

EXPERIENTIAL GROUP ACTIVITIES

(SOME CAN BE ADAPTED AS INDIVIDUAL ALSO)

- You can modify these activities however you like to make them your own
- Be conscious of the language you use... it's never about my experience, strength, hope, or story (that's a sponsor's job)
- Sequence all these activities as to where they make sense.
- The Question you always open with in experiential is "What was that like?" WWTL, don't ever ask "How are you feeling or how did that feel?"
- The Debriefing is of main importance. This is where you go deeper, probe, always asking questions about the experience that are open-ended letting the group do more of the talking.
- Challenge participants with probing questions during the debrief such as: "why was it fun?", "how was it fun?", etc.
- Every group and experience will be different according to all different reactions and responses. As clinicians, we sit back and observe how that person responds or reacts to that experience.
- Don't ever target how you want to see the result of each experience... just let it happen, and sit back and observe.
- Instigate and model a supportive, reactive, celebrative, attitude to each person's answers to their questions.
- Participants experience healing through experiential modalities.

#1 – GROUP GUIDELINES (*Ice Breaker/ Group Cohesion*)

1. Facilitator writes down 4 quadrants with Group Members in a large circle in the middle. (quadrants labeled: DO, DO NOT, and then on the bottom ARE, ARE NOT) (examples: DO-laugh, listen, love each other, have fun, share, ask, be you, interact, engage, encourage, have ADD...lol DO NOT-shame, save/rescue (let people have their experience), judge, criticize (except in training for feedback), gossip, whine, cosign defects of others, throw trash on the floor) ARE- respectful, inclusive, participant, supportive, positive, attentive, compassionate, honest, receptive to feedback ARE NOT- losers, judgmental, mean, full of contempt, ashamed
2. Participants come up one and write in what they think should be in each quadrant.
3. After everyone is done, facilitator reads through each word, asking for further clarification on words (ex. what does safety mean?)
4. Ask after each word/statement if there's any negotiating we need to do on each word.
5. Then finally ask, "does everyone agree on this?"
6. Facilitator then invites everyone to come up and sign this chart, saying "my job I to hold you guys to what you agreed on, not what I said...."

Debrief:

1. What was this like for you?
(ex. engaging, interactive, connecting/feel included, decreased apprehension/anxiety about group, increases receptivity)
2. How does this differ from me telling everyone: "Here's what you do and don't do."
(ex. could cause people to shut down)

Credits: Marc Pinsler/Diane Sherman

#2- FEELINGS IN A JAR

Round 1 - Charades (Ice Breaker)

Round 2 - Partner Mix (Connection)

Round 1: Charades (*Ice Breaker*)

1. Facilitator asks: Has anyone ever played Charades?
2. Can you explain to the group how to play Charades?
(ex. hold finger up for how many words, hold hand over ear for “sounds like”, can also hint with 1st letter of word if needed)
3. Pass out “feelings in a jar” cards to each person and tell them not to show anyone the word on their card (index cards can also be used- threatened, considerate, empathetic, embarrassed, delight, exuberant, relaxed, self-reliant, respectful, jubilant)
4. One at a time, each person goes to the front of the room and the participants guess the while the person in the front acts out.
5. Then the person in front chooses the next person until everyone has a turn.
6. After everyone has had a turn the facilitator asks:

Debrief:

1. What was that like?
2. Would anyone have tried to act out someone’s word differently?
3. What was that like to try to figure out someone else’s feelings by their body language?

Round 2: Partner Mix (*Connection*)

1. Facilitator passes out “feeling card” to each participant.
2. Each participant looks at the feeling card in their hand and gets up and finds one other person and shares the last time they felt that feeling which is named on the card, then the other person shares the feeling that is on their own card. Then they switch cards and each moves on to a different person and repeats the process until they’ve swapped and completed interacting with everyone in the group.

Debrief:

1. WWTL?
2. How was that different than if I just asked everyone to go around and share?
(ex. felt connection, more emotions)
3. Was anyone able to relate to another’s experience? WWTL?

Credit: Amazon

#3 – JUNK TO JEWELS (*Ice Breaker/ Group Cohesion*)

1. Part one: Facilitator dumps out a box of junk on the floor and asks participants: “pick out and choose one item that you identify or resonate with... or speaks to you.”
(ex. String spool, flashlight, slinky, voice recorder, brain model, stress ball, toy firetruck, binder clip, stapler, tape, turtle figurine, sunglasses, etc.)
2. 1st Debrief:
Go around the room and ask: “Why did you choose the item that you chose? “
3. Part two: Facilitator instructs participants: “Now use all your items together to create a _____ (recovery, spiritual, any other) story that has a **beginning, middle, and end.**
4. Agree on the story.
5. Choose a spokesperson to narrate the story.
6. 2nd Debrief:
What was that like (WWTL) to work together as a team? How did you come up with this story? How did you choose the spokesperson. Did anyone take leadership? Chosen or self appointed... etc.
7. Change the items around or throw in an additional item and ask participants to decide how the story changes. Then share.

