. Each person will talk for 1-2 minutes about a person, place or thing which they appreciate. The listener should practice active listening skills. The pairs do not report back to the group.

Debrief by asking what the activity has to do with achieving victory over violence.

Have the participants report back to the group and introduce their partner.

### **Circle Game**

**Purpose:** To discover what the group has in common as well as ways group members are different from one another.

**Time:** 15-30 minutes.

**Materials:** A list of characteristics.

**Directions:** Create a list of characteristics that are likely to be held by people in the group. Try to include characteristics that are common to the whole group, as well as qualities unique to a subgroup. Include physical characteristics, family backgrounds, things we like to do, things that have happened to us and things we are good at. The goal of the game is to see what people have in common, so not every statement has to be positive. For example, you might want to include, "Anyone who has ever been sent to the Principal's office," "Anyone who has ever been asked to get into a police car," and "Anyone who has ever witnessed racism."

Gather the group in a standing circle. Call out a description and ask those who fit the description to step into the circle. Those who responded then acknowledge each other and take a different place in the circle. Call out another quality, and repeat the process until you've read the whole list or the group seems ready for a change of pace.

Use this activity to introduce the Scavenger Hunt. For this, ask people to stand up if they know the meaning of the words called and explain the meaning to the others.

Rather than drawing up your own list, use the list from the Scavenger Hunt or Cultural Pursuit.

Begin with your own list of qualities, but then invite participants to call things out.

Notes: This activity is very similar to Big Wind Blows, but no one is standing in the middle of the circle. It works to use it as a VOV Ice Breaker.

### **Concentric Circles – Self Esteem**

Purpose: To build listening and speaking skills.

To build community.

To reflect on one's own experiences, feelings and patterns.

Time: About 20 minutes (Varies with number of questions.)

Materials: Selected questions or topics.

Directions: Ask the group to count off by twos. Ask the "ones" to move their chair into the circle and sit facing the person who was on their right. There should now be two circles, one inside the other. The inside circle faces out, and the outside circle faces in.

Explain that you will ask a question, and that the "ones" should answer, speaking for about one minute. Ask the "twos" to listen attentively, using all of their listening skills. When one minute has passed, call time. If the topic has been an emotionally charged one, ask the listeners to change the focus with a silly question, such as "What did you have for breakfast?" The listeners "twos" then answer the same question.

When both partners have discussed the questions, ask the outer circle to move one chair, clockwise. Repeat the process with the next question. This time, ask the inner circle to move one chair, counter clockwise. Repeat until all questions have been discussed.

#### Concentric Circle Questions for Self-Esteem

1. Who is one person you really respect, living or dead? Why do you respect them?
2. What are some ways you show respect for yourself?
3. Describe a time you "did the right thing," even though it was hard to do.
4. What is something you've learned in your life that has been important to you? Why was it important?

5. What is something you've done that you are proud of? Why?
6. What is something you've done that you're proud of? Why?
7. What are something's you do to take care of yourself?
8. Describe a time you took care of someone else.
9. What are some things you want to do before you die? Why?

### **Empathy Exercise**

**Purpose:** To develop empathy toward others.

**Time:** 60 minutes.

**Materials:** Index cards and a pen for each participant.

**Directions:** divide the participants into small groups of no more than five people each. Give each person an index card and a pen or pencil. Instruct participants to write on their card, "A problem I'm working on is..." and finish the sentence. They should describe a problem they are currently dealing with, which they don't mind having the group discuss. The cards should not be signed. Explain that because the groups are small, it will be hard to be totally anonymous, so the problems should not be extremely private.

Collect, shuffle, and redistribute the cards within the small group. If anyone gets their own card back, redistribute them until no one has their own card. Have each person then tell the group about the problem described on the card they have, as if it were their own problem. Have them describe how they feel, what fears or concerns they have and what kind of support or help they would like from others. Ask others in the group to share their own experiences solving similar problems and offer their insights and suggestions.

**Notes:** Leave plenty of time for this exercise. For many, it is a powerful activity and can be the heart of the workshop.

In the small groups, it is expected that participants may know or guess whose card they have. Emphasize that this is okay. The point is not to guess who the problem belongs to, but to work with the problem as if it were your own.

### **Introductions In Pairs**

**Purpose:** To learn about the people in the group and build community.

To build self-esteem.

To practice good listening skills.

**Time:** 20 to 30 minutes.

**Materials:** Just people.

**Directions:** Divide the group into pairs. Ask one person in each pair to be the speaker, and the other the listener. The speaker will speak for one minute about who they are. Suggest that they talk about things they like to do, how many people are in their family and other things that aren't too private. No one should say anything they don't want the whole group to know. The listener will practice active listening skills and will remember three things about the speaker to report back to the group.

After one minute, have the pairs switch roles. After both people have taken a turn speaking, bring the group back in a circle and have each person introduce three things about his/her partner.

**Variations:** The questions that participants respond to can also be: "What brought you to this workshop," and "what do you hope to get out of it?"

For older or more mature groups, give participants a longer time to respond to the question, up to three minutes.

Have participants make one of the three things they say about their partner be something that they have in common.

