Creative Crowd-Breakers, Mixers, and Games
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Introduction

Youth Ministry: Its Growth and Development

For the past twenty years, Catholic youth ministry has been in the process of critically re-examining its philosophy, goals, and principles. In part, this re-examination grew out of the perceived and felt needs of young people who will be the adults of the twenty-first century.

In the early seventies—before youth ministry, as we know it, existed—those who worked with young people saw a need to experiment with new styles and forms of ministry with young people. Many parishes, schools, and dioceses began to develop youth ministries on the solid foundation of relational ministry and on the unique social and developmental needs of young people. Heretofore they had relied on the unquestioned process of presenting organizational, programmatic approaches such as weekly or biweekly classes, sports programs, or rarely, weekend or overnight retreats.

The new processes and approaches planted and tended during those years produced a renewed ministry with young people based on experience and insight. Leaders in the field of youth ministry discovered that ministry with young people must be a multifaceted, comprehensive, and coordinated effort. They rediscovered the age-old truth of Jesus’ ministry: all ministry is rooted in relationships. Through the leaders’ outreach and relationship building, young people began to experience the warmth of an accepting community, which is vital for the development of a comprehensive youth ministry. As relationships grew, a sense of belonging and participation also grew. The experience of acceptance, belonging, and participation opened young people so that they were able to reveal the needs and concerns that preoccupied them. Programs developed around these needs and concerns: service projects, retreats, new forms of catechesis, peer ministry, prayer groups, celebrations of the sacraments. With these rediscovered opportunities for ministry, youth ministers were in a position to help young people grow personally and spiritually and find their place in the faith community as active Catholic Christians with a mission.

As the style of youth ministry changed, the traditional ministry to young people by the community evolved into a fourfold approach. Youth ministry was conceived not only in terms of responding to the unique social and developmental needs of young people but also in terms of adults’ sharing a common ministry with young people, by
young people (especially involving their peers), and for young people (adults interpreting young people’s legitimate concerns and acting as advocates for them). This fourfold understanding—to, with, by, and for—changed the style and broadened the scope of youth ministry.

In 1975 and 1976, hundreds of youth leaders from across the country consulted for fifteen months and concretized the aims and philosophy of youth ministry in a document called *A Vision of Youth Ministry*. It has served to guide the church’s mission to young people ever since. *A Vision of Youth Ministry* affirmed the growth that had taken place in youth ministry and challenged the whole church to renew itself.

The document clearly places youth ministry within the framework of the mission and ministry of the church. It defines youth ministry as the “response of the Christian community to the needs of young people, and the sharing of the unique gifts of youth with the larger community.” This reciprocal relationship helps the community to view youth ministry as part of the entire ministry of the community, not separate from it—a problem often encountered when a ministry with young people is perceived as a club or an organization set apart from the mainstream of church life. *A Vision of Youth Ministry* makes clear that an effective ministry with young people incorporates them into the life of the community, where they can share their gifts and talents with the whole community. If young people are to have positive experiences of church life, they must have opportunities to be involved in the whole life of the community. Such opportunities for this type of interaction are at the heart of youth ministry, not on the periphery. By being involved in church life with adults, young people gain a view of what it means to be an adult Catholic Christian. This is a special gift of adults to young people.

The categories of youth ministry as outlined in *A Vision of Youth Ministry* closely parallel the fundamental ministries of the church: word, worship and celebrating, creating community, and service and healing. The seven categories of youth ministry describe the forms that this ministry should take. It is a common framework for a holistic ministry with young people. Briefly, the seven components of youth ministry are as follows:

**Word:** proclaiming the Good News that leads young people to faith in Jesus (evangelization) and deepening young people’s faith in Jesus and applying that faith to their everyday life (catechesis)

**Worship:** celebrating relationships in community and with the Lord through a variety of worship experiences, personal prayer, and spiritual development

**Creating community:** building relationships with young people and creating a healthy environment for growth, in which young people can experience acceptance, belonging, and participation

**Guidance and healing:** responding to young people’s need for spiritual, moral, and personal counseling; vocational guidance; and reconciliation with self, others (peers and family), and God

**Justice and service:** educating young people to the demands of justice and the social problems of our world, responding to young people who suffer injustice, and motivating young people for service on behalf of others

**Enablement:** calling forth adults and young people to become ministers and providing them with the understanding and skills needed for effective ministry

**Advocacy:** working on behalf of young people, interpreting their concerns and needs, and standing up for them in the Christian, and larger, community

Youth ministry has experienced a renewal within the U.S. Catholic church. A renewed ministry with young people brings a need for new and better resources to assist leaders. Before turning to the resources found in this book, let’s examine the place of creative social and learning strategies within youth ministry.

