

Building Teamwork and Communication Skills in your Academy Class

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Get to Know You Activities

Personal Preference

Supplies: None
No Sight: NA
No talking: NA
Touching: NA

Description: Everyone stands at one side of the room. The leader asks an either/or question. Participants move to the side of the line that matches their choice.

Example Questions:

I have siblings / I have no siblings
I prefer sweet / I prefer salty
I prefer math / I prefer English
I like to read / I don't like to read
I like a quiet classroom / I like a noisy classroom
I like to watch sports / I like to play sports

Debrief tips: What was an interesting thing you learned? What would you have liked to have learned?

Teacher Goal: To show the class that diversity exists within their group and that they all have commonalities and differences. Get them to accept differences within the classroom and learn to work with all people.

M&M Activity

Supplies: M&M's (or rolls of toilet paper), paper and pen. (Do not allow pencil if possible.)
No Sight: NA
No talking: NA
Touching: NA

Description: Have each student take out a piece of paper and a pencil. Pass around a bag of M&Ms and tell them to take some M&Ms. (Might want to set a minimum and maximum amount.) They need to count the M&Ms and write the number in pen at the top of their paper and circle it. Then inform them that they have to write a different, positive fact about themselves for each M&M they took. You can set a time limit and collect papers at the end or the next day. You can ask each student to share out 2 or 3 facts about themselves.

Debrief tips: Was it frustrating to start an activity where the teacher's goal was not clear to you? How many of you wish you would have taken fewer M&M? What did you learn from this activity?

Teacher Goal: Since students' goal is getting the candy and teacher's goal is to learn information about the students, point out that the conflicting goals did not always work in their favor. This activity allows you to observe what happens when goals are not clearly stated, to teach students to ask clarifying questions and to get to know the individuals within the class.

Birthday List

Supplies: None.

No Sight: NA

No talking: Yes

Touching: NA

Description: This is a nonspeaking activity. To start, you have the class line up by height. Once they have accomplished this task, have them rearrange the line by birthday, starting January 1st (year does not matter). Once they are lined up, go down the line and check to see if they were successful.

Debrief tips: Which task was more challenging for you? Why? What method of communication did you rely on when you weren't allowed to speak? What other ways might you have used to communicate? Who were the leaders and why?

Teacher Goal: To get students to start working together and expand their communication skills.

Draw for Understanding

Supplies: Paper, pencil, and timer.

No Sight: NA

No talking: Yes

Touching: NA

Description: To begin, students are not permitted to speak to each other. Each student will be paired with his/her elbow buddy. The teacher chooses a few topics ahead of time. We recommend 3 or 4. The teacher names the first topic and each student has 1-2 minutes to draw their response. After going through all chosen topics, students will come up to introduce their buddy to the class, using only their drawings. The buddy is permitted to correct any misinterpretations during the presentation.

Possible topics:

Family

Pets

Career Goals

Favorite subject

Hobbies

Favorite Food

Debrief tips: What was challenging about this activity? Would you draw your responses differently? If so, how? What did you like about this activity? What did you learn? What would have been some topics you would have liked to share?

Teacher Goal: Students start getting to know each other and work on expanding communication skills.

Name Duck Goose

Supplies: Prizes optional. Can give bonus points or a small treat.

No Sight: NA

No talking: NA

Touching: Yes (minimal)

Description: This activity is better for outdoors. It is played just like duck-duck-goose, except using names. Have students sit in a big circle and have one person be “it”. They will walk around touching each student’s head and say their name. If they mess up on the name, that person chases them around the circle and tries to tag them before they make it to the open seat. If they can get all the way around the circle without messing up, they get a prize.

Debrief tips: What was the purpose of this activity? Did you learn anyone’s name today? Why is it important for you to know each other’s name?

Teacher Goal: To encourage class to get to know their classmates’ names and develop better relationships with each other.

Communication Builders

Observation Skills

Supplies: Timer.

No Sight: NA

No talking: NA

Touching: NA

Description: Have each person pair up with their elbow buddy. They are to stand facing each other and are given about 30 seconds to observe the other person. The teacher then tells them to stand back to back and change 2 to 3 things about their appearance. When the teacher tells them to turn back around, each person tries to name the changes their buddy made.

Debrief tips: What was the purpose of this activity? How might strong observation skills help you in this classroom? at school? in the workforce?

Teacher Goal: To encourage students to become more observant in order to communicate more clearly.

Back Writing

Supplies: Very basic picture or sketch, paper, and pencil.

