



Bay Area Teacher Development Collaborative

{the collaborative}

ADVISORY IDEAS FROM RIERA CONFERENCE

- 1 Have everyone write a letter to Dear Abby about a problem they have or have had. The letters, on 3x5 cards, are put into a box for another advising period when you draw a card and discuss answers.
- 2 At New Year's, talk about resolutions and remind the students that their school year is half over. Have them write a letter to themselves about where they want to be when school starts in September: things they want to work on, improve, solve, change. Seal the letters in an envelope and have them address to themselves. Mail them after school ends in June.
- 3 Each advisory group went to a shelter to help serve lunch (different days). It was great to see a different side of the kids—serving others—and also hang out on a different level outside of school.
- 4 During our 10-minute homeroom advisory period every day we would have a quote of the day that would write on the board and elicit responses to. Halfway through the year I started to let the kids teach the quote of the day and I would just go off to the side of the room. (They would go from concrete to abstract and back to concrete.) Kids even brought in their own quotes.
- 5 For helping kids develop listening skills (7th grade advisory): Cut up questions from the Kids Book of Questions and put them in a basket. Before another student responds to the same question, she needs to paraphrase what the last student said. (When kids are done with one question, move on to another.) This works best if it's a time-limited activity because it's a hard skill to maintain for an extended period of time. Also, before the start, we talk about listening and what that "looks like."
- 6 "On Your Back": Put paper on each kid's back. Everyone writes a quality/acknowledgement for everyone else while circulating throughout the room. Everyone writes on everyone else's back. Variation: make the exercise go with a special event/experience that everyone has shared.
- 7 "Questions in a Hat": This is one way to navigate a discussion about a meaty, serious topic. Let's say we're discussing date rape, homelessness, drugs, etc. Have each girl write down a question she would like to have answered, then fold up the slip of paper. Put all of the folded papers in a hat (or bowl, basket, whatever). Pass the hat around. One at a time, each girl pulls out a question and reads it aloud. The group discusses that question, then moves to the next.
- 8 "Chalk Talk": Pose a question on butcher paper (i.e. how do I want my school to remember me?" What's the difference between success and stress?) Each student gets a pen and writes

his/her thoughts – no talking – and thereby has a written conversation. An example: "Success is feeling good" 'What do you mean?' another student's comment. No debrief; it stands alone. Very powerful for 8th graders.

- 9 Student-directed Advising: Use an advising session to let one or two students share one of their passions with the group. For example: teach the group to sing a song, how to play mah jong, show a clip from a favorite movie, share a favorite poem/song and then lead a discussion about it. It's a great way for kids to exercise ownership and share their special talents.
- 10 Free Association Game: One person leaves the room and the others choose a famous person that all know (e.g. George Bush, Tiger Woods). When the person comes back she/he asks free association questions to develop a group portrait (e.g. what food does this person remind you of? What plant? Tool? Car? Type of music?) Each student answers each question so a composite portrait emerges and kids compare and share their images. It doesn't take long before the questioner can guess the person. As people feel more comfortable, they choose people they know and finally, each other.
- 11 We had a donut-eating contest. We hung the donuts by string from the ceiling and then had to eat them without using our hands. There were paper towels beneath each donut, so that if it fell to the floor, the player could still finish the game (and her donut). This got them to be less reserved. Good icebreaker.
- 12 Use a deck of cards that have questions such as: What was your favorite vacation? What is the silliest thing you have ever done? What is your favorite color? Vary the questions from easy to hard in terms of making think/be vulnerable. Or purchase Straight Talk for Kids cards.
- 13 For large group warm-up: get kids into birthday order line-up.
- 14 Say something that's true about someone else. Put it on paper.
- 15 Teach kids what "center" is.
- 16 For 7th graders, re high school: A discussion not about which school but about what a school needs to be like for you to thrive there (start by 5 minutes of individual brainstorming). Also, do a reflection about what you will bring to the school you go to. It is helpful to help expand their sense of what counts as meaningful contribution to a community (message: you have gifts to bring that are way more important than your GPA)
- 17 Ice Breaker: On a 3x5 cards, have kids write: favorite color, animal, number, book, sport, most frightening experience, best vacation, siblings, etc., any identifying thing, kept simple, and listed on card. Then collect and use them, that day and throughout the year, as a guessing game and getting-to-know-you activity. Teacher says, "This person's favorite color is..." and students guess. They love this! And so do I.
- 18 Each child writes 2 true and 1 false statement about her/himself. Others guess which is false statement.
- 19 K—Opening Day: Family comes in with new kindergarten girl for orientation hour. Take pic-

