GROUP BUILDERS

Impulse
With the group standing in a circle, one person squeezes the hand of the person to their right, who then squeezes the next person’s hand, and so on. The group should be able to watch the squeeze get passed around the circle. Try to do it faster, try changing directions, or try sending around multiple squeezes. The same exercise can be done passing a clap around the circle, where two people face each other, make eye contact, and clap together, then the person on the right turns to the person on their right to do the same thing, and so on. These games should be done in silence, and are a good way to get the group focused or concentrating on a task.

Counting Game
Sit or stand in a circle. The object is to count to 10 (or 20 for more advanced groups) out loud as a group. Everyone must be quiet. Designate one person to say “1” to start the game. Without any kind of communication or plan, the group must make it to the goal without any two people saying the same number at the same time. If two people do say the same number at the same time, you must start again. If the group can’t do it after many tries the first time you try it, try again a few days later. The group needs to be focused and able to ‘read’ each other well to succeed. If it’s too easy, count to a higher number or try it with your eyes closed.
* This is a good activity to get everyone focused and working together, may be helpful at the beginning or end of a reflection.

Warp Speed
- Have the group stand in a circle, about arms length apart from one another. Toss a ball around the circle, in any order, saying your name and the name of the person you’re throwing to as you throw. Do this until everyone has received the ball once and it returns to the person who started. Now that there’s a pattern have the group continue to throw the ball in the same pattern, as fast as possible. The only rules are that the ball has to travel from one person’s hand(s) to another’s, in order. They should be able to do this in under 5 seconds. (Hint: they should stand closer together, get in order in the circle, pass it instead of rolling it, and then finally, stand tight together with one hand inside the circle and roll it around the circle.)
**Communication Line-Up**

Have everyone stand with both feet on a masking tape line on the ground. Instruct them to line up in a specific order (by birthdate, middle name, etc.) without talking at all, and without moving off the line. Once the think they're in perfect order, have them announce what they are, and see whether they succeeded. Discuss: What did you notice about how people communicated? What worked? What didn’t? Importance of non-verbal communication. Importance of being able to understand each other and “speak the same language.”

**Tower Power**

Break up into small groups, and give each group lots of masking tape, scrap paper, cardboard, etc. Each group has to build as tall a tower as possible that can stand alone without human support. Give the group time limits to plan (1 min) and build (5 min). After a minute or two, make up a disaster and tell them they have to do the rest of the activity without talking. When time’s up, judge the towers.

**Giants, Wizards, and Elves**

This game is basically human “rock, paper, scissors.” Split the group into two teams, and have them stand facing each other, about a foot back from the center line. Also designate zones to be out of bounds. Teach the group very distinct physical poses for giants, wizards, and elves. As in Rock, Paper, Scissors, giants beat wizards, wizards beat elves, and elves beat giants.

Each round, each team should huddle and quietly decide whether they want to be giants, wizards, or elves (everyone on the team has to be the same thing). When both teams have decided, they come back to the center line. On the count of three (or the count of “Giants, Wizards, or Elves?”) they face off: everyone on both teams has to do their pose. If they tie, they try it again. If one team beats the other, the one that won has to chase and tag members of the other team. Everyone who gets tagged has to join the taggers. Play continues until the whole group’s on one team.
**STAND UP**

**Risk:** Low

**Equipment:** Ø (Wet grass doesn't help.)

**Procedure:** Group pairs up (someone about their height). Sit back-to-back on the ground with elbows locked. Stand up. Try it with one more person . . .

**Comments:** This is a good beginning initiative to help lay the groundwork for cooperation and communication.

**Discussion:** ✓ Mutual support  
✓ How did you strategize?  
✓ What happened when a new person joined the effort?

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**GROUP SIT**

**Risk:** Low

**Equipment:** Ø (Ability to make a good circular circle)

**Procedure:** Group forms a really good circle, then turns to the right (or left) placing their hands on the waist of the person in front of them. Group, in perfect synchronicity, slowly steps toward the center (keeping a good circle!) until not more than one inch separates everyone. On the count of three, everyone lowers themselves onto the lap of the person behind them, mindful that they are the “person behind” for the person in front of them. Rest your full weight on the lap of the person behind you and raise your hands into the air.

**Comments:** A common team-builder and comfort zone expander.

**Variations:** ✓ Walk the group in a circle, one leg at a time, or try jumping!

**Discussion:** ✓ What were the necessary factors for meeting the challenge?  
✓ Comfort zones?  
✓ Did you think you would be able to walk?

