

Spontaneous Do-Anywhere Activities that Anyone Can Do

A presentation by
Kathy Laurenhue, Wiser Now, Inc.
7282 55th Ave. E, Suite 144, Bradenton, FL 34203
941-749-0220 or 800-999-0795
kathy@wisernow.com or www.wisernow.com



Introduction

The handout for my “Resources for Keeping Aging Brains Active” presentation lists lots of games, exercises and books that provide ideas for interacting with older adults, most of which require minimal props and set-ups. This handout takes things a step further and suggests activities that require no props at all, except perhaps the “cheat sheets” of questions/statements provided here.

The handout is divided into two parts. 1) Active group exercises that anyone can lead, and which can also be done one-on-one as conversation starters between staff and older adults or older adults and their visitors. 2) Conversational exercises that can also be done both ways.

In the interest of saving space, the exercises are provided here without, for the most part, explanations on how to adapt them. That will be provided in the class as we try these out!

Active Exercises

Choose One

I have been doing this exercise with a wide variety of groups for about 20 years. My friend and colleague Karen Stobbe does a variation she calls “Pick a Side” (as people move from one side of the room to the other). Proving that the potential questions for this game are limitless, here are some of the other choices she uses:

- Chocolate or vanilla
- Ocean or mountains
- TV or book
- Steak or seafood
- Cat or dog
- TP over the roll or TP under the roll

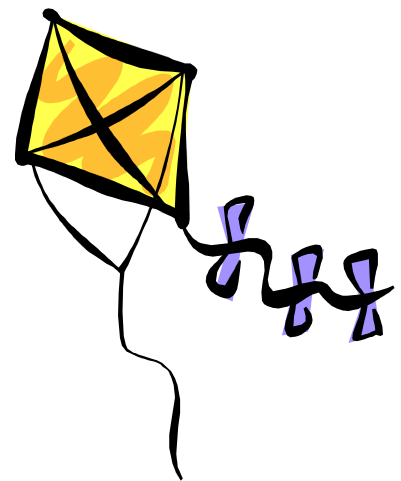
Check out her website for more improvisational games: www.in-themoment.com.



Choose One

Are you:

1. More of a saver or a spender?
2. More of an early-riser or a night owl?
3. More a city person or a country person?
4. More intuitive (go with your gut feelings) or more rational?
5. More physical or mental (in your exercise preferences)?
6. More like the tortoise (slow and steady) or the hare (racing along through life)?
7. More like dancing shoes or sneakers?
8. More *carpe diem* (Seize the day) or *Que sera sera* (What will be, will be)?
9. More like a rose or a daisy? Why?
10. More like a kite string or a clothesline? Why?
11. More like violins or drums? (Or some other musical instrument altogether?) Why?
12. More like a screened porch or a picture window? Why?



Have a ball

I consistently encourage physical exercise. If you are working with older adults, you may need ideas that can be done while sitting as easily as standing. If so, try the Imaginary Ball Toss – no equipment needed!

Everyone stands (or sits) in a circle. One person begins by calling out the name of someone else in the circle and then pretends to toss an object to him or her. As he does so, he names the object: "It's a tennis ball." That person pretends to catch a tennis ball, then calls the name of someone else, tosses the imaginary object to her, and either says, "It's still a tennis ball," or changes the name of the object and the way he tosses it, "It's a watermelon now." The person catching pretends to catch a watermelon, then calls another person's name and throws the same or a new object at him: "Now it's an egg." Got the idea? How you throw and pretend to catch each item provides both physical and mental exercise. Imagine everything you might toss (Olympic sports, anyone?) and go beyond the ordinary – it's a dove, a doughnut, a thermos of dry martinis.



If not everyone in your group knows everyone, wear large nametags or simply ask people for their names.

I first encountered this game in the marvelous book *Playfair* by Matt Weinstein and Joel Goodman. It was written in 1980, but it's still a marvelous resource.

What am I?

This is another idea from Karen Stobbe (www.in-themoment.com/) that is essentially a variation on charades, minus having to come up with the title of a famous book or movie. Here, anything goes.

The idea is to individually, or in groups of 2 – 5, act out an object, such as water, octopus, grass, house, flag, sleep, M&M's, paper, pantyhose – anything that comes to mind. Give each group a few minutes to figure out how they are going to act out their object, and then give the other groups a few minutes to figure out what is being acted out. You can set time limits, but the object is fun and creativity, not winning. Allow sound effects, if you wish.

The one preparation you might want to do in advance is to jump start creative thinking by putting one possible word on each of a dozen index cards and letting each person or group choose one card without looking at it in advance.



