



## Activities and Games to Build a Healthy Workplace Culture

Activities and games are powerful teaching tools, as they require attention, engagement, and offer connection with others. When learning is fun, it motivates people to pay attention and helps cement the lessons learned. The games below have been selected to help build trust, compassion, and healthy relationships between colleagues. The left column notes challenging team behaviors your organizations may experience, and the middle column notes a game or activity that can help address or alleviate that behavior between team members, with the goal of building a healthier, relationship-based work environment.

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## The Peacock Paradox

**Purpose:** To help staff see the big picture

**Props Needed:** Full-size peacock feathers

**Time Estimation:** 10 minutes

**Number of people:** Any number

### Activity Instructions:

1. Ask staff to balance the feather upright on their pointer finger, while looking at their finger.

*The result:* The feather will be difficult to balance.

2. Next, ask staff to place the point of the feather on their finger and, this time, look at the eye of the Peacock instead of their finger.

*The result:* The feather will be easy to balance.

3. Next, ask the group to form a circle and balance their feathers. Then ask staff to lean all the feathers in toward the center so they lean on each other at the same time.

*The result:* The feathers will balance but need team coordination.

### Discussion Debrief

1. Why is it easier to balance when you look at the eye than it is to look at your finger?

*Potential response:* When we have a narrow focus on something, things are often more difficult. When we look up to see the whole picture or important goal, it is easier to balance the truly important things.

2. What did it take for our team to balance their feathers as they leaned toward the center?

*Potential response:* It takes both teamwork and each of us working toward our shared goals in order to achieve our vision.



## The Six Thinking Hats

**Purpose:** This exercise is a powerful technique for looking at decision making from different points of view. It allows emotion and skepticism to be brought into what might normally be a purely rational process, and it opens up the opportunity for creativity within decision making. When using this process, decisions tend to be sounder and more resilient.

**Props Needed:** One hat of each color: white, red, black, yellow, green, blue

**Time Estimation:** 10 minutes

**Number of people:** Six or more people

### Activity Instructions

Assign each person a different color hat and have them read what their hat represents (hat descriptions provided below). When the scenario is provided, it will be up to each person to act the part of the hat they were assigned, even if it's not what they believe or how they typically behave in real life.

Read the Scenario provided below and get the discussion going. Allow each hat at least one turn to give their perspective and input in solving the problem.

As the group coordinator, continually keep the group members focused on solving the scenario and for participants to stay in "character" to the color hat they were assigned. When the 10 minutes are up, the group presents their solution to the problem.

**Scenario:** You and your team are being asked to figure out how to fund the operations of opening a new wellness center on your campus. The finance committee is recommending that a monthly fee be charged to residents of your campus who wish to use the wellness center, plus add-on fees for nutritional counseling, private trainers, and other ancillary services. In addition, it is recommended that the marketing department sell annual wellness memberships to seniors in the outside community. These memberships are estimated to cost \$1,500 each. Please discuss whether to adopt the finance committee's recommendations, or whether an alternate recommendation is more desirable to take to the board.

*\*Alternative scenario: Use a REAL problem within your own organization instead of the scenario above*

### Thinking Hat Character Descriptions

**White Hat:** Focus on the available data. Look at the information that you have, analyze past trends, and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge and try to either fill them or take account of them.



**Red Hat:** Look at the problem using your intuition, gut reaction, and emotion. Consider how others could react emotionally and try to understand the responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning.

**Black Hat:** Consider a decision's potentially negative outcomes. Look at it cautiously and defensively and try to analyze what may *not* work. This is important because it highlights the weak points in a plan, allowing you to eliminate them, alter them, or prepare contingency plans to counter them.

**Yellow Hat:** Think positively and consider the problem through an optimistic viewpoint that helps you to see all the benefits of the decision and the value in it.

**Green Hat:** Focus on creative solutions to the problem. Demonstrate a freewheeling way of thinking without criticism of ideas.

**Blue Hat:** You are the leader of the conversation and focus on process control. For example, if ideas are running dry, point to the creativity of the Green Hat thinking. If a contingency plan is needed, ask for more Black Hat thinking.