**Creative Strategies for Youth Ministry**

We have already seen the primacy of relationships in youth ministry. However, as relationships grow and programs are created, strategies are needed to accomplish youth ministry’s tasks. The strategies in this book are aids. Their aim is to provide you with a variety of activities you can use in any number of programs. Some of these strategies are primarily suited for one or another component of youth ministry. However, most are adaptable to any number of components. All these strategies foster a particular type of learning—experiential learning. To understand its contribution to your youth ministry, let’s examine experiential learning.

**Experiential Learning**

We have often heard it said that we learn from experience. This is true to an extent. But so much of our own life experience goes by without our ever learning from it. If young people’s life experiences are to be sources of learning and growth, then young people must reflect upon and assimilate them. This often goes undone because no one takes time to help them reflect upon and learn from those experiences. In addition to life experience, there is a second source of experiential learning: structured experience. Experiences we develop that engage young people in the learning process and enable them to reflect are a rich resource for learning.

The structured experiences found in the Creative Resources series—communication games, learning strategies, simulations, projects, case studies, planning ideas, crowd-breakers, mixers, games, special events, and skits—are potential learning experiences for young people.
Creative Gaming

Creative games can serve many purposes in youth ministry. They can acquaint people with one another, build trust, encourage spontaneity, mix and blend groups, and help people release energy. At the same time, they can be fun and learning experiences. Through creative games we discover an opportunity to play with instead of against one another, thus allowing us to play as a unit and reach a common goal. This type of play lets us learn from and laugh at our mistakes, instead of hiding them away in embarrassment. Creative games enhance the growth of a group and create a feeling of accomplishment among the participants, while providing an enjoyable experience for them.

Principles for Cooperative Gaming

1. Games are an effective educational tool. The primary purpose of games and play is to have fun. However, we do learn during play. We learn what is and what is not acceptable behavior. For example, when young people take part in a sport, they also watch the spectators. Their observations may tell them that certain language or actions are appropriate or that others are inappropriate and may even warrant penalties. In cooperative sports, young people learn how to work as a unit, how to cooperate with one another to achieve a desired goal.

Creative sports teach us new and exciting things about ourselves and others. We learn the advantages of working together instead of always trying to win. We learn the place of healthy competition in life. Cooperative games teach us skills and encourage leadership, and they enable us to grow while learning.

2. Games are an extension of the values we communicate. In cooperative gaming, we remove the element of competition and replace it with the value of working together. If caring and respect for one another are the values we communicate, then everyone is important and no one is more important than anyone else. Every participant is a vital part of the unit.

If we are trying to build community with young people but encourage competitive sports during recreation time, we contradict ourselves immediately. Cooperative games are an extension of our values: we respect each person, we work together, we have fun, and no one gets hurt.

3. Cooperative games build community and help us minister to one another. Cooperative games build a sense of community among participants. By working together and tapping one another's gifts and strengths, people discover new relationships. Ministry happens during playtime: We encourage one another, work together, laugh, struggle, and ultimately succeed together. Often, the people who are ministered to during cooperative sports are those who have been left to sit in the stands before because they “just aren’t good enough.” At least that is what they believe after numerous “failures” on the field at the hands of those who are a little faster, can jump a little higher, or are more agile. Just as many adults do, many young people dream of someday “making it” and harbor an image of themselves as inadequate.

There are appropriate times and places for competitive games of basketball or volleyball, but these games may not be suitable for a break at a retreat. They may be inconsistent with the message and the values we are trying to communicate to young people.

Competitive sports can, and often do, alienate some people who might otherwise participate in group activities. Competitive games are difficult for some people and are often segregating. We see boys playing on one field and girls playing on the other. Sexism in recreation can be a divisive factor in the broad set of values we try to communicate.

For the most part, the games in this book are cooperative in character.

4. Cooperative games encourage leadership. In cooperative play, no one is appointed leader because he or she is stronger, bigger, or brighter. Leadership is granted by the group, at the pace of the group, and when the need is recognized by the members. Leadership emerges by consensus, and it often develops nonverbally. Cooperative recreation encourages leadership and allows it to grow and be fostered by the group members. There is perhaps nothing more exciting to
watch than the dynamics of interaction in cooperative games as young people try to conquer the obstacle at hand—and experience delight in their accomplishment. Cooperative play opens up the exciting possibilities of working as a unit, getting along, and complementing one another, as well as having fun.