No Sight: NA

No talking: Yes

Touching: Yes

Description: Break your class into teams of 8 or more. Each team will sit down to form a line, front to back. Each person will be looking at the back of the person in front of them. You must tell the students that they are not allowed to speak. The person at the very back of the line will be shown a basic picture. Their job is to draw that picture on the back of the person in front of them. If you need them to draw the picture again, put your finger up, and they will redraw the picture. This back-drawing continues until

the person at the front of the line draws what they felt on a piece of paper. The team then compares their drawing to the original. (Our class wanted to try again after the first picture, so you might want two basic sketches prepared.)

Debrief tips: What forms of communication were used to complete this activity? What did you find challenging? How could you improve your approach?

Teacher Goal: Highlights how poor communication can impact success. Students learn how much they depend on verbal and sight skills. Allow students to develop other methods of communication and to build focus.

Lego Building

Supplies: Legos or some type of construction toy.

No Sight: limited

No talking: limited

Touching: NA

Description: You need to have one built object and enough parts for a second that is not constructed for each group. Students will divide up into pairs and should sit back to back. One student will be given a constructed object and one will be given all the parts to build that same figure. The student with the constructed object must describe in words how the object is constructed. The builder must attempt to build the object based on the description. The builder may not ask any questions.

Variation: Instead of using verbal descriptions, you can use written assembly directions. Give a 10 minute limit for the written communication and then pass the paper to the builder.

Debrief tips: What was challenging about this activity? What would have helped you to do this better? How would you have approached this differently? Why is communication key to this class? What real-life activities are similar to this activity?

Teacher Goal: The goal of this activity is to develop verbal communication. It encourages students to be accurate and thorough in their verbal (or written) descriptions. Highlights how poor communication can impact success.

Competitive Activities

Shove Off

Supplies: none

No Sight: NA

No talking: NA

Touching: yes

Description: Students will divide into pairs. Make sure they are standing in an area where they will not get hurt if they stumble a bit. Each person should stand with his/her feet shoulder width apart, place his/her arms up with palms lightly touching those of his partner. Each student tries to unbalance the other by adding or removing pressure on their hands once they say “go”. The one who moves his/her feet first loses. Switch partners and repeat with winners paired with other winners and losers paired with other losers. Teacher can pick how many times this is played. Each partnership may want to do the best 2 of 3 before switching partners.

Debrief tips: What approach did you take at first? How did you alter your approach? What did you find was the most successful approach? Did your approach depend on your partner?

Teacher Goal: Get the students to learn different ways of approaching problems and learn from each other.

Over/Under

Supplies: Water balloon or something else risky to pass.

No Sight: NA

No talking: NA

Touching: Yes (minimal)

NOTE: might want to warn students that they could get wet during this activity.

Description: This activity should be done outside. You might need ~5 balloons per team to have some spares. Divide class into 8-10 students per team.

You need a starting line and an ending line. Students start behind the starting line and attempt to move their entire team forward across the ending line. The teams form a line behind the “starting line” with any spacing they want. Once a person picks the spot to stand, they may not move until they are the “last” person in line, receive the balloon and race to the front. The person at the front of the line starts by passing the water balloon back over their head. The next person must pass it back to the next person through their legs (under their body). This continues until the balloon reaches the back of the line. The last person then runs to the front of the first person (closer to the ending line) and starts to pass the balloon backward again. The team that moves all players passed the ending line is the winner. If a team breaks their balloon, they may get a new one, but would need to restart at the beginning. (See diagram below for an example)

Starting positions:

End Line

|
|
|

Starting Line

|xxxxxxx
|x x x x x x x
|xxxxxxx

Intermediate positions

End Line

|
|
|

Starting Line

x xxx x|xxx
x x x x |x x x x
x x x x x x x |x x

Ending position

End Line

x x x x x| x x x
x | x x x x x x x
X x x x x x x x|

Starting Line

|
|
| **Winners**

Debrief tips: What went well? What went poorly? Did you notice the other teams' progress? What caused tension or conflict? What would you do differently? Who were the leaders and why? How did the team decide on spacing? Did spacing choices change as you progressed and why?

Teacher Goal: Get the students to learn different ways of approaching problems and learn from each other to find a method that works for the team. Develop a sense of shared responsibility. Balance risk vs. reward.

Paper Shelter

Supplies: A lot of paper (large sheets or newspaper works best), One roll of masking or duct tape per team. Timer

No Sight: NA

No talking: mostly

Touching: yes

Description: This should be done outside or in a large open space. Ideally, it should be done so that the two teams cannot see their competitor's work (around a corner from each other). The task is to build a free-standing paper shelter that will hold the entire team to protect them from a rainstorm. The team has a limited time to build their shelter and has limited resources. The shelter must stand on its own before the students enter it. The shelter must be able to hold all the students and cover them completely. Divide the class into 2 teams. Each team is given a certain amount of paper and one roll of tape. The student teams are then given 10 minutes to plan their shelter and their communication methods. Once the building phase starts, team members are not allowed to talk. (The teacher may need to develop penalties for talking, like a minute building break every time they talk.) The teams are given a limited time to build their shelter (15 min minimum is needed for even a small team). The first team to build the most successful shelter wins. The teacher is the judge as to whether all the rules have been satisfied.