### Discussion Debrief

1. How did each participant feel about the role they were playing? Was it natural or was it different than how they typically operate?
2. What are the strengths and challenges of each way of thinking?
3. What did you learn from this exercise?
4. What might you take away?



## Meditation – Box Breathing

**Purpose:** The purpose of meditation is the routine of training your mind to focus and redirect your thoughts. It can bring more awareness to yourself and your environment, reduce stress, and develop concentration. People often find that meditation can help develop better habits, stabilize or identify feelings, improve mood and outlook, increase self-discipline, encourage healthy sleep patterns, and even improve pain tolerance.

**Props Needed:** Space to lay down or sit comfortably, dim lighting, aromatherapy

**Time Estimation:** 3 minutes

**Number of people:** Any number

### Activity Instructions

Identify an emotion that staff is feeling. For example, stress, anxiety, pressure, and frustration. Then identify what staff want to feel. For example, calm, content, and grateful. Once identified, staff will “draw” a box in the air with the tip of their nose. Each edge of the box takes four seconds to “draw.” With each edge of the box, the facilitator recites the mantra below, based on the emotion that the staff have identified and staff does the box breathing. Examples are below. This exercise can be repeated several times.

### Mantra:

I gently breath [*calm/contentment/gratitude*] into my body (4 seconds)

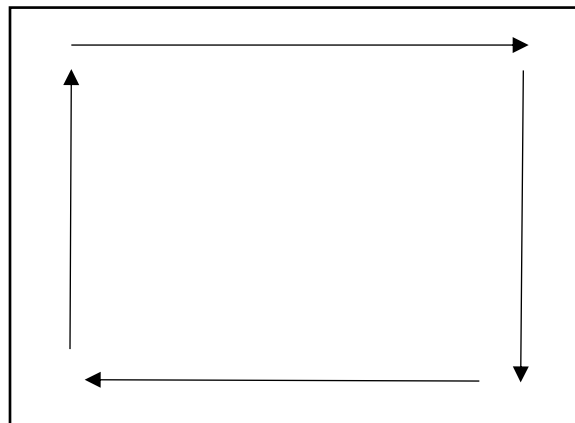
I gently hold [*calm/contentment/gratitude*] in my heart (4 seconds)

I fully exhale the [*stress/anxiety/pressure/frustration*] from my body (4 seconds)

I prepare space to accept [*calm/contentment/gratitude*] into my body (4 seconds)

I gently breathe calm into my body

1      2      3      4



I gently hold calmness in my heart

1      2      3      4

I fully exhale the stress from my body

1      2      3      4

I prepare space to accept  
calm into my body

1      2      3      4

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### **Discussion Debrief**

1. How did you feel when you arrived at this meeting?
2. How do you feel now after meditating?
3. How might you use this type of exercise going forward when you begin to feel [*identified emotion*]



## Active Listening

**Purpose:** To help staff actively listen to one another, which will improve understanding and validation between colleagues. Question prompts are non-work related to help build camaraderie and friendships between staff.

**Props Needed:** None

**Time Estimation:** 10 minutes

**Number of people:** Any number, in pairs

### Activity Instructions:

1. Ask staff to find a partner.
2. Share a question prompt.
3. Partner #1 has 3 minutes to answer the question.
4. After three minutes is up, Partner #2 has 2 minutes to summarize Partner #1's answer.
5. Partner #1 verifies that Partner #2 correctly heard what they shared.
6. Partners swap places and Partner #2 answers the question, Partner #1 listens and summarizes what they heard.

Sample questions:

- What are your favorite songs from your teenage years that you still rock out to when no one else is listening?
- If you could live a TV show in real life, which show would you pick and why?
- What is your favorite book and why is it so meaningful to you?
- What is your super-secret talent?
- What was your favorite toy when you were a kid and where is that toy now?
- What is the worst fashion decision you ever made?

### Discussion Debrief

1. What did you learn about your colleague?
2. Were you similar or different in your answers?
3. Was it easy or difficult to actively listen? Why?
4. Did you feel heard or validated after sharing your response? Why or why not?
5. How does this exercise apply to your everyday work?
6. How might you interact with others differently going forward?



