



Activity ideas for exam time

Tip number 4 in our 'Top 10 tips for leaders' is, "Help them to 'blow off steam'." We suggest playing some silly games and ice breakers or finding other activities that will help young people to get rid of their pent-up nervous energy.

Here are some of our favourites...

Imagine the way

All players remove their shoes and socks and close their eyes. The group leader begins, "Imagine you begin to walk slowly. Your feet feel the way forwards. You sense high grass... Now you come to a gravel path. The stones prick at your feet. You leave the path and come to mushy forest ground, where now and again there are patches of moss. After a short while you sense warm sand..." Continue the story.

You could have sound effects to illustrate walking on different paths, which are played at the same time as you tell the story.

Fantasy journey

This is a story that sends children and young people into their imaginations. Use any story. Meditation music to suit the theme should be played in the background and the text should be read out with a soft, quiet voice. The participants lie on their backs on blankets or roll mats on the floor. They breathe calmly and evenly. Wait until everyone is quiet before beginning.

Mafia

This has to be the most famous of all murder mystery games, and one of the most simple to set up, requiring no equipment other than a couple of sheets of paper and a pen. There are also dozens of variations, which allow youth leaders to set up the game based on the number of people present. Here is the simple outline of the game:

Set-up

Depending on the size of the group, you will need to decide how many will be members of the Mafia. Usually for a small group, one is sufficient but, if there are 10 or more, you will

probably need two. You will also need to appoint a detective. The rest of the group are 'villagers'.

The best way to allocate these separate jobs is to write letters on scraps of paper, place them in a hat (or bag) and have each child take one piece of paper out and read it secretly. When everyone knows what their 'role' is, you can collect up the pieces of paper, ready for the next round.

How to play

All the players close their eyes. The leader acts as a narrator. You can make this narration as exciting or as simple as possible, depending on how creative you're feeling, but the first round would start with something along the lines of, "As everyone falls asleep, the Mafia, and only the Mafia, awake!" At this point the Mafia must open their eyes and silently choose a victim to 'murder'. The Mafia then 'go to sleep' and close their eyes again. The narrator then says, "Now the Detective awakes!" The Detective opens his/her eyes and silently chooses someone to investigate. The narrator must indicate to the detective, silently, whether that person is a Mafioso. Then the Detective falls asleep with eyes closed and the narrator says, "Now, everyone in the village wakes up!"

At this point

The narrator then informs everyone of the murder of one of the villagers and the identity of the victim. 'Dead' players are not allowed to influence the game. Now comes the interesting part! The group must discuss between themselves who is likely to be the Mafia, based on who was murdered and who looks 'shifty'. You will need to limit the time for these discussions as they tend to go on for a long time!

Eventually the group must nominate at least one person to defend themselves against the accusation that they are a murderer. Often there will be more than one nomination. After they have defended themselves for a short time, the group must vote on who they think is guilty. That person is then sent away and 'executed'. This process then repeats itself until the Mafia either kills everyone, or until the group successfully accuses the Mafia - the Detective will obviously have a massive role to play in convincing the others to vote for the right person.

Although this game takes a lot of explaining, children absolutely adore playing it and, even though it can take a long time, it almost always satisfies all the players. Even if you are 'killed' in an early round, it is still most amusing to watch the squirming of other players, and to hear the heated arguments that arise over who should be executed next.

Wink murder

This is obviously a much simpler game than Mafia. It is a lot easier to play with young children and takes a lot less time. One player in the group is secretly assigned the role of 'murderer' and must 'kill' as many players as possible by winking at them, while the group's job is to successfully identify the killer. The correct way of doing

this is for one person to accuse the murderer and another to second the accusation. The chief enjoyment of this game is watching the young people milk their death scenes - some incredible acting abilities are likely to be showcased at this point!

There are many other murder mystery games, but this and Mafia are the easiest games to play in regular youth group sessions. There is also the option of holding a special murder mystery party, but that requires much more equipment, preparation and cost. The internet has many useful tips and tricks for setting up such an event. Hopefully the games mentioned here will give you some ideas for your own games and events!

Cooking ideas

- Hold 'bake-off' competitions, where everyone prepares the same dish. If you want to do something a little different to the usual cakes, why not hold a 'pasta bake-off'?
- Host a 'Come dine with me' evening, inviting different members of the group to work in teams to prepare food for the whole group.
- Hold a pizza making evening – you can buy plain pizza bases and a variety of toppings for young people to then create their own dish.
- Hold a 'cream tea' evening.

Card game evening

Spoons

You will need:

- enough spoons for everyone in the group, minus one (dessert spoons are best)
- at least one deck of cards – possibly two (depending on group size).

Set-up: Sit in a circle – either on the floor or around a table – with the spoons within reach of every player. If this is not possible, spread the spoons around the room in such a way as to offer an equal chance to every player of grabbing one. Each player is given four cards with the dealer keeping the remainder face-down.

Each player must attempt to get a run of four numbers (ie 2, 3, 4, 5) or a set of four cards (four aces, four eights etc).

The dealer picks up a card and decides whether they want to keep it. They must discard one card by passing it to the player on their left. This player then has to pass one card they don't want to the player on *their* left. While that player is perusing the card, the dealer must pick up another card. This goes on until everyone is looking at cards at the same time. If a player is slow, a pile of cards will start to develop next to them! It pays to be quick.

When someone has a set of cards, they must shout, "Spoons!" This heralds a mad grab for the spoons, with one unlucky player left without! This player is then out. One spoon is removed after each round. The game then continues until the final, climactic

battle between two people for one spoon. After that, everyone comes back into the game and gets another chance to be Spoon Champion!

Chicken Feed

You will need two decks of cards, as old as possible. This game can become quite boisterous!

Set-up: The dealer sits with his/her back to the group with a shuffled pack of cards. A duplicate pack (or two) of cards is spread out face-up on the table-top or on the ground in the middle of the players, who are arranged in a circle.

The objective is simply for a player to obtain the highest number of cards.

The dealer draws a card and calls it out. The players must then search for the card on the table/ground, and drag it back to their place using only their forefinger. Ripped cards are void, so the best way to win is to let players have cards they reach first and concentrate on grabbing the next one.

As you can imagine, however, it takes most young people quite a while to realise this! Anyone using more than their forefinger to obtain cards should sit out a round or two. This is a great, competitive, fun card game.

Some other popular card games you may be able to play with your youth group, particularly if they are a slightly smaller group, include:

- cheat
- chase the ace
- racing demons.

Dodgeball

There are several different versions of this very popular game. Many will be aware of the film based on the sport, but it can be difficult to play a game with that many rules with a group of unruly young people! A simplified version of the game involves choosing two or three volunteers who will be the throwers. These players have to try and hit all the others with the ball (buy a soft, large one, rather than a hard one).

Whoever gets hit has to either sit out or join the throwers (depending on the size of your youth group's venue). This is a fun, frenetic ball game that is guaranteed to tire the kids out - try playing it at the end of an evening to prepare them for going home!