



# MIXER GAMES

So, you have a passion for youth ministry?! Incredible! That's the most important piece of the puzzle when it comes to leading great mixer games. People often overthink mixers and stress themselves out, but when done well, they can be an awesome bridge to get your youth engaged in prayer and songs for the evening.

## TIPS AND TRICKS

What the teens <b>DON'T</b> need from a game leader	What the teens <b>DO</b> need from a game leader
<p><b>A formal introduction to your church.</b> It can be tempting to greet the teens as a specific congregation, but if you're their first impression at the start of your event, showing them a bit of informality can go a long way. Your event is worship (everything is), but is it church? Should it be?</p> <p><b>Proof that you're super cool and just like them.</b> NONE of us, whether we're fresh out of college or way more experienced, know how to perfectly speak our youths' language. Rather than try to win the youths' favor by bringing up TikTok or using lingo you've never tried before, it is okay to show them that you are different than them. You're their (insert: pastor, teacher, friends' mom, etc.) leader, but you care deeply about them and they're safe around you. Be authoritative, yet casual and unassuming.</p>	<p><b>An icebreaker.</b> There's a reason we don't start these events with a devotion or songs. While either of these could work at times, we start with a game to get the youth comfortable and ready for the REALLY important stuff.</p> <p><b>To know that it's okay to look foolish.</b> This is a BIG one. You better believe that when a new youth attendee comes to your group, they'll be looking around to see what's "normal." If you show them that you need to be perfect, polished, and wearing a suit to be accepted, they'll hear that message loud and clear. Consequently, prayer and songs will be stiff and small group time will be eerily quiet. Plan mixers that push your youth out of their comfort zone, but then join them there. Encourage your WHOLE youth night event team to play the game as well, further illustrating that everyone is at your event for the same purpose.</p>

<p><b>The highlight of their night isn't mixer games.</b>  Plan great games and never apologize for them getting the recognition they deserve for that! But just like explosions aren't the best transition for every PowerPoint slide, you need to make sure your game serves the evening, not the other way around.</p>	<p><b>To learn names and see each other in the room.</b>  One of the biggest reasons youth don't seem to come back to youth group is that they don't think anyone there is like them. Plan games that reveal common ground between the youth as well as force them to learn names. If name-learning is just a suggestion in the game, it won't happen—at least not for every teen.</p>
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## START PLANNING YOUR GAMES

**Suggestion:** Simply Googling “large group mixer games” or “games for youth groups” can help find one that serves your goals and sounds fun. Visualize how you would run it for your specific group. Don't be afraid to tweak things to better serve your needs! Take pictures at the Youth Night event with youth participating in your games and send them to us!

1. **Plan MORE than enough organized games**  
Always have one more game in your back pocket than you think you'll need to fill the time. It's okay to have one on deck for next time—it feels awful to run out of material. Try making a list of games you'd like to use for Youth Night events to fulfill the purpose of learning names, finding common ground, and of course, getting youth relaxed and having fun! At each event, select the ones from your list that you will be starting with, making sure you are prepared or have the items necessary to do the next game in case you don't fill the time with the first one. Work your way through the list as you host these events.
  
2. **Plan to have some free-standing games available**  
Have sets of cornhole boards/bags, basketballs, footballs, Kan Jam, Spike ball, or other fun games available for youth that they naturally gravitate to, to start interacting before an organized game is played or for after the event is finished for those waiting to be picked up. This is something that you could ask to borrow ahead of time from members and other event organizers for the Youth Night event.
  
3. **Practice/review your organized game prior to the event (optional)**  
During the Youth Leader Training/Review meeting (1-2 weeks) prior to the scheduled Youth Night event, plan to spend a little time with the Youth Leaders and other staff to go over the planned organized game list. Go over the game instructions together and plot out or event play the actual game as a “test run” to see how it will go the night of the event. This way you can avoid looking “unorganized” for your organized game.

## STARTING AN ORGANIZED GAME

**Start with introductions**—Introduce yourself during mixers, using your first name, if you're comfortable with that. Welcome them to Youth Night. You could give a very brief rundown of what the night entails to give them a small dose of comfort and control.

**Explain the game description**—This is a pretty important step! There's no shame in having an outline of how you want to explain the rules, if you're able to do it clearly, concisely, and with a joyful demeanor! Command attention with your persona and presence in the room, not by literally telling them to "be quiet." This will reduce the power-distance between you and your youth and will help make them more willing to listen. Use a mic if necessary.

**Play the game**—Start your game (or games—depending on time). You can use one longer mixer game that really challenges youth to meet one another and then do another that's more for fun. Don't be afraid to take it outside if weather permits. (Game samples below.)

**Get youth ready for what's next**—You'll be moving on to an official welcome, prayer, and songs. So, try to end the game in a high-energy way that also calls the youth to the next activity. (Example: If finishing up with the game Polarization, you could have them say to one another in their "goodbye" message, "Hey \_\_\_\_\_, want to go with me to pray and sing to our Savior together?") It may seem cheesy, but it sets the stage well for what's to come. Always remember to have fun! Your teens will see your heart and reflect your energy.