Credit: Diane Sherman

#4 – THREE ANIMALS (*Deeper Dive*)

1. Make sure everyone has blank paper and something to write with (offer optional markers or colored pencils)
2. Ask everyone to first THINK of their 3 favorite animals.
3. Then ask everyone to draw their 3 favorite animals on paper in order of preference. Then beside each drawing write 3 qualities or characteristics of each. Remind everyone there is no art shame in here. Let them know that personally I'm a stick figure/chicken scratch kind of person (so that they feel safe)
4. Play background music (prevents distraction and promotes feeling good)
5. As soon as everyone has had a chance to finish, ask if anyone would like to share their drawing with the group. If not, then just share the 3 qualities about each one. Stress to everyone to not focus so much on the animal's appearance, but focus moreso on the qualities and characteristics of the animal.
6. Share with the group that all art therapy is open to interpretation, and that there is quite a bit of scientific research on this particular activity.

Explain:

1st animal represents: how you view yourself

2nd animal represents: how others view you

3rd animal represents: how you really are

Debrief:

1. Looking back at the first part of this activity, what was that like to be able to express yourself creatively through art and think about animals you enjoy? (ex. relaxing, comforting, ask why and how?)
2. What was that like to experience the results of the activity? (ex. Interesting, enlightening)
3. Does anyone agree or disagree with their results? If so, how would you change it?
(In the instance you struggle with negativity, you can have them consider what they may need to work on)

#5 – WHAT'S MY LINE EMOJI? *(Check In – Debrief)*

1. Print out and laminate a variety of ½ sheet paper sized emojis. (ex. diamond, bomb, chain, heart, present, art palette, balloon, money w/wings, knife, dumpster fire, magic crystal ball, candle, clock, fishing pole, balance scale, musical notes, flame)
2. Ask participants to stand beside:
 1. Where were you when you first came to this program/group, or at the beginning of the day?
 2. Where do you see yourself now?
 3. Where would you like to be or see yourself at the end of your day or program?

Credit: Cody Davis / Diane Sherman

Day 2

#6 - TAKE 5 DIGITS (*guidelines for running a group/ icebreaker/ group safety*)

1. Explain a way that we can agree on some group guidelines together as a group using our 5 fingers.
PINKY FINGER: To remember we are all vulnerable, safety first, keep yourself safe.
RING FINGER: Remain committed to the group and to the process.
MIDDLE FINGER: Do not judge or say FU to anybody
POINTER FINGER: Remind that every finger I point at someone else, I have 3 pointed back at me. If you are going to give advice, remember to be able to receive advice back.
THUMB FINGER: THUMBS UP... The Fonz... stay cool and positive
2. Ask if everyone agrees to this... and then walk around the group and high five everyone in agreement.

Credit: Cody Davis and Diane Sherman

#7-BOARD WALKERS – (*Group cohesion/frustration/ tolerance*)

(Physical release- stand to the side and observe)

Materials needed: 4 foot rope through 8 drilled holes on 2 fence planks (making space for 4 people)

1. Facilitator explains: “We are going to all stand on the boards, figure out however you want to work as a team, and race against each other from one point to another”
2. After about 2 races, ask the person in the front of the boards to close their eyes. Race again this time with only the front person’s eyes closed.

Remember: Although this is fun... All the experiential is in the debrief

Debrief:

1. WWTL
2. What were the strategies you came up w your team to accomplish your task?
3. How was a leader appointed or self-appointed.
4. WWTL to have ur eyes closed or How is that like to lose a resource of your sight?
(Relate to in treatment... loss of Car keys, cigarettes, voice... etc)
5. Did u get frustrated? How did u overcome frustration?
6. When’s the last time u tried to rush something and it didn’t work out 4 u?