5. Cooperative gaming allows the development of skills. Many people playing cooperative games have a difficult time until someone says, “I don’t feel we are listening to one another. ... means of communicating, it develops a sense of problem solving and decision-making, skills that are important to growth.

6. Cooperative games allow everyone to feel a sense of importance and accomplishment. Cooperative games allow everyone to play and work together. People are not left out because they are too short, too fat, too slow, or the “wrong” sex. Everyone is given the opportunity to feel accepted and needed instead of fearing rejection or the pressure of having to prove something to the group. Everyone is included in the activity. Everyone is an important part of the group and is needed by all because of the variety of experiences, personal strengths, gifts, and talents each person brings.

Guidelines for Creative Gaming
1. Always encourage and affirm the participants during games.
2. Model the Christian behavior you are expecting or hoping for from the participants.
3. Avoid games that are sexist, that is, games that assume and promote sexual stereotypes or that use sexist language.
4. Play games that challenge participants to grow, but do not choose games that frustrate the players by their difficulty.
5. Be prepared—have all equipment on hand.
6. Play only games that you personally have “field-tested.”
7. Play games that help create a relaxing, comfortable atmosphere; that build community; and that avoid liable risk of bodily harm.
8. Avoid games that misuse things (such as food), waste or harm natural resources, or damage clothing, carpeting, and so on.
9. Clearly explain the object and the rules of a game before beginning (except, of course, in games that require an element of surprise).

Notes
Search Me

For this crowd-breaker, give each person a sheet of paper, a pencil, and an envelope containing a small object such as a rubber band, a paper clip, a bread wrapper tie, a soda pop can tab, a nail, a piece of string, and so on. Ideally, each person should be given a different object, but duplicates are okay.

Next, explain that when you turn off the lights, each player is to place the object somewhere on himself or herself so that it is visible yet inconspicuous. Turn off the lights for about a minute.

When you turn on the lights, have the participants move around the room and visually search each person for his or her object. Caution them to use only their eyes for their search. Explain that when they discover an object on someone, they should write down that person’s name and the object. Announce a time limit (this will depend on the number of participants, but make it challenging). The winner is the one who finds the most objects and lists each one with the right person’s name.

Abbreviated Phrases

Here is a challenging quiz that can be photocopied and passed out to your group. It can be done individually or in teams—with the young people pooling their brainpower to come up with the correct answers. Each abbreviated phrase contains letters that represent words and a number that gives meaning to the phrase. (Clue: In most cases, the number is the primary clue for figuring out the phrase.) Set a time limit; ten minutes should be long enough.

Answers

1. 10 Y in a D.
2. 666: The M. of the B.
3. 7 W of the W.
4. 54 C in a D. with T. J.
5. 60 S in a M.
6. 26 L in the A.
7. 99 B of B on the W.
8. 52 W in a Y.
9. 11 P on a F. T.
10. 4 Q in a D.
11. 3 M in a T.
12. 12 A of J.
13. R. and F of the 3rd R.
14. 10 C Given to M.
15. 40 Y in the W.
16. 73 B in the B.
17. 31 F at B–R.
18. 5 Smooth S in a S.
19. 12 M in a Y.
Bob Bob Bob

Here is a fun way to learn everyone’s first name quickly. Stand in the center of the room and ask everyone to be seated in a circle or to scatter casually around the room. Move around the group randomly pointing at different people. As you point at a particular person, encourage the rest of the group to chant that person’s name over and over again loudly and in rhythm, for example, “Bob! Bob! Bob! . . .”

Keep the activity going at a rapid clip. Point to everyone and keep the group chanting as loudly as possible. Encourage the group to clap in time. Point to some people more than once, point quickly back and forth between two people, and so on. It is a simple idea, but it’s really wild and a great activity for learning names.

How Embarrassing!

Give everyone a sheet of paper and a pencil. Have them take a couple of minutes to write down their most embarrassing moment. Caution them to conceal their identity, to write only the truth, and to write something that they are willing to reveal to the group.

Collect the papers and read the stories to the group one at a time. After reading each one, ask the young people to guess the identity of the writer. To settle on the most likely writer, call for a show of hands. Afterward, the actual writer can reveal his or her identity. It’s good for a lot of laughs, and it’s an excellent way to break the ice at an informal small-group gathering.

