

Open/closed circle (Topic 1)

Purpose:

To highlight the social tensions young people may experience when newly joining a board or council.

Instructions:

1. Choose two adult volunteers from the group who seem good-natured and seem to easily verbalize their ideas and feelings. Say to the group that you are going to give these two volunteers special instructions for the activity, and you will give the rest of the group its own instructions.
2. Ask the two volunteers to step outside the room with you. When you are outside the room, say “Your instructions for this exercise are to do whatever is necessary – physically or verbally – to get into the group.” Prompt them to wait outside the room until you call them in.
3. Invite the group still in the room to stand, circle up in an open area (not around a table), and lock arms. Say to the group, “Your instructions for this exercise are to keep the two volunteers out of your group at all costs. Don’t let them in the circle. Don’t speak to them or make eye contact.”
4. Now invite the two volunteers to come in. Allow them to attempt getting into the circle for a couple of minutes, then say “OK – stop.”
5. Ask the two volunteers to leave the room again. Outside the room, say to them, “For round two, your instructions are exactly the same. Do whatever you need to do – physically or verbally – to get into the group.” (They may start asking you questions, but refrain from answering.) Ask them again to wait until the prompt to come back into the room.
6. To the group in the room, say, “For round 2, your instructions are to physically let the two volunteers into the circle, but only when they make a movement or ask to be included. Even when they are allowed to join the circle, ignore them. Do not make eye contact or talk to them.”
7. Now invite the two volunteers back in the room. Let them to attempt to get into the circle, allowing enough time for both to join the group, but to realize the group is ignoring them. Then say “OK – stop.”
8. Ask the two volunteers to leave the room for a final time. Outside, instruct them, “For round three, your instructions are once again the same. Do whatever you need to do to get into and be a part of the group.” Finally, ask them to wait until your prompt to return.
9. To the group, say, “For round 3, let both volunteers into the circle, once they make a movement or ask to be included. Choose one of the two volunteers to talk to and make eye contact with, but refrain from speaking to or making eye contact with the second volunteer. Ask the group to pick which volunteer they will “adopt.”
10. Finally, invite the two volunteers into the room. Allow them time to get into the circle, and for the one volunteer to recognize he/she is getting “preferential” treatment and the second volunteer to recognize he/she is getting left out. Now say “OK – stop.” Thank the volunteers and the group for participating, and ask all to return to their seats.

Reflection questions:

1. Ask the two volunteers: “What happened the first time you came back in the room? How did it make you feel?”
2. What happened the second time you came back in the room? How did it make you feel?
3. What happened the last time you came back in the room? Ask the first volunteer who received “preferential” treatment: how did it make you feel? Ask the second volunteer who was ignored by the group: how did it make you feel?
4. What does this activity illustrate about the experiences young people may have when first joining the council?
5. What can the council do to ensure a new youth representative is not treated preferentially over another?