

“I Have a Secret” Activity

Recommended Age: 12+

Goal

- To help youth build confidence in their ability to be a good listener and support to other youth.

Have Ready

- A half sheet of paper and pen for each participant.

Instructions

- Give everyone a piece of scrap paper and a pen.
- Ask them to think of a secret, something that they would not tell many people or anyone at all about. It can be a secret thought, or be something they may have done. Assure them that they will **not** be asked to write the secret down or tell the secret to anyone. If people find it difficult, tell them to think of something that most people in the room do not know about them.
- Ask the group to think about what it would take to be able to tell someone about their secret. **“What qualities does the other person need to have? What would be a helpful environment/space?”** Now ask them to **write one word, a group of words, or a phrase that explains what they would need in order to feel comfortable talking to someone about it.** Remind them that other people will read this, so they should not write down a personal secret.
- After they are finished writing, have youth stand in a circle, clear of chairs and food.
- Tell everyone to ball up their paper and on the count of 3, everyone throw that paper at each other, and just keep throwing until you tell them to stop (like a snowball fight).
- When you say stop, everyone finds a ‘snowball’ and returns to their spot.
- Go around the group and ask them to read their papers. Write their answers up on a flipchart or board. Record everything, even

those answers that imply there is no way the secret could be shared.

- To save time, when a common word like ‘trust’ or ‘non-judgmental’ gets read, you can ask, “How many other people have that one on their sheet?” and put that many checkmarks beside it.
- The list can include: **trust, confidentiality, good listener, understanding, caring, respectful, non-judgmental, private space, quiet space**, acceptance, shared experience, warmth, kindness, friendship, etc. Note: Bolded qualities should be added if not mentioned by youth.

Debrief

- Ask youth, **“What are the most common responses?”**
- **“What could this list also represent?”** Characteristics of a good friend or support person.
- If ‘same experience’ comes up, ask if you have to have had the same experiences in order to be helpful/give resources/etc.
- Notice that words such as expert, certified counsellor, and college graduate are not usually on this list. Stress to youth that they do not have to be these things in order to be helpful. However, referring to a counsellor or other resources is a really important part of supporting someone. Chances are if the things on the list are what we need, then they are also what other youth need.
- Sometimes, people will feel really comfortable telling their secrets, while others are more cautious and private. Both are okay, but extremes on either end can be problematic. Not talking and ‘bottling things up’ can lead to an explosion of emotion, whereas telling everybody everything and having a lack of boundaries can leave us feeling vulnerable.
- Relate the idea of boundaries to being a support person to their friends and peers, such as letting people know when you are able/not able to talk, setting times and places for support (e.g., ‘call me to talk, but not after 10 pm’), and how/when to refer someone elsewhere.