

The Power of Improv in Youth Programs

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C O N S U L T I N G



About Me

- 15-years experience in education and nonprofit sectors across out of school time, health and workforce development programs
- Experienced in strategy development, program design, training and facilitation, youth and family engagement, systems and coalition building.
- Emphasize a human-centered approach for inclusive, responsive and sustaining community solutions. (methods such as design thinking, liberating structures, and improv)
- Seasoned improv performer and facilitator for youth and adults
- B.A. in English Literature from St. Edward's University; White-Riley-Peterson Policy Fellow; Quality Coach for Center for Youth Program Quality; trainer for the Finance Center Sustainability Toolkit; IT3P Design Thinking Bootcamp participant.

Approaches



Overview

- ★ Why Improv?
- ★ The Power of a Yes/And Mindset
- ★ Forms and Purposes of Improv
- ★ Sample Improv Activities, Adaptations and Integrations
- ★ Tips + Considerations for Facilitators
- ★ Optimistic Closure + Questions

Why Improv?



- ★ Builds trust and connections
- ★ Enhances creativity and divergent thinking
- ★ Accepts all answers in a judgement free zone
- ★ Serves as a tool for expression and emotional processing
- ★ Positively shifts energy for better teamwork, authentic interaction, and productivity

And also:

- ★ Improv as a form of therapy
- ★ Improv may curb anxiety for teens
- ★ Mental health benefits of improv
- ★ The many benefits of improv for children

Opening Activity: Yes/And

Someone begin with an idea they have to make youth health programs more fun. Each person will take a turn adding a component/attribute to the idea by using the phrase, “yes, and.....”.

Avoid:

- Overthinking!
- Rejecting your peers’ ideas. Be wary of the “yes, but”. This is still a no!

The Power of a “Yes/And” Mindset

Why might this be beneficial when working in groups? Specifically with groups of youth?

Improv on Stage vs. Improv in the Learning Space



What are your experiences with these forms of improv?

Press Conference

Overview: a participant is secretly assigned a famous person or character by their peers and must investigate who they are through an interactive press conference or awards show. The group should give small hints through their questions, but not give too much away. The general goal is that the secret guest should be able to guess who they are within a few minutes!

Adaptations: Awards Show, Birthday Party, other ideas?

Curriculum Integration Ideas:

http://improvincyclopedia.org/games/Press_Conference.html



Energy Ball

Overview: an imaginary ball is tossed around the circle and each time it must take on a unique shape and sound

Adaptations: Awards Show, Birthday Party, Book Signing, other ideas?

Curriculum Integration Ideas:

<https://www.dramanotebook.com/drama-games/energy-ball/>



Photo by [Greyson Joralemon](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Whoosh-Bang-Pow

Overview: Players pass sounds around the circle, each with a unique rule. WHOOSH passes to the right or left, always continuing in the same direction. BANG reverses the WHOOSH and sends it back in the opposite direction. POW passes across the circle to whomever you're pointing at. There are many many variations on this game with different sounds or extra rules.

Adaptations: Freakout; change words to resonate with youth or cultural language

Curriculum Integrations: We Need You Here; Transition between material or when an energizer is needed

<http://www.improvhd.com/whoosh-bang-pow>



Family Portrait

Overview: Groups of participants take turns posing for various kinds of family photos suggested by their peers.

Adaptations: Statues, Calendar Spread, Images in the Media/Social Media Posts

Curriculum Integration Ideas: We Are Native Introduction, Media Literacy, Transition between material or when an energizer is needed

<https://www.theatrefolk.com/blog/improv-games-for-collaboration/>



Group Environment

Overview: The first person in the group enters a space and mimes an action that defines an environment. Once another group member knows that what that environment is, they enter the space and perform a complementary action until the entire group is interacting in the environment.

Adaptations: Prompt participants to create safe/unsafe and healthy/unhealthy environments

Curriculum Integration Ideas: Drugs and Alcohol Research and Report, Healthy Relationships

<https://www.theatrefolk.com/blog/improv-games-for-collaboration/>



One Word Story

Overview: Participants use a story title to build out a story one word at a time around the circle and must make sense. The last participant must end the story or you can go multiple rounds until you reach a natural ending.

Adaptations: Have someone title the story at the end instead. Choose story titles based on current or upcoming content.

Curriculum Integration Ideas: Native Voices, Stand Up. Stand Strong, Make a Difference in Your Community

<https://www.theatrefolk.com/blog/improv-games-for-collaboration/>



once upon
A TIME

Emotional Symphony

Overview: One person plays the role of conductor, while other participants choose sounds and movements tied to emotions. The chorus interprets conductors motions and “performs” emotions how they see fit.

Adaptations: Storm Conductor

Curriculum Integration Ideas: Transition between material or when an energizer is needed

<https://learnimprov.com/emotional-symphony/>



Other Tips + Considerations

- ★ Cultural and contextual adaptations
- ★ Empowering and engaging youth to lead activities
- ★ Integrating improv into program culture
- ★ Facilitator energy matters!
- ★ Matching energy to subject matter
- ★ Clear directions matter

Optimistic Closure

I Like....

I Wish....

I Wonder....

Questions?

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