

Breaking Into Small Groups

“Counting off” to form groups quickly becomes boring and distracting. For variety, try some of these techniques.

- **Stickers:** Put several different stickers on nametags, handouts, or folders, then group by type.
- **Numbered Name Tags:** Divide “even” and “odd,” or by sequential numbers (e.g. 1-5, 6-10, etc.)
- **Color Coded Nametags:** Divide into same color groups and/or mixed color groups.
- **Deck of Cards:** Group members draw from the deck, or facilitator places a card face down on the table, in front of each person. Adjust the deck so that you have the correct number and mix of suits to create equal size groups.
- **Alphabetize:** Group people by the first letter of their name – A through H, I through P, etc.
- **Organization Type:** For some activities, it is useful to have people with similar jobs in groups together – recreation, education, juvenile justice, etc.
- **Thumbs:** Divide into two groups, based on which thumb is on top when they fold their hands.
- **Seasons:** Form groups based on what season people were born in. If time permits, first tell participants to arrange themselves by birth date, in a straight line, without talking. When all are in place, each shares the month and day of their birthday, to see how well they communicated without words.
- **Hamburgers:** Make cards with parts of a hamburger on them (bun, beef patty, cheese, lettuce, ketchup, etc.). Use as many as necessary for the correct group size. Instruct participants to form hamburgers after cards are distributed.
- **Seniority Groups:** This method enables youth workers of various tenures to interact and learn from each other. Ask workers with “more than 10 years of experience” to stand. Divide these workers into the required number of groups. Ask workers with 4 to 9 years to stand and join groups. Have newer workers also distribute themselves among the groups.
- **Basket Buddies:** Place a variety of items in a basket. Participants pick one out or a facilitator places one on the table in front of each seat (while participants are on break or out to lunch). Divide by type of items, e.g. nuts/bolts/screws, pens/pencils/erasers, four types of candy, etc.
- **Sock Mates:** Form pairs by having each person pick a sock from a grocery bag full of separated, distinct pairs. Everyone locates their “mate” for the next activity. (Using baby socks in different colors makes this activity appealing!)