

Washer Game

Goal: Throughout the workshop, participants are asked to pass washers around to each other, accompanied by genuine compliments.

Intention: This activity helps break down some shyness barriers as it focuses people on looking for the strengths in others, and recognizing those strengths with heart-felt compliments.

Supplies: At least two washers for each participant, and a pocketful for yourself.

How to play:

- The best way to introduce this activity is to begin without letting anyone know that it is an activity. Simply start casually handing out washers, with genuine and meaningful compliments, as you do other things. After an hour or so, explain the structure of the game to everyone.
- Explain that the goal of this activity is to give washers away as often and as honestly as you can.
- From the time the activity begins through the end of the workshop, no one may hold onto a washer for more than one hour, unless they are asleep.
- In order to give someone a washer, you must give them a genuine and meaningful compliment or positive affirmation.
- An example of a genuine and meaningful compliment would be: “I really liked the way you made sure Terry was safe during that activity.”
- Compliments should have to do with who the person is, not what they’re wearing. So something like “Cool shoes” would not be a meaningful compliment.
- When someone gives you a washer, you must except it and say “Thank you.”
- Ask everyone what it means to be “stuck up.” Share with them that a stuck up person is usually someone who receives a lot of compliments, but doesn’t give any away. They horde them all, like a compliment hog, and don’t share them with others. In this game, no one should be stuck up! And we’ll be able to tell if someone is stuck up in this game, because all those washers will rattle around in their pockets making jingly noises!
- Give everyone two washers and let them know that this activity will continue throughout the workshop.

Tips for facilitators:

- This is a great game to begin at the start of a longer workshop, especially one that runs over several days, during which you have the same group of participants.
- Keep a pocketful of washers so that you can continually model giving compliments.
- It’s very important that you make certain that every single participant receives at least one washer from you.

- Remind people periodically to keep the love flowing! Yes, it's a cheesy thing to say. It ought to get a good laugh. If they happen to notice and comment on the number of washers in your pockets, you can simply say that's because you're overflowing with love. Again cheesy, again, a good laugh.
- At the end of the workshop, some participants have chosen to keep a washer, and put it on a cord around their necks as a reminder. If you see someone in Alaska wearing a washer as a necklace, ask them about it! Some of the youth who have attended an Alaska ICE workshop have been wearing washers for years!

ORID Debrief:

Objective: What did you see happening with the washers throughout this workshop? What did you hear people saying? How did you see people reacting to receiving the washers? Did you approach anyone outside of our workshop and give them a washer? If so, what was their reaction?

Reflective: How did you feel when you gave someone a washer? How did you feel when you received one? Did these feelings change over time?

Interpretive: Why do you think we did this exercise? Why might it be important to give people genuine compliments? What does it do for them? What does it do for you to receive compliments? What does it do for you to give compliments? Did it get easier to give compliments as the activity went on? Did it get easier for you to receive them? Was it easier to give washers to people your age, older, or younger? Why?

Decisional: Will this change anything about the way you interact with other people your age? What about people older than you? Younger than you?

Optional Debrief: If the group you're working with knows about the Asset Framework, you can use this activity to reinforce the basic principles. At the end of the workshop, pull a washer out and show them this is how you build assets. This is how simple it is; as simple as a washer.

Variations:

- At the end of the workshop, you might encourage youth to continue to play this game, and to get adults in their community involved.
- Encourage youth to give the washers to adults who have made a positive impact on their lives. Adults love to be recognized by youth!
- If you're a teacher, you might make this a week-long event at school. Try starting it in one class, and watching it spread throughout the school!
- Some people use large glass beads or stones rather than washers. They are very pretty, but sometimes participants like them so much, they're more hesitant to give them away!