

## GROUPWORK Ideas & Activities

### Warning! Warning!

Sometimes questions and activities which seem really quite innocent and simple can elicit very big responses, both in those with whom you might use these activities and in yourself if you decide to respond to them before using them. (And this is always a good idea!). So use them tactfully and with timing. Fun and playfulness are always welcome of course.

I have listed here the titles of each of the activities to give you some idea what they are about so you can find more quickly the one you want. Of course all activities can be re-jigged to fit any topic and any group. And in fact, to also fit for individuals, couples and families. If you want to ask about any of these activities, just send me an email.

### List of activities

1. TOPIC: WHERE DO YOU WANT TO BE?
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14. TOPIC: WHAT'S IN OUR HEADS?

#### 1. WHERE DO YOU WANT TO BE?

This is a playful way of starting to ask just what we need in our lives right now. *'Imagine this....there are two places, equally interesting and equally unusual. One is a disused lighthouse on a windswept and deserted coastline. No mod cons but liveable. The other is a run-down disused farmhouse...nearest neighbours 5 ks. No phone, but running water and electricity.*

*If you had to choose between them as a place to spend some time at this point right now in your life...which would you choose? (and no, you are not allowed to say: 'neither')...and...why have you chosen what you have?'*

## 2. THREE IDEAS

The Treaty of Waitangi of Aotearoa New Zealand is based on three key ideas:

- **Participation**
- **Partnership**
- **Protection**

Borrowing these three profound ideas, ask how these ideas are present or not, acted out or not:

- In your most intimate relationships?
- In your family, however you define it?
- In any group/workplace/organisation that you are part of?
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## 3. TWO EMOTIONS ONLY

This is an idea that has been around for a long time and can be approached as an idea which is simply simple...or one which is simply profound. Use it in any way that fits for you.

Some say that all our actions are driven by one of two emotions, love or fear? Think of everything of significance that you have done over the past week; not what has happened, but everything that you have *done*. And record these on paper, using pictures, symbols or words...

And then for each of these actions, ask yourself this question and record your response: Did I act from fear or love?

## 4. YOUR BEST

Think of a moment...when some terrific part of you emerged, was in action, was experienced by you and by others:

- What brought it out?
- How often do you get to see this part of you?
- How often do others get to see it?
- Is it as present in your life as you would like it to be?
- What can you do to keep it present, or more present?

## 5. HOW WE ARE SEEN, HOW WE SEE OTHERS

### Enjoying the 'Passing Parade'

This activity explores how we 'read' the world around us; how we think the world 'reads' us, and how we would like to be seen by others.

The activity aims to be done both playfully and respectfully, bearing in mind that you are observing and noting things about other human beings. You can do this individually or in pairs. Start from your moment of rising today, and think of each person you have encountered since then and ask yourself:

- Is this person happy?
- Is this person confident?
- Is this person content with who they are?

Ask also, why do you think what you think?

Ask of yourself: What do I think I look like when:

- I am happy?
- I am feeling confident?
- I am content with myself?

And ask of yourself:

- What would people most notice about me when I am happy? Confident? Content?
- Is this what I would most like people to notice?
- How would I generally like to be seen in the world?
- How do I want people to behave towards me?

### **As a 'homework' activity**

As an activity to do outside the group, this can be done in a car, walking along the street, sitting in a park, anywhere where you are able to observe people. You are to simply notice people in the world around you make a guess as to how that person is.

## **6. RELATIONSHIPS**

This is a neat activity to explore non-verbal communication and look at what each of us 'projects', and to start to look at how we can decide quite deliberately what we project into the world.

Two people stand back to back. They imagine a time six months from now when they bump into each other in the street. On the count of 1, 2, 3...they turn and freeze in a 'photo' of that moment. The 'freezing' is important so that the group can view the image. Hold it for 15 seconds or so.

Secondly, ask the pair to imagine that there was some minor yet unresolved tension between them when they last met. Repeat the action...1, 2, 3...and note the differences. A third and final 'photo'. Ask each person is to decide, in this mini piece of theatre, whether they would like to try and sort out the tension; and to show this in the final photo.

### **A variation**

OR...from the very beginning of this activity...

One person recognises the other, while the 'other' has no idea at all who they are seeing.

OR

They each recognise the other, but not really sure just where from...

OR

One person remembers the other, and has really fond memories...while the 'other' actually gets the person mixed up with someone who they have had a really horrendous fight with...

### **Instructions to the actors:**

Each of the above instructions can be given loudly so that all members of the group hear them, or they can be done quietly to the 'actors' only. Either way, this activity is usually fun and entertaining.

## **7. INFLUENCES IN LIFE**

### **Three circles of influence**

This activity aims to highlight the influences people are exposed to and to introduce the idea of inner and outer worlds and how they might intersect, and just what this means for the choices we make.

A person sits in a chair. They are themselves, at least a bit, certainly a person a bit like who they are. (This makes it real, limits the need for 'acting', and gives the person something to present as they simply sit). The person is about to be exposed to: THE MANY INFLUENCES OF THE WORLD....

## **CAUTION**

This activity does tend to replicate a sense of 'voices in the mind'. So be careful and mindful about how you use it. It does not aim to replicate what people might experience when they hear voices, as in what is commonly called a 'psychotic episode'. It aims to represent the ordinary and real voices to which we are all constantly exposed.

Ask people to be the various voices outlined below.

**Voice 1** represents the larger world and all that it says to each of us.

**Voice 2** represents all the messages of the world that are constantly directed specifically to people of the age, sex, gender, culture, sexuality...of the person in the chair...

