



TRAUMATIC STRESS INSTITUTE

September 27, 2022 RC Consult Group

Tapping into Our Creativity and Playfulness via Improv



Lacey Byrne is the Assistant Touring Company Manager for Sea Tea Comedy Theater in Hartford, CT. At our first in-person consult group since the pandemic began, Lacey brought RC Trainers through a variety of exercises and games to build confidence in public speaking, foster creativity, and inject a little fun into our work – and after the last couple of years we really needed some fun!

We discussed how these activities can be used in RC Trainers' own trainings or in their agency programs. After the workshop, Lacey promised us a list and brief descriptions of the games we played during the Consult Group, which is here below. She welcomes anyone to reach to her if they want more details on the games. Her email is lacey@seateaimprov.com. If you do email her, please mention TSI and the consult group to give her some context, as she runs trainings for many types of organizations.

Lastly, it's a good idea to think about ground rules to frame expectations. Some examples to consider:

- Assure everyone that the pressure to perform is low – there's no "right" or "wrong" to ideas, you don't have to "be funny" or memorable
- If you think something is too ridiculous or dumb to say or do, try it anyway. The absurd is fine here; what's more important is to keep the games moving forward
- Reminder that we want to still be respectful of each other during games. Consent is encouraged – in improv, "yes" is funnier and more generative than "no" – but it is each person's own to grant or deny
- As the facilitator, try to be mindful that everyone feels included/gets a turn during each game

1. Introduce Yourself

Going around in a circle, each person says their name while making a corresponding movement (e.g. a twirl, a bow, a dance move, a hand gesture) that represents them. For each name said, everyone repeats (waterfall, or in unison) the name and the movement. Optional: You could use alliteration of your first letter, e.g. "Karen karate chops" while making a chopping motion, or "Wanda Wonders" while scratching her chin. Great for groups unfamiliar with each other, as the combination of name and movement acts as a memory aid.



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2. Dude

Form a circle with all participants (works best with 8 to 20 people). Ask everyone to look down. When you cue them, they should look up at one specific person in the circle of their choosing. If that person happens also to be looking at them, they should both say “dude” to each other. Then, ask everyone to look down again and repeat the activity a bunch of times. In a group of 10 to 15, there are usually about 1 to 3 “dudes” per round.

3. You/Yes You

In a circle, people are asking permission to take someone else's spot through the use of eye contact. One person is chosen to start and they connect with one other person (can be anyone in the circle) through eye contact and ask, "You?" The person answers "yes" in consent and gives up their spot to the person who requested it. This person now has to find a replacement spot...and so on and so on.

4. Pass Clap

Everyone passes claps together around a circle. To start, one person faces another to pass the clap to them, that person then turns to pass the clap to another person. In this way the clap is passed around the circle. A double clap reverses the direction of the clap. People may choose to pass the clap across the circle. Works on eye contact, being ready.

5. Red Ball

The facilitator mimes having a bag full of objects to the circle of participants. They name and describe each object as they pull them out of their imaginary bag and choose a person to ask if they'd like it (eye contact is important here). The prospective recipient says “yes” and receives it, then passes it to someone else by making eye contact, describing the object, and asking if they would like it. See how many things you can all pass around concurrently – this game can get pretty cacophonous! Examples of objects: a red ball, large bouncy green ball, bubbles, an axe, a wet cat...anything at all!

6. Yes, Let's...

No need to remain in a circle for this activity. In no particular order, someone has an idea - "Hey everyone, let's brush our teeth!" and mimes brushing teeth. Response by all is, "Yes lets!" Everyone mimes brushing teeth (and then at any moment, someone else shouts out an idea). All must get on board and do the idea.

The ideas may be performed cooperatively (e.g. for “Hey everyone, let’s build a plane!” everyone might perform different actions that could be construed as building) or individually (e.g. if everyone is brushing teeth, they’re probably all making the same movements). Some examples: let’s juggle, let’s eat chicken wings, let’s smoke, let’s throw our cell phones out the window.

7. Ask the Expert

One person volunteers to be an 'expert.' The audience (everyone who's not the expert) suggests what they are an expert in and takes turns asking them questions. It should be something the person knows nothing about, but they have to answer as though everything they say is true. Practice at showing confidence and speaking without editing yourself while being supported.

8. Park Bench

Two volunteers at a time sit next to each other as though they're sitting on a bench. The facilitator gets a random suggestion for a topic from the audience. They talk like two people having a regular conversation – all truth, nothing made up, not trying to be funny. Helps with getting to know each other, listening, and building rapport.

9. I'm a Tree

Making tableaux (a.k.a. strike a pose to set a scene). Participants in a circle. A person (anyone with an idea) takes a step into the circle, says what they are, and strikes a pose to model that thing. For example, 1st person might say, "I'm a tree." 2nd person joins in with, "I'm a squirrel." Third person joins with, "I'm an apple." The first person takes themselves and one other person out, for example saying, "I'll take the apple" (they and the "apple" return to the circle). What's left in this example is the squirrel, who starts the NEW tableau by repeating, "I'm a squirrel." Then a 2nd and 3rd person joins in with their new ideas. People can expand on ideas, broaden them, and see how many directions you all can go in. This is a good exercise for relational, abstract thinking.

10. Yes/But, Yes/And

The facilitator gives a topic (it can be anything). Participants split into pairs and participate breakout style. One person starts a conversation on the given topic and the 2nd person responds to each statement with "Yes, But.....", refuting each point as they go back and forth.

"Yes, but..." example:

Person 1: I really feel like chicken wings today.

Person 2: Yes, but we just had chicken wings last week.

Person 1: So what, we can eat them again.

Person 2: Yes, but I'm sick of them....

Both take a turn, 2 minutes each, but in the second round, the facilitator gives a new topic. The former "Yes, But" person starts the conversation, and the other person answers every sentence with "Yes, And....", supporting each point as they go back and forth.

"Yes, and..." example:

Person 1: Let's go hiking along the river.

Person 2: Yes, and we can look at the beautiful fall leaves.

Person 1: Yes, and we could get ice cream when we're done.

Person 2: Yes, and you can get your favorite sundae.

After the exercise, the facilitator asks participants to reflect on their experience during each conversation, e.g. How did each feel? What is the power of but vs. and?

If you use these exercises, or if you find an improv company in your area to bring this type of activity to your agency, we'd love to hear about your experience. Drop us a line!