Credit: Cody Davis

#8- OUTLINE OF ME - chalk exercise (*Connection/Deeper Dive*)

1. Facilitator asks: What is the difference between emotional and physical pain? Could there be a cross between the two?
2. Split in pairs ... one person lies down on the ground, the other draws an outline of the person laying down. Pick one color to draw.
3. Next, each person chooses 2 colors ... one that represents physical pain, and one that represents emotional pain.
4. Facilitator instructs each person: "shade in any areas that you've experience physical pain and any areas that you've experienced emo pain. Both people on the team will both shade in on the one person's outline.
5. Debrief:
 1. What color did u choose for physical pain and what color for emotional pain? Why?
 2. Share about what you shaded for emotional pain and what you shaded for physical pain and why.
 3. In one sentence, talk about what you do for self-care. How are you taking care of your pain? (**if someone answers for self-care for emotional pain they get high, share that a lot of people with addictions just want instant gratification, but as we learn, that's not sustainable, that's not working long-term. The fact that you are feeling that now and not getting high is a victory.*)
 4. Did anyone hear any self-care ideas that someone else mentioned that appealed to you?
 5. How do you think this is different than if I sat everyone in a circle and asked everyone to talk about what part of their body is feeling physical pain, and what part is feeling emotional pain?
 6. That's why we only draw one body so that no one is alone in their pain. They both draw in one body.

Credit: Cody Davis

#9 – PAINT MY MASTERPIECE (*Connection*)

1. Facilitator has a long piece of butcher paper sectioned off in squares with paint brushes, paper towels, water, and paint palettes on top.
2. Ask participants to stand in front of a square and start painting whatever comes to mind. They can use whatever brush and make sure everyone has paper towels to wipe their brushes to change colors if they wish.
3. Please do not make any symbols of hate.
4. Facilitator says, "Everyone in position? Start painting. Paint whatever you want."
5. Facilitator play music for a couple minutes as they begin painting. After a couple of minutes, say "alright everyone stop working on their square and move one to the left, continue painting on the square that you are now in front of."
6. Keep this rotation going until everyone has made it around back to their original square. Make sure you vary the music to all different time intervals so no one gets used to any one time.
7. Debrief:
 1. WWTL?
 2. Was anybody's picture similar to when they started?
 3. Did anyone's theme stay the same?
 4. Was anyone blazing your own trail?
 5. WWTL for someone to add to your work?
 6. WWTL for you to add to someone else's work?
 7. How can you compare that to your recovery?
 8. Tie into how you live together with others sharing the same space.

Credit: Jason Rudra

#10- FELLOWSHIP BATTLE (*Group Cohesion*)

1. Facilitator says, “pretend that I am new to the group and I am new to treatment. I don’t know anything about groups”
2. Spilt into 3 teams:
 - AA
 - Celebrate Recovery
 - Smart Recovery
3. Ask, has anyone ever been to a job fair? (work here, come here, visit here... etc.)
4. Write & draw on poster with markers, a sales pitch as to why I should join your fellowship.
5. Then each group chooses one spokesperson and shares the “pitch” for their fellowship.
6. Debrief:
 1. WWTL for you?
 2. WWTL to work as a group?
 3. What were the resources used to gather info?

Credit: Cheryl Grover

#11- WHAT WOULD YOU SAY? (*Deeper dive*)

1. Think of someone that means the most to you in this world living or dead that is not you. Get up and choose the stuffed animal or scarf that most represents that person.
2. Go back to your seat and hold that item in your lap, close your eyes and sit still, feel your feet going heavy into the floor, think about that person.
3. Ask for a volunteer
4. Volunteer Sits in chair in middle of room, and place the item in a chair directly across.
5. Tell them anything you would like to tell them ... something that you've never had the opportunity to say...or something that you've always wanted to say but never or haven't had the chance to.
6. DEBRIEF: WWTL 4U?
7. Note that this activity encourages community and support.
8. After this activity, SHAKE IT OFF... have everyone throw their hands up in the sky, and then forward fold and make a loud exhale as they swish their arms down. Explain this is what animals do afterwards to shake things off.

Credit: Cody Davis

#12 - CRISS CROSS APPLESAUCE: (*Connection*)

PART 1: Energy Ball or Energy Stick

1. Participants stand in a circle.
2. Facilitator explains, "How many times are we challenged to believe in ideas or things without being able to see it? Energy is one of those things that we can't see, yet is very real. The energy that we produce when we connect with one another is one of those things that is unseen, yet today we are going to do an experiment that makes energy from connection clearly visible. "
3. "We have heard that the opposite of addiction is connection, right? Ok. Let's connect, as I turn to my person to the left, I'm going to grab their hand and say to them "the opposite of addiction is connection." Then they will turn to their left and do the same until everyone in the group is holding hands."
4. At that point, pull out the energy ball/stick and place it in between your hand and ask the person next to you to grab the other end. Notice as it illuminates and makes sound.
5. Experiment with different people in the group tapping the person beside them on the shoulder making the energy stick go on and off and on and off. Also experiment with different people breaking the connection by disconnecting hands.
6. Debrief: WWTL?