Conversational Exercises

Name stories: Everyone has at least one

Our identity comes first from our name. Many of us have been shaped by our names -- first and last and nicknames. Some of us have had to live up to a name; others of us have had to overcome negatives associated with our names or heritage. Some name stories are funny, others are sad, but everyone has a story about his/her name or about the name of someone else.

- Who named you? What do you know about how your name was chosen? Were you named after someone?
- Do you like your name? Why or why not?
- Do you have a nickname? How did you acquire it? Do you prefer the use of your real name or nickname? Why?
- What are the stories associated with names in your family?

Plan or remember a celebration

In this exercise, everyone is asked to imagine a celebration – one remembered or one they would like to have. The celebration could be one honoring the person remembering, such as a birthday, or one honoring someone else whom the person loves and/or admires.

The one prop I suggest here that often gets creative juices flowing is to draw the shape of a cake on a blank piece of paper and then decorate it. One can also simply imagine the cake.

- What are you celebrating? Is there a “guest of honor”? Who is it?
- Who is at the celebration?
- Where is the celebration taking place?
- Describe your cake. What is written on it? What flavor is the cake?
- What else is being served?
- Is the room decorated? How?

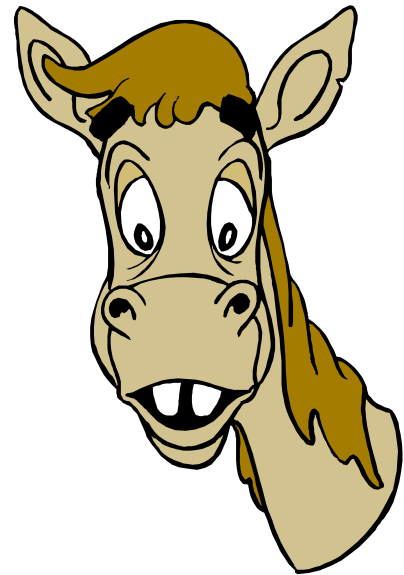


- Are presents being given? Is anything especially fun or interesting in the packages?
- Are games being played? Describe them.

Opposing Proverbs

We can learn a lot about one another by choosing between proverbs that express opposite views. Which statement in each of the following pairs is closest to your attitude? Does it vary depending upon the people or event involved? Explain. The talk about other proverbs you live by – or once did.

- ___ 1. Look before you leap.
___ He who hesitates is lost.
- ___ 2. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.
___ Once bitten, twice shy.
- ___ 3. You can't teach an old dog new tricks.
___ It's never too late to learn.
- ___ 4. Where there's a will there's a way.
___ Time and tide wait for no man.
- ___ 5. Out of sight, out of mind.
___ Absence makes the heart grow fonder.
- ___ 6. Two heads are better than one.
___ If you want something done right, do it yourself.
- ___ 7. Never look a gift horse in the mouth.
___ All that glitters is not gold.
- ___ 8. You can't tell a book by its cover.
___ Clothes make the man.
- ___ 9. Better safe than sorry.
___ Nothing ventured, nothing gained.
- ___ 10. A stitch in time saves nine.
___ Better late than never.



Rules for Living

A variation on choosing proverbs is identifying your rules for living. Try to keep them short. These were Alice Roosevelt Longworth's:

*Fill what's empty.
Empty what's full.
Scratch where it itches.*



Some resources

Connecting with others is often largely a matter of asking questions and sharing responses. Two books with good questions are:

- *To Our Children's Children, Preserving Family Histories for Generations to Come* by Bob Greene and D.G. Fulford.
- *If . . . (Questions for the Game of Life)* by Evelyn McFarlane and James Saywell. (They have also written sequels.)

Games that ask interesting questions include:

- LifeStories
- Conversation Pieces (also from LifeStories)
- Penny Ante (2 versions)
- Table Talk
- Shake Out the Truth; Shake Loose a Memory

There are innumerable coffee table and other picture books that prompt conversation and simple enjoyment between people. Here's one that's fun:

- *Everyday Fashions of the 50's*, featuring excerpts from old Sears catalogs of the decade (versions from other decades are also available) and published by Dover. The print is very small on the clothing descriptions, but the styles will bring back many memories and the prices are hard to believe.

Catalog sources:

Bi-folkal Productions, Inc.
800-568-5357
www.bifolkal.org

ElderSong Publications, Inc.
800-397-0533
www.eldersong.com

Dover Publications, Inc.
www.doverpublications.com

S&S Primelife
800-243-9232
www.ssw.com