**Voice 3** represents a third and closer circle of friends and family, who may well send positive and/or negative messages to this person.

We hear from each voice one at a time. Then collectively...

**Voice 4** enters and represents what we shall call: 'an ITEM you highly desire.' This item may be real or imagined, legal or illegal. The ITEM introduces itself to the person in the chair and tells them just what it can offer them.

**Voices 5 and 6** place themselves either side of the person. These are the competing internal voices; one saying 'yeah go on. Take it!'. The other voice counsels caution: 'This is dangerous.'

And so it goes for a moment or two...and then we hear all voices speak simultaneously with the expected impact. After a moment of what is likely to be a noisy, possibly disturbing, probably chaotic sound barrage, we ask the person what they are likely to do at this point. And why.

## **8. COMMUNICATION IN RELATIONSHIPS**

Only do this activity when everyone's senses of humour, irony, playfulness and compassion are FULLY engaged. It is perfect for couples, and can also be really useful for team building events. And it can also of course be a homework activity.

This is an activity for people who know each other in some way, whether deeply or less so.

Ask people to choose a topic or situation including a moment or event from the group itself.

The idea is to make comments, give feedback to another person. The comments are to fall into one of these categories.

- A complaint or criticism
- A helpful suggestion
- A 'for your information'
- A comment
- An observation.

And there is bound to be discussion as to which category each comment falls into.

You may tell your partner beforehand what is coming, or you just decide which category it is and keep it to yourself and then see if your partner agrees.

This activity can lead to increased intimacy and a great deal of laughter. Or to divorce, arguments and heated discussion, depending on how you handle it.

## 9. WHAT'S IMPORTANT IN LIFE

### Some life questions to ponder

- What brings you joy?
- What lifts you up?
- When do you feel wonderful?
- What inspires you?
- What makes your spirit soar?
- Who do you admire?
- What is unforgettable?
- What, for you, has been a splendid moment?
- What do you think the next splendid moment might look like?

## 10. MORE RELATIONSHIPS

The following activity is best done at a time when people really feel like exploring relationships in their lives. It can be surprising what feelings they can elicit within us. So be aware of this.

Take a pen and paper...and take a moment...and now...put a word or sign of some sort on the paper to represent you. Your name would do fine!

Think of the people in your life...and as they come to mind represent them in some way on the paper around 'you'...in no particular order, nor in terms of closeness or importance...just note them down in some way in words or in symbols or pictures...

Now for each of those relationships, write just one or two words next to them that describe that relationship, what characterizes it, what defines it...

Now take a few moments to simply look back over what you have recorded, and ask yourself, for each of these relationships:

- Is this the way I want it to be?
- What do I need to do to maintain it?
- Or what do I need to do to nurture it more?
- Or possibly, what do I need to restore it?

## 11. A LIFE REVIEW

### Checking on 'life stuff'...using rating scales

Depending on the group, by standing on an imagined line on the ground to represent their answers, by a show of hands, or by writing a response on paper: using the scale below, give a rating for each of the following, where 1 is 'Some change needed'...through to 10 which is 'Just the way I want it to be'?

**0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10**  
**Some change needed** **Just the way I want it**

**to be**

- Your work (Or school)?
- The fun part of your life?
- Working hard when you need to?
- Relaxing when you need to?

- Backing your own judgment?
- Paying attention to the 'advice' of others?
  
- Enjoying your own company?
- Enjoying the company of others?

## 12. IMPORTANT MOMENTS

Think of a time when something happened, something that was quite wonderful, and draw something to represent that moment. Do this fairly quickly. And what you draw is unimportant, what you are representing – that's important. And now, with words, symbols or pictures, answer these questions for yourself.

1. Firstly, what was it that made this moment so wonderful.....?
2. And secondly, what was your part in this moment? Was it active? Did you do something to create this moment? Or did it just happen?
3. Are you expecting more wonderful moments?
4. Are you doing anything to make them happen? Or just waiting?
5. And whatever your last response was, is this okay with you?

## 13. LISTENING – DEEPLY

This is exactly what its name suggests, a listening activity. Two people. One simply talks for two minutes while the other listens. Then the listener does either or both of two things:

1. They let the person know what they hear and with feedback, find out how well they listened
2. A more compelling and more difficult thing is this. The listener takes a moment to tell the other person not so much what they heard, but what they think they now might know about the speaker. What they think the person is interested in, what they care about, the sorts of qualities and characteristics they possess...

### CAUTION!

The second is much more complicated and risky for the obvious reasons. Also often much more useful.

## 14. WHAT'S IN OUR HEADS?

There have been endless strategies over the years about the power of 'positive thinking', about sports people 'psyching' themselves up, about thinking what it is that you want to attract. And some of this has been useful and some less so. This simple activity asks you to use self-talk, the voice in your head, the thought-voice, to do three things.

1. **Stop!** No more complicated than this. When you find thoughts in your head that you do not want there, say to yourself: 'Stop!'. And don't take no for an answer.
2. **Breathe and focus on your breathing...**the in...the out...don't be concerned with clearing your mind or not clearing your mind...just focus on your breathing...the in...the out...and that's it. Nothing simpler, sort of
3. **Imagine.** We know that when we listen to music we love, we get certain brain activity. We now also know that when we just imagine listening to our favourite music,

we get similar brain activity. So put the words, the pictures, the sounds, that you want. that you enjoy, that lift you up...into your mind. So...here it is....

## **2. STOP BREATH IMAGINE**

Is it all as simple as this? Well of course not. And yet this really can still be helpful.

I hope you find something here that is useful to you. Have fun.

Peter Slattery August 2015