



Four of a Kind

OVERVIEW

In this activity the young people use the suits in a deck of playing cards to reflect on and pray about different aspects of their life. Through a simple ritual, they can choose to share about the relationships in their life, the work they are doing at home or school, the hard times they are experiencing, or something that is precious to them.

Suggested Time

10 to 20 minutes

Group Size

This kind of prayer activity will be more effective and less intimidating when done in smaller groups of ten to twenty individuals. If your group is larger than that, form small circles, each with a separate set of cards.

Special Considerations

Sharing prayers publicly can be intimidating for some young adolescents. Allow those who are more self-conscious to simply hold up one of the cards so that the group can see which aspect of life they wish to pray for. Young people become more comfortable sharing prayer when group leaders or adults initiate the process and model the prayer for them.

PROCEDURE**Materials Needed**

- ☀ a cloth or a blanket
- ☀ a candle and matches
- ☀ a crucifix or other symbol of faith
- ☀ four aces from a deck of playing cards
- ☀ a tape or CD player, and a recording of reflective music
- ☀ a Bible

Preparation. Make a simple focus table or altar in a central location in the room using a cloth or a blanket, a candle, and a crucifix or other symbol of faith. Place around the candle four aces from a deck of playing cards.

1. Gather the group around the altar that you prepared and begin playing a recording of reflective music. Invite the group to become still. Introduce the activity by lighting a candle, pointing out that the light is a reminder of God's presence. Read Matt. 18:19–20.

2. Pick up the four aces one at a time, explaining how each one is a symbol of a different aspect of life:



The ace of hearts symbolizes the relationships in our life, the people we care about and those who care for us.

The ace of spades symbolizes the work we each must do to earn our daily bread, either at school or in the home.

The ace of clubs symbolizes the tough times, when we feel beaten up or beaten down by something.

The ace of diamonds symbolizes the things and people that are treasures, precious to us.

3. Invite the group to reflect on the four symbols. The following questions may be useful in guiding the reflection:



Which of the four symbols caught your attention?

What areas of your life are you particularly anxious or concerned about?

Is there a situation or a person that you are thankful for?

Who are people you know who need prayer or assistance?

What work needs to be done, or what things have been accomplished in your life?

Are you facing difficult decisions or tough times?

Make the comment that through prayer we become more conscious of the hand God deals us in our life, and God helps us to respond with love to the situations we have to deal with.

4. Call the young people to the table or altar one by one. Ask them to hold up one of the four cards and share their prayer in any of the following ways:



Pray in silence as you show your chosen card.

Use a simple prayer formula such as, "Dear God, I pray for a special relationship in my life," "I pray for a person I know in need," "I thank you for a precious gift I have received," or "I pray for help with a difficulty I am facing."

Share in greater detail the situation or request for prayer but don't use names. For example: "Dear God, I want to pray for someone very important in my life who is having a really difficult time."

Each of the three options requires a different degree of trust and confidence. Although it is important for adults to model prayer and challenge young people to share, it is equally important to respect the comfort level of each individual.

5. To conclude this activity, remind the group that when we pray, we are putting our life into God's hands. Read Luke 12:26–32 (Jesus describes how God deals with us).

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- ☉ This prayer can be done in a more random fashion. After explaining the symbolism of the suits, shuffle a deck of cards and deal out one card to each person. Invite the participants to quietly study their card and, either in silence or by sharing, to offer a prayer for the specific area of life indicated on the card.
- ☉ Distribute an index card and marker to each person. Explain that everyone is to design an ace of one of the four suits. It should include a prayer that corresponds to what that suit symbolizes (see step 2). Collect and shuffle the cards and deal one to each person. Instruct the young people to carry this prayer with them, keeping in mind the needs of another member of the group.
- ☉ Use the four suits as ongoing themes for prayer. Over a period of weeks or months, have the group design four giant poster-size aces on which the young people write prayers for specific intentions related to each of the four aspects of life. The posters can be displayed in a public area such as a hallway or church entryway. Set out pens nearby and a note that explains the meaning of the suits and invites others to add their own prayers.

**SCRIPTURAL
CONNECTIONS**

☉ Use the card suit themes as a community-building game in a youth session or retreat. Divide the group into several small groups, have each small group form a circle, and place a deck of cards in the center of each circle. Tell the players to take turns choosing a card from the top of the stack and sharing one experience related to that suit's theme. If a player draws a card from a suit that he or she has already shared about, he or she may place it at the bottom of the pack and select another card. Continue until each person has shared one experience from each of the four themes.

- ☉ Ps. 127:1–2 (God is in charge.)
- ☉ Matt. 6:19–21 (Wherever your treasure is, there is your heart.)
- ☉ Matt. 11:28–30 (God invites the weary and burdened.)
- ☉ John 15:12–17 (Love one another.)
- ☉ Rom. 8:35–39 (Nothing can separate us from God's love.)

NOTES

Use the space below to jot notes and reminders for the next time you use this strategy.