You can substitute “my most embarrassing moment” with other ideas, like “Few people realize that I . . .” or “Ten years from now, I will be . . .”

Sum Fun

Divide the group into teams of two or more and give each team a copy of the “Sum Fun” page. Direct the team members to pool their knowledge and enter the correct number by each clue. Then have the teams add up the numbers and report their total. The team that first gets a correct total wins. Pocket calculators can be provided to make the addition a little easier, or outlawed to make it a little tougher.

Answers

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>5 (or 9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11 (in Canada)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 21,574 (or 21,579 or 21,578 or 21,575)
**Keys to the Kingdom**

If you are in a big church, chances are good that somewhere in the church there is a box or a desk drawer that has dozens of old keys in it and that nobody knows which keys go with which locks. Here is a solution to that problem. Pass out the keys to your group and give the young people fifteen minutes to see how many keys they can match up with a lock in the church. Whoever matches the most keys—or any key, for that matter—can be declared the winner.

Caution: Before doing this activity, be sure some of the keys actually unlock something. You may need to plant one or two. Also be sure to gather all the keys afterward. Security is often a problem on church premises.

**Up, Up, and Away**

Hang some balloons from the ceiling so that they are about seven feet off the floor. The distance can vary, depending on the height of the people in your group, but be sure the balloons are just beyond reach. Select two contestants of about the same height to compete in this event. Give them each a hat that you have rigged up with a straight pin or a thumbtack sticking out the top. Use baseball hats (or something similar) that can be adjusted to fit most heads.

The object is to see which person can pop the most balloons by jumping up and sticking the balloons with the pin on the top of his or her hat.

**Human Bingo**

Here is a fun way to break the ice and learn everybody’s name. Give each person a copy of the following bingo card and a pencil. Direct the players to fill in the squares with the names of people who fit the various descriptions. Each person they find must sign her or his own name in the appropriate square. The first person to complete five blocks in a row yells “Bingo.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Has a beauty mark</th>
<th>Owns a dog</th>
<th>Is wearing contact lenses</th>
<th>Is a foreign-exchange student</th>
<th>Owns a motorcycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has three brothers</td>
<td>Is going bald</td>
<td>Has red hair</td>
<td>Got an A in English</td>
<td>Just ate at McDonald’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has blond hair at least twelve inches long</td>
<td>Is an amateur photographer</td>
<td>Sign your own name</td>
<td>Has been to Canada</td>
<td>Weighs less than 100 pounds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plays football</td>
<td>Likes to jog</td>
<td>Is wearing blue socks</td>
<td>Drives an imported car</td>
<td>Owns a horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was born outside of the United States</td>
<td>Plays guitar</td>
<td>Played tennis over the weekend</td>
<td>Has a cowboy hat</td>
<td>Has a pet bird</td>
</tr>
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Icebreaker
This activity takes the idea of an icebreaker literally. Have the young people sit in a circle (on the floor or around a table) with a bucket of ice cubes. Tell the group that the first person to give his or her name is to place an ice cube in the middle of the circle and that everyone else should add an ice cube as they give their name. Each cube must go on top of the previous cube. Emphasize that the object is to make the stack as high as possible.

The name sharing can be done in a variety of ways. One good way is to have each person give her or his name using an adjective beginning with the same initial as in the name (e.g., “Gallant Gary”). Then as each person gives a name in succession, he or she must repeat in order all the names previously given, without making a mistake.

Zip Zap
Zip Zap is a circle game for learning first names. The participants must know who is seated to their left and to their right. The person on their left is their “Zip.” The person on their right is their “Zap.” The leader stands in the center of the circle. He or she points to a person and says “Zip” and begins counting. That person must shout the name of the person to his or her left within the count of five. If the leader points to a person and says “Zap,” that person must shout the name of the person to his or her right. If the person fails, he or she takes the role of leader and comes to the center of the circle, and the former leader takes the empty chair.

Shirt Sharing
This is a great group-building activity for a retreat or another occasion. It is a unique way for young people to learn some facts about one another.

