

Activity Title: Figuring Out Friends

Goals: 1. To increase and promote student awareness of:

- A. Qualities sought for in developing friends/friendships.
- B. Distinguishing between like and trust.
- C. Understanding what friends are all about.

Diversity Relatedness: Everyone in the classroom.

Participant Characteristics:

- a) Grades 2-8. Ability to write/communicate on paper.
- b) Mixed group of gender & academic abilities.

Potential Stage/Sessions: School classroom. This activity can easily accommodate from 20 to 30 participants.

Estimated Duration: 25-35 Minutes.

Materials: Group Facilitator (GF): 3 paper grocery sized bags, 3 large manila envelopes, crayon, 2- 8x11 paper cut out hearts, and 3- 2x4 pieces of paper for every student.

Each of the 3 grocery bags should have a word printed on them: Friend, Good Friend, or Best Friend. That is, the word Friend is on one sack, Good Friend on the second sack, and Best Friend on the third sack.

The 3 manila envelopes should have one of the following words on each of them: Like, Trust, or Heart. That is, one envelope is labeled "Like," one envelope is labeled "Trust," and one envelope is labeled "Heart."

In the Like envelope, place a crayon.

In the Trust envelope, place a perfect heart shaped paper cut out.

In the Heart envelope, place a damaged and crumpled heart shaped paper cut out.

Group Participants: Pencil or writing pen.

General Directions:

(Part A)

1. GF introduces self and shares he/she will be spending time with students helping them understand what counseling is about, some reasons people go to counselors, and how counselors do counseling. Let the kids know that you've got a real "crowd pleaser" activity planned for them today and that you'll need some volunteers and lots of participants.
2. Distribute three small pieces (2x4) of paper to each student. Make sure each student has something to write with.
3. For 20 seconds have the kids look around the room into the eyes of their classmates. No one leaves his/her chair. No one makes any sounds...just look at as many kids as they can.
4. (4a) Tell the kids: "On one (just one) sheet of paper you were given, write down the first name of your friend in the classroom. No last names, no last name initial, only your friend's first name. It's ok if it's not spelled perfect. Don't show or tell anyone."
(4b) For the first time, the kids are able to see that you have a grocery sack with the word "Friend" written on it. Go up and down the rows of students and have each kid drop the name of their friend he/she had just written in the sack. Keep that sack with you in the front of the room visible for everyone to see.
5. (5a) Announce: "On the second little sheet of paper I had given you, please write down the first name of your "Good Friend" in the classroom, no last name, no last name initial, and

...it can't be the name of the person you used in the Friend bag. Don't show or tell anyone." Expect to hear some gnashing of teeth;)

(5b) Once the names have been written, the kids are able to see that you have a grocery sack with the term "Good Friend" written on it. Go up and down the rows of students and have each kid drop the name of their Good Friend he/she had just written in the sack. Keep that sack with you in the front of the room visible for everyone to see.

6. (6a) Announce: "Now, on the third and final sheet of paper, please write down the first name of your "Best Friend" in the classroom. Remember, no last names, no last name initial, and it can't be either of the first two names you've already used for Friend or Good Friend. Don't show or tell anyone." Expect more gnashing of teeth;)

(6b) By now it's largely suspected that you have a third sack with the term "Best Friend" written on it. Go up and down the rows of students and have each student drop the name of his/her Best Friend from the classroom in the sack. Keep that sack with you in the front of the room visible for everyone to see.

Once all names are gathered, listen to the students thoughts about this part of the activity. Most kids will express some frustration in that the name of their real best friend ended up in the friend sack. This will largely be a result of the kids having not anticipated further requests of them regarding "degrees" of friends. You can come back to this point later in the activity as an example of how sometimes friends become best friends who then turn back into regular friends or even enemies. Kids will also want to voice some unfairness in being restricted to choosing friends only in their classroom. That's all good. Just keep moving forward with the activity :-)

General Directions continued...

(Part B)

Let the kids know you're going to help them figure out the differences between the three sacks. That is, you're going to show them how Friends, Good Friends, and Best Friends can be told a part. (This is really just intended to stimulate thinking and lay a foundation for conversation.)