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**KNOTS**

**Risk:** Low

**Equipment:** Ø (Flexible wrists)

**Procedure:** Group stands up facing one another in a tight circle. Everyone puts right hand into center and grabs a hand of anyone except the person next to them. The left hand is next, same rules, plus you can't grab the left hand of the person whose right hand you already have. Without breaking the chain, untangle the knot. Make sure your grips are loose and flexible to avoid pain and suffering.

**Comments:** A good way to introduce the concept of initiatives (learning on top of having fun) and push folks’ comfort zones.

**Discussion:** ✓ What is comfortable?  
✓ What styles of communication were most effective? natural?  
✓ Did teamwork happen? What helped it? hampered it?
Trust Activities

TRUST ACTIVITIES

Trust Leans
Pair up with someone about your size. Stand behind the person, in catching position, with the person in front in falling position. With your hands ready to support their back, have the person in front slowly fall back into you, then bring them back to a standing position. Start relatively close together, then move a step backward each time, as long as both people are comfortable. When you’ve reached that limit, then switch roles.

Trust Walk
Pair up and blindfold one person in each pair. Hold hands, or have one person put their hands on the other’s shoulders. Each “guide” leads their partner through an obstacle course or through any unfamiliar territory, directing and warning the person with their voice. Switch roles. This activity can also be done in a single-file line, in which each person but the one in front is blindfolded, and everyone has their hands on the shoulders of the person in front.
The Slate

"Beam Me Up Scotty"

The Challenge:
To fit the entire community on one small platform long enough to say the words, "Beam me up, Scotty."

Materials Needed:
Some sort of board, size to be determined by counselors

Set Up:
The board sits on the ground and players stand around.

Obstacles:
The board is small and the players must figure out a way to fit every person on the board at the same time. No feet may touch the ground for at least the time it takes to say the phrase.

The Story:
Trying to get up to outer space. Scotty only has time for one ride, so every member of the community must go together. He will only zoom the group if everyone is all the way on.

Variations:
This challenge can be done in small groups, using smaller slates, like kickboards
More Group Activities

The Sheet

The Challenge: A group of people is standing on a simple bed sheet, spread out on the ground. The goal is to turn the sheet over so that the group is standing on the other side without ever stepping off at all.

Materials Needed: a simple bedsheets, non fitted

Set Up: lay it out on the ground. Stand on it.

Here's the trick: make a twist in the corner and send the ripple across to the farthest corner.

Obstacles: proximity can get stifling...25 people is a little too many...

The Story:

SOMETHING LIKE

THIS...

(NOT AS EASY OR OBVIOUS AS IT LOOKS!)

Sheet is flipped over!
Mafia

Face cards (about 3) are mafia. Number cards are innocents. Ace (1) is the informer (also an innocent). Each person takes a card, looks at it but keeps it hidden from everyone else. Innocents are trying to wipe out the mafia before they themselves are killed. Whichever group has the most people left alive in the end wins. The first time you play, have one person stay out to be the caller. After that, the first person killed becomes caller.

First night:
While the group’s eyes are closed, the mafia open their eyes and look around to identify themselves to the caller and to each other.

Each day:
Group deliberates and accuses people of being mafia. The person being accused can do anything to defend themselves (including lie). The group chooses someone to kill, by democratic vote (majority wins, and the person being voted on can’t vote). The person killed then shows their card. Once someone is killed, the talking stops until the next day.

Each night:
While the group’s eyes are closed, the mafia open their eyes and choose a group member to kill (by pointing only). Then the informer opens their eyes and points to someone to find out whether or not they’re mafia (caller gives thumbs up for mafia, thumbs down for innocent). When everyone opens their eyes, the caller announces who was killed during the night, and the day’s deliberations begin again.

Play continues until only mafia or only innocents are left standing.

Warning: Approach with caution. Concerns have been raised that encouraging kids to “kill” each other may not be the message we’re trying to send, so consider changing the story a bit. Also, though this can be a great group builder, it can also create tension, or kids can get obsessed with it, so use it with care, and make sure you have a solid group first.
MORE GROUP INITIATIVES

Blind Shapes
Start with the group standing in a straight line or a circle. Blindfold each person and give them a rope to hold on to. As a group (without cheating or removing their blindfolds), they have to form the rope into a perfect square. The only rule is that everyone has to keep one hand on the rope at all times. When everyone thinks the figure is right, let them open their eyes and see. But don’t let them be too discouraged if it’s not a perfect square -- the victory is more in the process than the end result. If they’re way off, let them discuss what worked and what didn’t about their process, and let them try it again.

Ice Slide
Find a playground set with a large plastic tube slide. Pretend the slide is an "ice slide" with no traction. Challenge the group to get all of their members from the bottom to the top (without grabbing or climbing on the slide).