You will need enough white T-shirts for everyone and a plentiful supply of felt-tip markers. Clear a work area and have the young people put sheets of paper inside the shirts to absorb the ink that soaks through. Instruct them to write or draw a variety of things on their shirt. Use these suggestions or come up with a dozen or so of your own:
1. Write your first name somewhere on the front.
2. Write your last name below the back collar.
3. Write your height in your favorite color.
4. Draw an animal that you would like to be.
5. Draw an eye the same color as yours.
6. Identify your favorite musical instrument.
7. Write your birthdate on the sleeve.
8. Draw the logo of your favorite sports team.
9. Identify your favorite food.
10. Write a Bible verse that you can quote from memory.

After the young people have finished, have them wear the shirts and direct them in a number of get-acquainted activities. For example, have them gather with others who have the same animal drawn on their shirt. Or have them take a pencil and paper and try to make a list of everyone’s name and birthdate. Announce that whoever has the longest list by the end of a specified time limit is the winner. You can probably think of other games like this to play. Or the young people can just wear and enjoy the shirts.

Oddball
This hilarious crowd-breaker works best when you have an audience and a stage or a defined front area. To begin, select four or five contestants to compete in “an exciting new game.” Ask them to leave the room so that they are not able to hear the rest of the group.

Place end-to-end two or three tables of uniform width. Cover them with old blankets to give the appearance of one long table. Cut a hole in one of the blankets and have a person kneel or sit between two of the tables so that his or her head sticks through the hole and above the tables. Next, place seven or eight balls of various kinds along the length of the tables. Then cover all the balls and the person’s head with towels. Warn the group not to reveal to the contestants what is going on.

When you are ready to go, you can play the game with your contestants in a couple of ways:

1. Name That Ball: Have one contestant come into the room. Introduce him or her and encourage the crowd to cheer wildly. Explain that a number of different kinds of balls—volleyballs, footballs, soccer balls—are on the table. Tell him or her that the object of the game is for the contestant to start at one end of the table, tear off the first towel, and identify the kind of ball before proceeding to the next one. Appoint a timekeeper to clock the contestant. Announce that the winner will be the one who identifies the balls accurately in the
least amount of time. Encourage the crowd to cheer on the contest-
tant. When the contestant tears off the towel covering the head, the
person between the tables should yell "Boo!" with his or her eyes
bugging out. Nine out of ten contestants will jump right out of their
socks. Have the contestant face the audience, because the reaction is
what makes this so hilarious. Invite the next contestant in and assign
a new timekeeper. Continue in this way until all the contestants have
played.

2. Guess That Ball: Use the game show motif described above,
but this time have the contestants guess what is under each towel. Tell
each contestant at the start that he or she cannot touch the balls but
must guess what each ball is before taking the towel off to see if the
guess is correct. The contestant with the most correct guesses wins. If
a correct guess is made, the crowd cheers; if wrong, they boo. It is
important that the person under the towel stay perfectly still.

Time Bomb
Make a "time bomb" by placing a travel alarm clock inside a small
gift-wrapped box with a removable cover. On the cover tape these
instructions:

You have just been handed a time bomb. It is set to go off. Hear
it ticking. The only way you can get rid of it is to introduce yourself
to a stranger in the room, tell that person where you are from, and
find out the person's name and where he or she is from. Then you
may hand that person this gift.

Five minutes is usually enough time for introductions before the
alarm goes off, but this will vary depending on the size of the crowd.
You can use more than one bomb for a large crowd. When the alarm
goes off, whoever is caught with the bomb should be marked with a
Band-Aid on the forehead and must be seated in the middle of the
room. The victim can then reset the alarm for a shorter period of
time and pass it to someone to continue the introductions. Continue
this activity for about fifteen minutes.

The Why Game
On slips of paper write, "I like my church because ______." Have the
group sit in a circle. Distribute one of the slips and a pencil to each
person and instruct the young people to write a single phrase com-
pleting the statement.

When they have written their phrase, have them pass their slip to
the person on their right. Now instruct them to write a sentence or
phrase to rhyme with the sentence on the slip that has been passed to
them. Then collect the slips and read them aloud.

Some of the completed rhymes will be serious, and some will be
foolish, but all will be interesting.

Number Nonsense
Here are a couple “tricks” that are easy and fun to do but that will
seem baffling to the people in your youth group and make you
appear to be a genius. Try these sometime just for fun. It is best to
memorize the procedures and carry them out as if you do this all the
time.