## Hi, my name is....

**Purpose:** To help staff develop a sense of humility and compassion for those around them, and to better understand the complex lives that colleagues face every day outside of work. The goal is that staff will be more apt to give a little grace to one another when needed at work. *Note, this is a highly sensitive activity and requires the sensitivity and emotional intelligence of participants. This activity should be treated as confidential.*

**Props Needed:** None

**Time Estimation:** 25 minutes

**Number of people:** Any number

### Activity Instructions:

1. Ask staff to think privately about their biggest challenge in life (at home or at work) and identify how it makes them feel. For example, maybe a colleague is failing in school and they feel dumb, or they have a sick family member and they feel helpless.
2. Next, staff walk around the room and introduce themselves as the identified feeling. For example, "Hi, my name is dumb" or "Hi, my name is helpless."
3. Staff do not need to explain their feeling or personal situation, but they are free to share with colleagues if they choose.

### Discussion Debrief

1. What did you learn about your colleagues?
2. How did it feel to be vulnerable with your coworkers?
3. How does this change how you might interact with your colleagues going forward?
4. Is there anything else you wish your colleagues knew about you?
5. Why might it be helpful to be honest and transparent with one another in the workplace?
6. How would you like to see our team support one another?
7. When people make mistakes at work, how should we treat one another?





## Silver Lining

**Purpose:** To help staff get out of negative thinking cycles, and to identify positives or lessons learned from challenges in life and work.

**Props Needed:** None

**Time Estimation:** 10 minutes

**Number of people:** Any number, in pairs

### Activity Instructions:

1. Ask staff to find a partner.
2. Partner #1 shares a negative work or life experience with their partner.
3. Partner #2 summarizes what they heard from Partner #1, but then focuses on the positive aspects of the experience, lessons, or helpful takeaways.
4. Partners swap places. Partner #2 shares a negative work or life experience, then Partner #1 summarizes what they heard, focusing on the positive aspects of the experience, lessons, or helpful takeaways.

### Discussion Debrief

1. What silver lining did your partner identify in your situation?
2. How does it feel to receive support from your colleagues?



## Know Me

**Purpose:** People's lives and experiences shape how they behave and react at work. When staff have the opportunity to share personal things with others, it builds camaraderie, trust in one another, and inclusion in teams.

**Props Needed:** None

**Time Estimation:** 15

**Number of people:** Any number

### Activity Instructions:

- Staff sit in a circle without a table or other barrier between them.
- Go around the circle and answer one of the question prompts below.
- Anyone can pass on their turn.

### Question prompts:

1. If you really knew me, you'd know that ...
2. My rose (best part) of the week was ... and my thorn (worst part) of the week has been...
3. Three things I'm grateful for are ...

### Discussion Debrief

1. Are there any similar themes that popped up in our group?
2. What did you learn about your colleagues?
3. Does anyone need extra help or support right now? What does that look like?



## Rock, Paper, Scissors, Cheerleaders

**Purpose:** Encourage team members to support one another and be their colleagues' biggest cheerleaders. Help staff break down silos.

**Props Needed:** None

**Time Estimation:** 15

**Number of people:** Any number, in pairs

### Activity Instructions:

- Ask staff to find a partner.
- Pairs play three rounds of Rock Paper Scissors.
- The winner moves on to the next round of the tournament. The losing player becomes the biggest fan of the winner, and they cheer for that person as loud as possible in the next round of the tournament.
- Winners pair up and play another round. The winner of this round moves on to the next level of the tournament. The losing player becomes the biggest fan of the winner, and they cheer for that person as loud as possible in the next round of the tournament. Each winner now has two fans cheering them on.
- Repeat the process until there is one final winner and many, many fans.

### Discussion Debrief

1. How might we cheer each other on better in our everyday work?
2. What does support look like to you?
3. What does recognition look like to you?

*\* This toolkit is based on resources from Robin Wolzenburg, Vice President of Housing and Clinical Services at LeadingAge Wisconsin and Sarah Peterson, Assistant Director Assisted Living and Homecare at Markesan Resident Home in Wisconsin.*