PART 2: Unwind in circle

1. Ask participants to raise their right hand and place it on their left hip. Then raise their left hand and place on their right hip.
2. At that point connect hands with the person next to them so that everyone is holding hands in the circle in a criss-crossed manner.
3. Instruct the participants to unwind their hands so that everyone is holding hands regularly again and uncrossed, without releasing hands.
4. Eventually you will see they figure it out.
5. Debrief: WWTL? Did you notice anyone who took leadership?

#13 – DOPE DEALERZ/ POSITIVE AFFIRMATION (*group cohesion*)

1. Facilitator explains that they are going to look at a participant, say their name, and give them a positive affirmation (say something great about them to them). (example: Amelia, you are more than worthy of love).
2. Then Amelia says, “I am Amelia, and I am more than worthy of love”. Then Amelia looks to another participant and gives an affirmation. Then that next participant repeats in the same way.
3. This continues to the last person, and then it is reversed, going all the way back to the facilitator.
4. Debrief: WWTL?
5. Explain that everyone in this group just became a Dope Dealer. How so? Because it is scientifically proven that every time a person says or does something nice to another, the recipient smiles, and experiences a significant increase in dopamine in their brain. What is even more interesting is how the giver, or the dealer of the kind word or act experiences an even greater increase in dopamine than the recipient. Even more interesting is if anyone is observing this entire transaction, then they too experience an increase in dopamine, just by observing kind words or acts. In the end, the result is really just one big Dopefest with dopamine flying all over the place.
6. How do you think regularly involving one self in a service project or in regularly saying something positive to others would affect those in recovery? How so?
7. What does it feel like to be a genuine Dope Dealer?

Credit: Cody Davis

Day 3:

#14 – COLOR CHECK IN: *(check in)*

Place pieces of different colored construction paper on floor.

Ask participants:

1. Stand on the color that represents where you are at right now. Ask participants to share *why*?
2. Identify the color that most represents your recovery or self-care. Ask participants to share *how*?
3. Stand on the color that represents your future or how you see yourself going with this treatment or your training. Ask participants to share *how*?

Credit: Diane Sherman

#15 – CRAZY HATSCAPADES

Round 1: *Icebreaker*

Round 2: *Group Cohesion*

1. Facilitator throws a bunch of hats on the floor and the participants choose a hat that resonates with them.
2. Go around the room and participants share why you chose the hat they chose.
3. Next, get in teams of 4 or 5, and create a story of your recovery or self-care. Take 5 minutes to come up w story... and one person share the story from each group.
4. Did anybody get their eye on a hat, and then someone else got it before them?
5. When you were in teams, what did you do to come up with a story?

(This activity is a variation of Junk to Jewels)

Credit: Diane Sherman and Cody Davis

#16 - FEAR SNOWBALL FIGHT (*connection*)

1. Everyone starts with a blank sheet of paper... and a different color marker or crayon.
2. On one side, they write down their fear they have about _____(implementing this work, relapsing, etc.)
3. On the other side, color scribble up the whole other side.
4. With the scribble side on the outside, crumple up paper into a ball.
5. Throw them all at the facilitator, then get up and pick up a color that's not yours
6. Everyone goes around the room and shares what's on the paper they chose.
7. Debrief:
 1. Does anyone relate to any of these fears?
 2. Did this make you feel not so alone anymore in your fears?
 3. Does this change your relationship with fear.
 4. What's it like to be able to throw shit at me?
8. Then they rip up the papers and throw away.

Credit: Anthony Stanley

#17 – LABELS IN THE HOUSE *(connection/Deeper Dive)*

1. Pass out post it sticky notes
2. Explain the word stigma: a mark of disgrace attached to a person place or thing (labeling, judging)
3. Write 3 words on sticky notes that relate to one particular stigma with (recovery, LGBTQ, Christian, sales, Muslim, etc)
4. Volunteer stands at front of room
5. Another volunteer collects all sticky notes., reads them one by one and places them on the standing volunteer.
6. Then the facilitator asks:
 1. WWTL to have all these labels placed on you?
 2. What is your relationship to any of the words on these labels?
7. Then tell the group one at a time to go up to the person with the sticky notes on them and have each person take off 3 notes each and say ... they are NOT what the note says. (Some populations you can go for saying the opposite)
 1. WWTL for you to be placing those labels on your peer?
 2. Ask the person with all the sticky's just removed WWTL to hear all that?
 3. WWTL to be able to hear that they are not these things?
 4. How did this experience affect your feelings towards each other (the volunteers)?
 5. Ask everyone... how did you come up with the words on these labels?
 6. WWT activity like for everyone?