1. Choose a number: Suggest that someone in your group (or
the entire group) choose a number between 10 and 100. You must
not be told this number. Use these directions to find out ... is. (The number 44 is used as the secret number in this
example.) Direct the individual or group to do the following:

   I Double the secret number ................................8 8
   I Add 1 ................................................8 9
   I Multiply by 5.........................................4 4 5
   I Add 5 ...............................................4 5 0
   I Multiply by 10 ...................................... 4,500

(tell this number aloud)

Then you subtract 100 from the result without saying anything (100
from 4,500 is 4,400). Next, strike off the last two digits (00) and an-
nounce the number (44!). Practice this a few times with your family
and friends.

2. When was I born? Announce that you can guess the age
and the month of birth of anybody in the group. Select a volunteer.
Give her or him a pencil and a sheet of paper and the following instructions:

   I Write down the number of the month you were born (August) . . . 8
   I Double it .............................................1 6
   I Add 5 ................................................2 1
   I Multiply by 50....................................... 1050
   I Add your age (16) .................................... 1066
   I Subtract the number of days in a year (365) ................7 0 1

You call for the result and secretly add 115, making the total 816. The first one or two digits indicate the month, and the last two indicate
the age. Immediately announce August as the month of birth and 16
as the age.

Fuzzy Photos
Collect a number of 35-mm slides of recognizable objects, places, or
people. Show them to your group, but begin by showing them terri-
ibly out of focus. Slowly bring each picture into focus and see who can
be first to identify correctly the person, place, or thing in the slide.
The secret is in your previewing the slides, carefully choosing those
that give odd effects and have misleading shapes when out of
focus. Cartoons make good choices, as well as pictures from magazine
ads. You will also need to practice slowly bringing slides into focus in
a smooth motion. This activity is great fun.
The Wave

The Wave is a popular cheer at sports events in large stadiums across the country. Usually the people in one section of the stadium begin the wave by jumping up, throwing their hands up in the air, and letting out a cheer. The next section follows suit, and this continues all around the stadium in a kind of domino effect. (Trivia buffs will be interested to know that the Wave is said to have originated at the University of Washington.)

The Wave can also be done on a much smaller scale. If you have an auditorium full of people, divide the group into two sections, and try it by rows. Have the first row in each section begin by standing up and letting out a cheer. Have the second row follow, then the third, and so on, to the last row. Tell the participants that when the wave reaches the last row, they should send it in the reverse order to the front. See which side can complete the wave first.

With smaller groups, have the young people do the Wave one person at a time. Set it up to go down rows of chairs or around a circle. It really looks crazy when done around banquet tables.

License Plate Name Tags

Give the young people blank “license plates” (paper or cardboard in the shape of vehicular plates) and felt-tip markers. Give them time to design their own personalized license plates (like those you see on the road: KLULESS, N LUV, SWEET16, etc.). Encourage them to use creative combinations of numbers or letters. Limit the number of digits and letters that can be used on the plate to six or seven.

Allow the young people to share the significance of their plates’ messages. Give prizes for the most original, most humorous, most creative, and so on. The plates can be worn as name tags for the rest of the event.

What’s the Meaning?

Try these word puzzles with your group. Do them individually or in teams. The object is to decipher each word picture. Give a prize to the person or the team with the most correct answers.

Answers

1. double standard
2. tip-top shape
3. crossed eyes
4. double take
5. banana split
6. rough edge (or jagged edge)
7. several options
8. Rejoice in the Lord.
9. He spoke to them in parables.
10. Go down, Moses.
11. whosoever believes in me
12. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
13. victory over sin and death
14. justification by faith
15. narrow way
16. sunny

What’s the Meaning?

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<td>STANDARD</td>
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<td>THE LORD BELIEVE JESUS CHRIST</td>
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<td>WAY</td>
<td>VICTORY SIN DEATH</td>
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</table>
For Your Eyes Only

One of the ongoing problems with youth group meetings is how to occupy participants who show up a bit early. One solution is to handout the following memo as the young people arrive.

For added atmosphere, seal each memo in an envelope marked “confidential” and have the theme music from a James Bond movie playing in the background.

Of course, you will need to hide the chocolate bar well enough to keep the players looking for a reasonable amount of time. For example, conceal it in a pocket of one of the leaders so that its outline is visible to the careful “detective.” The lie mentioned in the memo can be anything you want. Be creative. You can adapt this idea any way you like—it works!

---

**Top Secret!**
**Urgent!**

Confidential!

**Mission:** The final and complete elimination of zits.

**Your Task:** Our government, in conjunction with other governments around the world, has declared total war on zits. Our department’s ongoing task in this vital effort is the total elimination of chocolate bars from the face of the earth!

