

What Brings You Joy

Why you should try it: This activity is almost certain to elicit smiles as it helps foster connection, stimulates feelings of empathy and enhances listening and communication skills.

Time required: About 15 minutes as a facilitated activity. May also be done informally in less than 10 minutes.

Why it matters: According to a 2019 survey of 60,000 U.S. adults, about 60% of people feel lonely on a regular basis. Loneliness doesn't just feel bad, it takes a serious toll on well-being. Loneliness is a risk factor for deaths from all causes and can be as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Working on social skills, such as the active listening and curious questioning in this exercise, is a proven way to reduce feelings of loneliness. Active listening strengthens social bonds and makes both the speaker and listener feel more valued and connected.

How to do it: This activity is meant to increase feelings of connection and enhance listening and social skills with one single question: "What brings you joy?" Participants are consistently delighted at how much connection they can develop with a stranger in just a few minutes. All parties typically find themselves smiling throughout the activity. If conducting as a facilitated group exercise, bring the group together at the conclusion for discussion.

Script:

We're going to do an activity that's practically guaranteed to have you smiling and feel a connection with someone who you don't really know right now. This activity is called "What Brings You Joy?" And it's built around this simple question.

Not only does this exercise give us a chance to focus on joy, but it also allows us to practice listening.

The way it works is we're going to partner up and one person will ask the question and the other will answer for a period of three minutes, then we'll switch.

The person asking the question will say, "What brings you joy?" And the other person will respond.

Then, without commenting on the response, the asker says again, "What brings you joy?" The other person responds with something else that brings them joy.

If you're asking the question, the only thing you have to say is, "What brings you joy?" This allows you to really listen to your partner, without having to come up with what you're going to say next. You simply ask the question again.

If you're answering, you can share anything that brings you joy each time you are asked. This will continue for three minutes, then you'll switch roles. I'll let you know when it's time to switch.

Now, let's partner up!

In-Person Option: Pair up and ask participants to arrange their chairs to face each other. If in-person, randomly match people into pairs, perhaps based on proximity, rather than having participants choose a partner. The idea is to connect with someone new.

Virtual Option: If on Zoom, pair up participants in breakout rooms. If conducting as a facilitated group exercise, bring the group together at the conclusion for discussion.

Script:

OK, so I'm going to set the timer for three minutes and we'll get started. Remember, if you're the one asking the question, "What brings you joy?" is all you have to say. When your partner responds, you just listen and then ask the question again, "What brings you joy?"

If you are the one answering the question, that's all you need to do — think about what brings you joy and tell your partner. This is a chance to dig into what brings you joy. Try to answer differently each time.

OK, let's go!

Facilitator's Next Instruction: Start timer for three minutes. When it rings, tell participants it's time to switch. Set the timer for another three minutes.

When the timer rings and each pair has had an opportunity to both ask and answer the question, bring the group back together for discussion.

Group Discussion Prompts:

- What did you think of this activity?
- What did you like about it?
- What was most challenging?
- What was most surprising about it?
- How connected do you feel to your partner?
- How has this activity affected your mood?

Script:

You just made a warm connection in less than six minutes and practiced your conversation and listening skills. Thank you so much for participating and sharing what brings you joy!

If you are looking for more activities that foster social connections and support mental wellness, visit bchd.org/mentalhealthawareness.