Debrief tips: What communication methods did your team use and how well did they work? What was the hardest thing about the task? What did you learn? What would you do differently? Who were the leaders and why?

Teacher Goal: Highlight the importance of planning. Teach the students how to follow a set of rules and succeed using limited resources. Learn how to communicate in a variety of ways. Develop a sense of shared responsibility. Allow leaders to emerge.

Cooperative Activities

Hand to Hip

Supplies: None.

No Sight: NA

No talking: NA

Touching: yes

Description: Each student is paired with another. They face each other and hold their partners right wrist in their right hand. Each student tries to touch their right hand to their right hip as many times as they can.

Debrief tips: How many of you wrestled with your partners to try to touch your hip? Were you successful? How many of you worked cooperatively? How successful were you?

Teacher Goal: For students to see that competitive approaches are not always the best. The students with the most touches will be the ones who work cooperatively together.

Human knot

Supplies: Space for everyone to move around. Good outside activity.

No Sight: NA

No talking: NA

Touching: Yes

Description: You can divide the class into smaller groups or do this as a whole class activity. Each student crosses their arms in front of them and grabs two of their classmates' hands. Students should not grab two of the same person's hands. The goal is to get all students to untangle their arms without letting go of their classmates' hands. The end result will be a circle or interlocking circles.

Debrief tips: How was your team able to accomplish the task? In what ways did you have to cooperate? Who were the leaders of this activity and why?

Teacher Goal: For students to learn to work together to accomplish a goal. Allows leaders to emerge, and students learn to value each other's ideas.

Traffic Jam

Supplies: 7 pieces of paper per group

No Sight: NA

No talking: NA

Touching: minimal

Description: Divide the students into teams of 7, where 6 students are on the paper and one student serves as the coach. You can have larger teams if you use more paper, but then there is a lot of arguing. Allow each team to choose their coach. Put 7 pieces of paper in a line and have the 6 students stand on the paper leaving the middle space open. The 3 students on the left face the 3 students on the right of the blank space. The goal is for all the students on the right side to move to the left and all of the students on the left side to move to the right with the center space empty at the end. If a student starts on the right, they may only move toward the left spaces. If a student starts on the left, they may only move toward the right. Students may not move backward. Only one student may be on a paper at any one time and all must be on papers after a move. Students may only move to empty papers. Students may only jump to skip one occupied paper in a move and must end on an empty paper. Only one student may move at a time. First team to complete wins.

Key: If the papers are labeled 1 through 7, with 4 being the middle stone.

1. 3 to 4
2. 5 to 3
3. 6 to 5
4. 4 to 6
5. 2 to 4
6. 1 to 2
7. 3 to 1
8. 5 to 3
9. 7 to 5
10. 6 to 7
11. 4 to 6
12. 2 to 4
13. 3 to 2
14. 5 to 3
15. 4 to 5

Debrief tips: Who emerged as the leader and why? What type of communication skills did you use to solve the problem? How would you improve next time? What was the minimum number of moves for your team to be successful?

Teacher Goals: Teach the students how to follow a set of rules as a team. Learn how to communicate in a variety of ways. Develop a sense of shared responsibility. Provide opportunities for leaders to emerge.

Count off

Supplies: Blind folds.
No Sight: Yes
No talking: Yes
Touching: NA

Description: This activity takes a lot of time to complete successfully. Students are not allowed to speak, except to say numbers. Students are blindfolded and asked to “count off” from 1 to however many people are in the class. Every time a number is said twice, the group must start over. If someone does shout out something other than a number, the group must start over. If anyone comes into the room, the group must start over. The group is successful when each person has said one number and completed the “count” of bodies. Note: A person may NOT say more than one number.

Debrief tips: What did you find frustrating about this activity? How did you approach the count off? Was it important to have different approaches within the group itself to find success? How would you approach this differently if you were to try again?

Teacher Goal: For students to learn cooperation and patience to accomplish a task.

Blind polygons

Supplies: Blindfolds, string.
No Sight: Yes
No talking: NA
Touching: Minimal

Description: This activity works well with groups of 3 or 4. Each group is blind-folded and given a piece of string. They are asked to make the string into different polygons, for example: square, pentagon, parallelogram, equilateral triangle, etc. Pick shapes you know your students know. Each student must have their hands on the string. When they have completed their task, they need to call the teacher over to check their figure.

Debrief tips: What approach did you take to this activity? How were you able to tell if you were close without seeing? What was difficult about this activity? Who was the leader of this activity and why?

Teacher Goal: For students to develop their communication skills and to work together to accomplish a goal.