Our intelligence has advised us that a chocolate bar has found its way into our church building and is hiding in open sight somewhere on the main level. We have been able to verify that it definitely is not in any of the offices or washrooms.

I want you, personally, to hunt down and destroy this fiendish chocolate bar, in whatever manner you deem best. You have until exactly ______ o’clock to achieve this.

Our intelligence has been able to determine that if the chocolate bar is not found by this deadline, it will turn itself in at the gym, to be destroyed by me. Therefore, regardless of results, you are to report to the gym no later than ______ o’clock for your next assignment.

Oh, one other thing—agent 003 was able to get some vital information to us. With his dying breath, he told us that one of the statements above is a lie. Unfortunately, he died before he could give us any further details.

Memorize and destroy this memo! Good luck, 007.

---

**Hang It on Your Beak**

With a package of plastic teaspoons and a little practice, you will break up your crowd in no time! First, practice hanging a spoon on your nose. It works if you rub the oil off your nose, breathe heavily on the inside of the spoon, and hang it on the end of your nose.

After you teach your crowd this trick, start some competition:
- See who can hang a spoon off his or her nose the longest.
- See who can get the spoon off the nose and into his or her mouth—using only his or her tongue.
- See who can hang a spoon off any part of his or her face or arms.

Award comic prizes to the winners. Also bring along some spoons of varying sizes and styles and let the participants try them on for size.

**Sticker Faces**

This get-acquainted activity is great for large groups. Write each person’s name on a pressure-sensitive sticker (round ones work best) and distribute the stickers at random. Have everyone take the label they receive and stick it somewhere on their face. Then direct each player to find his or her own name on someone else’s face and stick it on his or her own shirt, blouse, or dress. Direct these two players to stay together until both have found their own name. This is a good way for the young people to see a lot of faces in a short time.

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Permission to reproduce this page for use with your group is granted.
Oh, No!
Here is a fun mixer for your next meeting or social event. Give everyone the same number of tokens—marbles, poker chips, clothespins, or whatever. Then allow the young people to mingle and talk to one another.

Explain that whenever someone says either the word no or know, they must give one of their tokens to the person with whom they are talking. It is difficult to avoid saying those two words in normal conversation, so this game produces lots of good laughs. Give a prize to the one who collects the most tokens.

Name Tag Autographs
This is a good mixer for people who do not know one another very well. Make an eight-inch-square name tag for each person. In the middle write the person’s name but leave plenty of empty space. When you are ready to begin, give each person someone else’s name tag and have them find the person who belongs to it. After they have found that person, direct them to pin or hang the name tag on him or her. Once they have their own name tag, have the young people go around the room meeting people and having each person autograph their name tag. After ten or fifteen minutes, stop and give a prize to whomever has the most signatures.

Word Puzzles
The young people in your group will enjoy trying to solve these word puzzles. Each puzzle represents a common saying or phrase. Give a prize to the person who solves the most word puzzles within a ten-minute time limit.

Answers

1. spreading the Gospel
2. upper room
3. frankincense
4. mixed messages
5. too much of a good thing
6. not enough money to cover the check
7. stretching the truth
8. smokestack
9. three-piece suit
10. eggs over easy
11. fly in the ointment
12. sign on the dotted line
13. sideshow
14. pie in the sky
15. feeling under the weather
16. splitting the difference
17. fancy footwork
18. to be or not to be
19. bouncing baby boy
20. slanting the news
21. spread the news
22. condensed books
23. skinny-dipping
24. A bird in the hand equals two in the bush.
25. scrambled eggs
26. That’s beside the point.
27. hanging in there
28. flat tire

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Word Puzzles</th>
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<td>5. a good thing</td>
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<td>9. SUIT</td>
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<td>13. SPIEKY</td>
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<td>17. FOOTWORK</td>
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<td>21. BOOKS</td>
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<td>25. GOOD</td>
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</table>
**Story-Song Skits**

Remember the records we listened to as children? We played them over and over until we knew every word. Here is a way to use all those old familiar story-songs and get a good laugh with your youth group.

Divide your group into several smaller groups and give each group a cassette player and a recording of one of these children’s songs. (If necessary, check the children’s section in local record stores for songs. The cornier, the better!) Also, see if you can provide props.

Direct the groups to pantomime their entire song—music, speaking parts, narration, movements. Give them enough time to assemble their props and to practice. Then have the groups present the story-songs. The result is great! To ensure plenty of long-lasting laughs, videotape the performances.