## ORGANIZED GAME SAMPLES (TO GET YOU STARTED)

### Game 1—Polarization

*This game is intended to show youth that they have a lot in common with the other people in the group.*

It's super simple—make a (long) list of things that are closely related and easily compared (spring or fall, cake or pie, dogs or cats). Your examples will be better the more relevant they are to your specific youth. (If you were in southern Wisconsin, you wouldn't say "Cane's" or "In-N-Out," since it's unlikely every youth has experienced those restaurants.) Designate one side of the room for one of your options and the other side for its alternative. Make the youth walk to the side of the room that represents their preference. Now, they are all surrounded by people who have at least one thing in common with them.

*NOTE: From this game, you could have them phase into the next one by partnering with someone from the side they are standing on, but with someone they didn't know before the game started.*

Once they've had enough time to learn names, give them a discussion question to use in their groups. These should avoid small talk at all costs—dig a little deeper. (Examples: What was the most surprising thing that happened to you this week? If you could have any pet right now, what kind would it be, and what would you name it? What is the first thing you'd do if you had an unlimited vacation budget?) After discussing this question for a couple minutes, give the teens a silly prompt to say involving their new friend's name. (Example: It was exquisite to meet you, \_\_\_\_\_, I do hope to speak to you again soon.) This shows the teens that it's okay to be goofy and also keeps them honest if they don't remember their partner's name. After this, everyone can return to the middle of the room for another round!

### **Game 2—More on Name-Learning**

*Take an extra minute to explain some tricks to help the youth learn new names. There's no such thing as someone who's "bad with names," just someone who's not trying quite as hard as they could be.*

Start by partnering up. (Groups of three can work if you have an uneven number on each side.) Ask your partner for their name. Close your eyes and picture the face of someone else with that name (maybe a celebrity or someone you know with that name) or a name that's similar. Then say your partner's name three times while looking at them. You'd be shocked how often a little intentionality does the trick!

Once they've had enough time to learn names, give them one discussion question to use with their partners or groups. These should avoid small talk at all costs—dig a little deeper. (Examples: What was the most surprising thing that happened to you this week? If you could have any pet right now, what kind would it be, and what would you name it? What is the first thing you'd do if you had an unlimited vacation budget?) After discussing this question for a couple minutes, give the youth a silly prompt to say involving their new friend's name. (Example: It was exquisite to meet you, \_\_\_\_\_, I do hope to speak to you again soon.) This shows youth that it's okay to be goofy and keeps them honest if they don't remember their partner's name. After this, everyone can return to the middle of the room for another round!

### **Game 3—Circle Speed-Friending**

*This game is similar to Polarization (listed previously) in some ways, so you may not want to use it on the same night. This version is best with a large group.*

You'll need to separate the group into two smaller groups and have them make two concentric circles. This can be done easily if one group joins hands and makes a circle, kindergarten-style, and then their partner goes inside the circle and stands facing them. Now, you'll go through something akin to what you did after polarizing the youth in the other game.

After teens have said goodbye to their partner, have the inner circle move one or more spots in the same direction. This will give each youth a new partner for your next round. This game is great if your youth aren't so sure about meeting new people since they're not able to choose who they're partners with round to round.

#### **Game 4—Manufacturing Memories**

*This is a slightly more involved take on the classic "two truths and a lie."*

Divide your group into small circles of 6-8 people. First, make sure everyone knows the names of the people in their group. Next, tell the group that they'll be getting to know each other better by taking a dive into the past. Each person must decide on a brief anecdote from their life that they'd like to share. Feel free to give a prompt (ex., Tell us about a time you were extremely surprised, tell us about a time you were happiest, tell us about a time you felt the most excited). They must each also come up with a fake memory—something that also fits the prompt but never actually happened. Have the group think about their two stories and put their hand on their head once they've come up with them. Take turns telling the two stories and having the rest of the group vote on which they think is true. If they're correct, they earn a point. The person with the most points at the end wins!

#### **Game 5—Actions Speak Louder than Names**

*This is one of the most effective name-learning games I've found. The goal of this activity is that everyone in your group will learn each other's names.*

Split the group into smaller groups of 6-10. They should make a circle. One person starts by saying their name aloud and doing a corresponding action of their choice (ex., "Adam!" Adam pretends to shoot a basketball because he plays point guard for his school's team). Their action should represent them in some way, and they should explain why it does. Everyone responds by saying that person's name and performing their action. Next, another person in the circle says their own name and performs their action. This process repeats until the whole group can say all the names while performing all the actions in a row.

**Game 6—Big Jenga Faceoff**

*This game requires the church to make or purchase a big Jenga set. They are easy to make with scrap wood—there are instructions all over the Internet, and these are great additions to any church picnic or youth night! (best played in groups of 6-8)*

Write prompts on the Jenga pieces for questions participants can ask one another (ex., Where are you originally from? What career do you want to have? What's your biggest fear?). These questions can vary in intensity or level of disclosure required. Have fun with these! Lists of "get to know you" questions can be found very easily on the Internet. Pick your favorites and write them on the Jenga blocks or use sticky notes or painter's tape if you'd like to be able to switch out the questions in the future.

**Game 7—Beach Ball**

*Write "get to know you" questions all over a beach ball. (best played in groups of 6-10)*

Start by having everyone in the group learn each other's names. They'll need to know them in a minute. One participant will throw or hit the beach ball at another participant, shouting their name to indicate who they're intending to pass the ball to. The recipient catches the ball and reads aloud whatever question their thumb lands on. They answer it. Repeat until everyone gets to go, or until you're done!