If the group is large, have one pair introduce each other to another pair. This set-up saves time but defeats the purpose of building community within the whole group.

To make this a more challenging affirmation activity, have participants speak for one minute about things that they like about themselves.

**Notes:** Plan to do the Good Listening skit or demonstration before this activity, as it depends on the good listening skills of the participants. As you introduce this activity, refer to the list of good listening skills, which should be posted somewhere in the room.

## **M&M Game**

**Purpose:** To introduce people to one another in a positive way.

**Time:** 15-30 minutes depending on the number of participants.

**Materials:** A bag of M&M's or another kind of candy that comes in small pieces.

**Directions:** Pass the bag of candy around the circle and invite participants to take as many pieces as they want, without eating any. When everyone has taken some, tell the group that they have to say one thing they like (such as reading, listening to music, going to movies, etc.) for each piece of candy they have. Ask for a volunteer to start, and move around the circle until each person has taken a turn.

Variations: To make this a more challenging affirmation activity, ask participants to say one thing they like about themselves for each piece of candy they have.

Create a question or sentence starter for each color. For example, for blue candy, finish the sentence, "One thing I like to do is..." For green candy, finish the sentence, "One thing my friends like about me is..." Let participants choose which question they want to answer, and have them answer the question for each piece of candy they have of that color.

Notes: Be sure to have plenty of candy.

### **Moment of Silence**

Purpose: To recognize positive role models.

To focus after a break.

Time: 1 minute.

Materials: Just people.

Directions: Ask the group to call out the names of positive role models that they all might know. Select one, and ask them to observe a moment of silence in honor of this person or someone else that they respect for their positive influence on others.

Notes: This quick activity works well to bring people back together as a group. If you plan to use it repeatedly during the workshop, you may want to keep a running list of role models, and choose one name from the list each time you do the activity.

### **My Best Day**

Purpose: To think about peer pressure and how other people affect our values and decisions.

Time: 30-40 minutes.

Materials: Paper, pens or pencils and tape or a stapler.

Directions: Explain that participants will be working alone to imagine their ideal day. Stress that no one will see their paper. Pass out paper. Ask participants to record their ideal day. They should include what they would do, at what time, and with whom. There are no financial restrictions; they can use as much money as they want during this one day.

Next, have participants form several groups. Without sharing what they wrote individually, ask each group to come up with the ideal way they'd spend a day together, as a group. Stress that they do not need to talk about

their individual days to create a group day. Again, there are no financial restrictions.

To debrief, ask people to silently consider the following questions: how close was your personal ideal day to your group day? What did you give up? Why did you give it up? What did you gain? Is this similar to real life in any way?

### **Scavenger Hunt**

**Purpose:** To see what the group participants have in common.

**Time:** 10-15 minutes (with 20 participants).

**Materials:** Photocopies of the below list of Scavenger Hunt questions with space to write answers. Pencils or pens.

**Directions:** Pass out the Scavenger Hunt question list to each participant. Ask them to find as many people as possible who fit each of the categories on the list.

1. Who plays a musical instrument?
2. Who has felt proud recently? Why?
3. Who had a scary dream this month?
4. Who has recently read a book about people of a different race?
5. Who was born in another state?
6. Who has cooked a meal for his/her family recently?
7. Who can whistle? Show us.
8. Who felt left out recently? What happened?
9. Who helped someone this month?
10. Who spends time with an older person, like a grandparent?
11. Who is good at something that isn't typical for his/her gender?
12. Who knows a game from another country?
13. Who has felt angry recently? What happened?
14. Who laces his/her shoes in an odd pattern?
15. Who repaired something that was broken?
16. Who has a regular job in his/her family?
17. Who can say a sentence in a language that isn't English?
18. Who felt happy recently? (share what happened)
19. Who has defended a person being "put down"?
20. Who has learned a new skill in the last month?

### **Thing In Common**

**Purpose:** To discover what the group has in common.

To build communication and group decision-making skills.

**Time:** 20 minutes. 10 for the variation.

**Materials:** Paper and pen. For the variation, puzzle pieces, enough for each participant.  
To make puzzle pieces, cut out colorful magazine pictures and tape or glue them on to cardboard. Cut the pictures into three pieces.

**Direction:** Ask participants to pair off with someone they don't know well, and draw up a list of things they have in common. Suggest that they think about as many categories as possible, such as food, social activities, sports, movies, books, cars and work experience. Give the partners two minutes to draw up their list. Now, ask each group to merge with another group and find out what the two groups have in common. Their respective lists can be a starting point, but they are free to expand beyond this. Again, give the groups two minutes to find common ground.

Allow the small groups to keep merging with each other until you finally end up with the entire group discussing things they have in common. The larger the groups get, the more time you may want to allow for discussion.

To debrief, ask: "was it harder to find things in common as a large group or earlier in the process? Were you surprised? How can we strengthen our bonds as a group? How can we form new bonds?"

**Variation:** Three Things in Common: Give each person a puzzle piece. Ask them to find the others in the room whose pieces fit together to complete their image. Once they have found their group, they have 2 minutes to discover three things they have in common. Return to the large group to share what each group found in common. This variation leads easily into the Circle Game.