**Musical Showdown**

This activity is great for total group involvement. Break the group into several teams and assign each team a number. Give each team a pencil and paper and several minutes to write down some songs that they all know.

When the teams are ready, shout out the number of a team and give them five seconds to start singing a song. At any point in the song, blow a whistle and shout out the number of another group. That group must start singing a different song within five seconds. To add excitement and a little confusion to the game, shout out the name of the team that is already singing, causing them to switch songs. Teams can be disqualified for these reasons:

- singing a song that has already been sung
- not starting a new song within five seconds
- having less than half the group singing the song

Continue until all but one team is eliminated. Groups may add songs to their list during the showdown. To limit the song options, you might choose a particular theme, such as Christmas songs, fun songs, or hymns.

**Identity**

As the group enters the room, have each person fill out a name tag and drop it in a basket. After everyone has arrived, have them stand in a circle. Pass the basket around and have each person take a name tag without letting anyone else see the name. If anyone draws their own name, they should return it and draw again.

Then have everyone pin the name tag they drew on the back of the person to their left. They are to discover the name pinned to their back by asking people questions that can only be answered yes or no. For example, “Do I have red hair?” or “Am I wearing jeans?” They can ask only two questions of each person they meet.

When the players discover whose name they have, they must go to that person, place their hands on his or her shoulders, and follow that person around the room. As more people discover their partner’s identity, the lines of people with hands on shoulders will lengthen until the last person finds the identity of his or her partner.

Another way to play this game is to use stickers (adhesive labels) rather than name tags. Rather than putting the names on one another’s backs, they are placed on one another’s foreheads. This makes it possible to look at the person one is speaking to.

**Cross ‘em Up**

This game could be used as part of an evening of quizzes, for retreats, for youth meetings, or anytime you need a get-acquainted activity. Have each person write on an index card his or her name and one thing about himself or herself that not everyone knows. (You might need to do this ahead of time, perhaps at registration or an informal gathering.) Collect the cards and use the information for clues to create a crossword puzzle, with the participants’ first names as the answers in the puzzle. (Many computers have a crossword puzzle program that makes this project easier.)

When it is time to play the game, hand out pencils and copies of the puzzle. Then let the young people mix freely, asking one another questions. The first one to complete the puzzle wins.

**Mother Goose in the News**

Below are a number of “newspaper headlines” that correspond to familiar Mother Goose rhymes. See how many of them your youth group can recognize. Distribute pencils and copies of the “Mother Goose in the News” (page 34) to the group and give them about five minutes to work. Give a prize to the winner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1. Little Polly Flinders</td>
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<td>2. Peter, Peter, Pumpkin Eater</td>
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<td>3. Three Blind Mice</td>
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<td>4. Little Miss Muffet</td>
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<td>5. Jack Sprat</td>
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<td>6. Humpty Dumpty</td>
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<td>7. Baa, Baa, Black Sheep</td>
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<td>8. Sing a Song of Sixpence</td>
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<td>9. Hark, Hark, the Dogs Do Bark</td>
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<td>10. Tom, Tom, the Piper’s Son</td>
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<td>11. Old King Cole</td>
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<td>12. Old Mother Hubbard</td>
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<td>13. A-Diller, a-Dollar, a Ten O’Clock Scholar</td>
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<td>14. Pease Porridge Hot</td>
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<td>15. The Queen of Hearts</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Rub-a-Dub-Dub</td>
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<td>17. To Market, to Market</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. Hey, Diddle, Diddle</td>
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<tr>
<td>19. Jack and Jill (or Ding, Dong, Bell)</td>
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<td>20. Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary</td>
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<tr>
<td>21. Jack Be Nimble</td>
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<td>22. Georgie Porgie</td>
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<tr>
<td>23. Little Bo-peep</td>
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<td>24. Mary Had a Little Lamb</td>
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<td>25. Little Boy Blue</td>
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<td>26. Pussy-cat, Pussy-cat</td>
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<td>27. Little Jack Horner</td>
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<td>28. A Tisket, a Tasket</td>
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<td>29. See, Saw, Sacaradown</td>
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<td>30. This Little Pig</td>
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### Mother Goose in the News

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<td>28.</td>
<td>Multicolored Hamper Appealing</td>
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<td>29.</td>
<td>Directions to London Given</td>
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<td>30.</td>
<td>Swine Tour, Eat, and Weep</td>
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