Credit: Christina?

#18 – BABY TRUTHS/ BABY LIES - I AM SHAME MESSAGING *(Deeper Dive)*

1. If you are in a situation to have students bring a baby picture... or bring pics yourself of some from every race.
2. Puts all pics on wall... on butcher paper.
3. Explain to group that every shame message stems from a lie.
Were you really wrong for leaving your bike out or were you just 3, coming in for snack?
4. Have participants write 1-3 I AM shame messages and stick over their pic.
5. Then place a garbage can right beside the wall with the pics.
6. Then one at a time, come up and pull off every message that is covering over your picture representing purity and innocence. Speak out the lie, then speak the truth, then throw in garbage.
7. Debrief:
 1. What was it like to speak your I AM shame messaging?
 2. What was it like to speak the lie?
 3. What was it like to speak the truth?
 4. What is it like having someone else's shame messaging be the same as yours?
 5. How does this change our relationship to our I AM messaging over all?
8. Share with the group, "the more we shed light, the more we are to love. If I expose the lie and I can speak the truth of me, the closer I come to purity.

Credit: Cody Davis

#19 – DOPEFEST/ POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS *(connection)*

(This activity is really as part 2 of the DopeDealerz positive affirmation activity)

1. Pass out a block of sticky notes to each person in the group.
2. Ask each participant to write a positive affirmation for each person in the group.
3. Turn on music while they take time to do this.
4. When complete, each participant gets up and places the sticky notes on the chairs of each of the participants that they wrote the message about.
5. Everyone returns to their seats and collects all their notes.
6. Everyone then gets up with their notes, form a circle and each person takes turns reading their notes changing the phrase to I AM about themselves speaking to themselves. They read though each note. When they are done it goes on to the next person.
7. Debrief:
 1. WWTL?
 2. WWTL to turn the statement around to you speaking it to yourself?
 3. How does this relate to the dopamine production we spoke of earlier?

Credit: Cody Davis and Diane Sherman

#20 - AN ADDICT FELL IN A HOLE

By Nadine Blase Psareas

Experiential Level: Deep Dive

Materials Needed:

- writing utensil
- paper
- Poem “An Addict Fell In A Hole” -author unknown from ***HOPE DEALERS: The Calling, The Struggles, The Breakthroughs, and The Community of Believers*** by Nadine Blase Psareas (or use attached copy below)

1. Make sure each participant has a piece of paper and a writing utensil
2. Facilitator explains to participants, “I’m going to read you a poem from the book, ***HOPE DEALERS*** called “***An Addict Fell in a Hole***”. Listen for and identify 6 characters in the poem. Write them down on your paper.
3. Facilitator reads the poem, “***An Addict Fell in a Hole***” from ***HOPE DEALERS*** by Nadine Blase Psareas.
4. Facilitator pauses for a moment, then asks, “I would like for everyone to look at the characters you wrote down and choose one character that resonates with you or stood out to you for whatever reason.
5. If you could say one thing to that person about whatever, (whether it be frustration, gratefulness, questions, instructions on what they could have done better, anything at all) ... what would you say?
6. Allow one volunteer participant at a time to share. Remember to ask the participant several probing questions, such as how so, why, etc.
7. Ask the group what was that activity like?

AN ADDICT FELL IN A HOLE...

POSTED BY SAMIAM IN DIARY

AN ADDICT FELL IN A HOLE and couldn't get out.

A businessman went by and the addict called out for help. The businessman threw him some money and told him to buy himself a ladder. But the addict could not buy a ladder in this hole he was in.

A doctor walked by. The addict said, "Help! I can't get out!" The doctor gave him some drugs and said, "Take this. It will relieve the pain." The addict said thanks, but when the pills ran out, he was still in the hole.

A well-known psychiatrist rode by and heard the addict's cries for help. He stopped and asked, "How did you get there? Were you born there? Did your parents put you there? Tell me about yourself, it will alleviate your sense of loneliness." So the addict talked with him for an hour, then the psychiatrist had to leave, but he said he'd be back next week.

The addict thanked him, but he was still in the hole. A priest came by. The addict called for help. The priest gave him a Bible and said, "I'll say a prayer for you." He got down on his knees and prayed for the addict, then he left. The addict was very grateful, he read the Bible, but he was still stuck in the hole.

A recovering addict happened to be passing by. The addict cried out, "Hey, help me. I'm stuck in this hole!" Right away the recovering addict jumped down in the hole with him. The addict said, "What are you doing? Now we're both stuck here!!" But the recovering addict said, "Calm down. It's okay. I've been here before. I know how to get out."