1. Hold up the Friend sack and say: "If any of you "like" your friend, raise your hand. (A majority of the kids will raise their hand.) Frown a little bit and proceed.
2. Hold up the Good Friend sack and say: "If any of you "like" your good friend, raise you hand. (Look a bit frustrated when everyone raises their hands.)
3. Hold up the Best Friend sack and say: "Now, if any of you "like" your best friend, raise you hand." (Look really exasperated when everyone raises their hands) and ask: "Well, if you like everybody, how do you tell the difference between who's who?????"

Ask, "Just so I can better understand, can anybody tell me what the word "Like" means without using the word Like in his/her definition??? (get along with, enjoy, understand, similar to)

Allow the students a moment or two to offer up their meanings.

4. Bring out the manila envelope with the word "LIKE" written on it. Make sure the students know and agree that we're all talking about the same word (LIKE.) Show everyone the envelope and ask for a volunteer. Tell them you have a perfect way of helping them figure out differences between friends, good friends, and best friends.

Reach inside the envelope and pull out the crayon. Announce that this is a very, very special

crayon...one that has really special meaning to you. (I tell kids it's one my grandma gave me just before she passed away thirty years ago and that I've kept it safe all this time and I only let people I like hold it.)

Place the crayon in the student's hands very, very carefully. Its easiest if the student holds the ends of the crayon instead of having it cradled in his or her hands. Really put on a production about being careful with the crayon and highlight that you only let people you like to hold the crayon.

As you pull away from the student with your hands over the student's hands, snap the crayon while it is being held by the student but for a moment, ignore that it's been broken.

The kid holding the crayon and most others in the room will realize the crayon is broken. After a second or two of feigned unawareness, notice the broken crayon, look shocked and in an accusatory tone ask the volunteer, "What did you do?" (It's ok to give the volunteer a wink and then have he/she return to his/her seat.)

5. From there, move on to the envelope marked "TRUST." Show everyone the envelope and ask if anyone can give a definition of the word TRUST without using the word trust in his/her answer. (depend, count on, honest, believe in)

Call on a new volunteer. (GF) Reach inside the envelope and very, very carefully pull out the perfectly cut out heart shaped paper. Let the kids know that the heart is really about your feelings. Ever so carefully, hand the heart to the volunteer while confirming that the volunteer is someone you both like & trust. Make a big production out of handing the heart over. (The students in the classroom are now watching closely anticipating something will go wrong.)

As quickly and with as much theatrics as possible, reach for the third envelope with the word HEART written on it. Have the student place the perfectly cut out heart shaped paper carefully in the envelope (hold the envelope up just high enough so the student cannot see the other heart in the envelope.)

Thank the student for being someone you both like and trust and for having been so careful with your heart. Ask the student if he or she would then please hold the envelope while you pick up some other things. When the student reaches to take the Heart envelope from you...drop it just before the student has it in his/her grasp and robustly shout out "How could you do that?" (It's ok to give the volunteer a wink and then have he/she return to his/her seat.)

Pick the envelope up and pull out the damaged and crumpled heart to show the class!

Grand Finale:

Generate a discussion about Like & Trust. Let the kids know that we naturally and initially like the people we choose to become our friends. However, liking someone is just the beginning. Being able to trust the people we initially like is important in building friendships. If friendship is the goal of liking someone then trust must be the foundation in the building of that friendship.

Talk about the counselor's role in helping people work out their differences. Those differences may be between friends as well as family members. Counselors help boys & girls not only learn to pick up and put together the pieces of a "broken" friendship (see crayon) but also help when a trusted someone has hurt his/her feelings (see crumpled heart.)

Pick up the sack with the word Friend written on it and say, "Raise your hand if you think your

name is in this bag.” (This is your chance to not only tell boys and girls what friends are really about, but also to coach them on becoming a better friend, good friend, or best friend.) Before reading a handful of names from the sack, inform kids that

Friends are:

Kind & Polite, Will smile at you when you come into the room, will invite you to join him/her at lunch, will save your place in line, and will pay you back any money borrowed. Friends are also people that we’ve known for a while and can be trusted at least a little bit.

Walk around the room as you read some names from the Friend sack. Tell the kids you won’t have time to read everyone’s name in each sack but will do your best (this is said just in case you miss announcing someone’s name in the class during the activity.) Pay attention to the names of the boys & girls written on their desk tops. Feel free to use those desk top names in place of the names on the written note cards. Make sure it looks like you’re reading desk top names off the note cards.

You may also want to provide the classroom teacher with a handful of note cards from the sacks as well. Consider including some blank name cards in the handful you give to the instructor. The teacher will realize this is a friendship building activity and will have a good idea of whose names “need” to be announced.

Call out the kid’s first names and have those kids raise their hands or stand up until most or all the names have been read from that particular sack. Many names will be called more than once. You don’t have to call on everyone in the classroom for each sack. Just be mindful to include everyone in the activity before the end.

Have all those kids either put their hands down or sit down before moving on to the next sack.

Pick up the sack with the words Good Friend written on it and say, “Raise your hand if you think your name is in here.” Provide the students with the definition of a:

Good Friend:

Caring & Thoughtful, Good Friends will invite you to hang out or play, will help you study, will encourage you to do your best, will stick up for you, and will not talk about you behind your back. Good Friends don’t pass bad notes about their friends. Good friends won’t take stuff out of their friend’s desk without permission. Good Friends are people we like to be around and who make us feel good about ourselves. Good Friends are people we’ve know for a longer time and can be trusted even more.

Again, walk around the room reading names from the Good Friend sack as you go. Remember, pay attention to whose names are not being called. Use desk names as needed. Have kids raise their hands or stand up for acknowledgement when their names are read. Be sure to praise kids for being the type of kids others would like as a Good Friend.

Have all those kids either put their hands down or sit down before moving on to the next sack.

Lastly, hold up the sack with the words Best Friend written on it. Say, “Raise your hand if you think your name is in here.” Let the kids know its ok to feel good about themselves :-)

Provide students with the definition of the term:

Best Friend:

Considerate & Forgiving, Best friends want what's best for their friends not always what's best for him or herself. Best Friends can keep secrets and won't spread rumors or gossip about you or your family. Best friends can spend the night and not take any stuff that's not theirs. A best friend will help you study but will not let you cheat off their paper. Best friends are supportive and won't lie. A best friend is someone we've known for a really long time, someone we really like a lot, and someone really well trusted.

Say, "Let's find out who in here is a Best Friend or soon to be someone's new Best Friend." Pull out some names, provide the teacher with name cards, begin walking around the room reading names and utilizing desk names as needed. Have these kids raise their hands or stand up. Be sure to praise kids as being the type of kids others would like as a Best Friend.

Once you have called on a significant number of kids and everyone in the room has been recognized as being a Friend, Good Friend, or Best Friend, have everyone sit down.

In closing, remind boys & girls that everyone starts out as a stranger but through the process of getting to know one another, we begin to like and trust others. The more we like someone the more we feel we'd like to trust that person. However, Like and Trust are two different things! Just because we like a person does not mean we should trust that person. As an example, I often tell the kids that I work in prisons and jails and that I meet lots of guys (dads, uncles, brothers, and cousins) that I really like because they seem friendly, nice, and sometimes funny. I also say that just because I like that person does not mean that I trust that person by telling them where I live, who my family members are, where I keep my house key and the secret place in the house where I keep my money! Be careful at making someone you just met your new best friend! Let the kids know that counselors are good at helping boys & girls restore broken and damaged friendships and rebuilding trust. Emphasize that Trust can be learned and practiced by everyone!!!

Reiterate that friends come and go and it's not uncommon for someone to start out as a friend and then turn into a best friend someday. Like and Trust are two really great qualities that help us figure out friends!!!

Cautions or Considerations:

In this activity be careful to avoid in depth conversations about Enemies. The focus of Figuring Out Friends is in helping boys & girls understand the basics of friendships and in supporting boys and girls in becoming better friends. In the book *Fifty Steps Closer; Group Counseling Guide in Reflections of School-Aged Boys & Girls*, there is a good follow up activity to this lesson on "Forgiveness."

References:

This presentation was initially suggested as an original lesson in the book: *Fifty Steps Closer; Group Counseling Guide in Reflections of School-Aged Boys & Girls* written by Nicholas G. Minardi, Ph.D. This is a detailed lesson guide for the activity.

About the Author:

Dr. Nicholas G. Minardi is a licensed clinical psychologist and credentialed school counselor of twenty years. The bulk of his experience involves group work with school-aged children. He has recently written a book called: *Fifty Steps Closer; Group Counseling Guide in Reflections of School-Aged Boys & Girls*.

For more information go to www.fiftystepscloser.com