- ture of student with family. Parent(s) write note for daughter on an "apple". Parent(s) help make (decorate) nametag that girl will wear for at least 2 weeks. After the families leave: Picture and note are laminated and put up on lockers so that girls see it the next morning, their first day of school. This stays up the whole year.
- 20 Each student makes a "This is Me" collage inside a paper box, such as a video mailer, or fills a brown paper bag with pictures, photos, symbols. This is a good beginning of year exercise.
 - 21 Ice Breaker: "People Bingo". Make up a bingo board with different things on it (e.g. find someone who has a pet fish). Give a board to each child and have him/her walk around and try to fill up their board with other children's names.
 - 22 Walk into a room and ask kids to pick a subject to discuss. I've done it with 2nd- 8th graders and it's always been a success.
 - 23 My favorite with middle school - discuss a favorite movie with other kids questioning why it's meaningful...learning to give feedback or compliments.
 - 24 A successful thing I did with my discussion group was to purchase a large, working model of a catapult. We put it together during our discussion time. It gave us a common goal. The boys cooperated and talked while did this. It's hard to describe the dynamic but while they went over the directions and solved problems and worked on assembly they would talk about what they did that week, how they felt about math, etc. etc. By the end we had a cool catapult and we had come together as a group.
 - 25 End advisory with "Two Minute Mystery", board games (Scategories, Zilcho are two favorites) word games: puzzles, anagrams, etc.
 - 26 "Clapping" Game #1 (advanced Telephone game): students sit in a circle (no desks). Step 1: One person leads a 4 count rhythmic phrase that others repeat. Take turns, different students lead. Step 2: Students look at person to their right. a) they lead 4-count phrase, while watching what the person on their right does. b) 2nd measure: students do what they observed person on right did. Add measures until students do their original rhythmic phrase.
 - 27 In single-sex groups: Ask the kids, "What is the best thing about being your gender?" "What is the hardest thing about being your gender?" "Would you switch?" Very interesting, honest, and informative discussion!
 - 28 My advisory group had a good time with a project where they were passing on information to the incoming 7th graders on what helped them with succeeding, in school. They wrote a script for the "How to Survive the 7th Grade" (done in a newscast format) and filmed its various segments using a camera from the computer lab.
 - 29 Maturity chart to point out how we all mature in different areas in different ways. I always use my daughter at 13 as an example, then each advisee creates his/her own chart.
 - 30 Get in pairs. Each person has a nametag. Each person talks to his/her partner for a minute about him/herself. Then they switch nametags and become the other person. Join with another

er partner and each talk but this time as the person on one's nametag. Switch nametags and repeat one or two more times. At end, join as a whole group and talk as if you are the person whose nametag you ended with. The original person comments on accuracy.

- 31 Activity for young kids: Give paper heart to every child. Ask them to imagine it is their own heart. Then ask them to feel, describe what happens when something unkind is said and then ask for 3 or 4 examples of something that hurts. Each time there is a statement, put a fold in the heart until it is folded 3 or 4 times. For each mean, unkind statement, give something kind you could say instead and each time unfold the heart. When heart is unfolded, ask kids to describe what they see. Discuss that the heart is never the same once the words are out of mouth. Kids have a wrinkle in heart; let that be something to hook onto and refer back to.
- 32 In 8th grade we separate the advisory groups into 1 group of boys, one of girls, (just for this exercise). During one class they make a list; girls do, "What boys need to know about girls." Boys do, "What girls need to know about boys." The next week the girls get the boys' list and the boys get the girls'. They discuss but are NOT allowed to argue with it (they need to consider what is being said, not just defend).
- 33 In an effort to continue service learning, but in a smaller group, we "adopted" a family over the holidays. Families in need can be located through various children's hospitals and advocacy groups. The kids used gift lists from families and/or banded together to create age appropriate ideas. We shopped together and wrapped and delivered together. It was a great way to "give back".
- 34 The first time I met my advisory group, we went around the circle and each said our least favorite word, favorite word, and the reasons for each. The answers were very telling, sometimes quite entertaining, and we learned so much about each other in a very short time.
- 35 In my 6th grade advisory we decided to put on a short drama for the rest of the middle school at the assembly we were in charge of organizing. As a group, we went to the school library to get inspiration. Unanimously, we chose the book *Miss Nelson is Missing*. We all had loved the book when first reading it in first or second grade and still loved it. Each of us played a role; everyone really identified with the thoughtless-turned-thoughtful and mischievous students portrayed. The audience was really responsive too, which united the advisory. This was in early October.
- 36 "Knots" from *New Games* book: Have a group of 8-12 kids stand in a circle shoulder to shoulder. Each kid raises her/his right hand and reaches out to grab another kid's hand (can't grab hands on either side of person). Next do the same with the left hand—can't grab same person child is holding with right hand or kids on either side of person). Now group is in a knot, Need to move out of the knot into a circle without letting go of any hands. Should be able to form one circle. Can have kids do this without talking.
- 37 Always have food in your office for hungry teenagers.
- 38 Arrange "private" lunches with each advisee once a term to communicate without interruptions

- 39 Special group "off-campus" events, meals, trips.
- 40 I sent my freshmen on a scavenger hunt around the school. The clues had to do with the school itself and the subjects the students were learning. At the end of the trail, I provided cupcakes. Everyone was involved, and I tried to make clues that different people would know the solutions to. A little time-intensive, but a very fun bonding activity.
- 41 I teach second grade. On the first day of school I have the kids play Buddy Bingo. Each kid has to find someone who fits the description in each box on a bingo card and no one may be used twice. In this way the all have to go around asking each other questions that are safe. It's very noisy and very fun. And the kids learn a little about each other. Ideas for squares: someone who.....speaks another language, has a dog, has a loose tooth, has a little sister has an April birthday, likes pizza, lives in El Cerrito, likes to swim.
- 42 Have students write a letter to self for the end of the year. The objective of the letter is to predict, dream, explore fears around potential challenges of the year.
- 43 Advising session on positive self-image: Have students write a letter to themselves focussing on affirmations. The teacher mails them so the students receive them at home, perhaps for Valentine's Day? Exam time? High school application time?
- 44 Kids secretly bring in an object that they think represents an important aspect of themselves. Advisor collects and then places all in center of circle. Kids try to guess which object belongs to whom and the "owner" elaborated as to why that item was chosen.
- 45 Use art! Give everyone a ball of clay to fashion and talk about. Make a collage about school/friends/self.
- 46 K-adult ice breaker: To learn names, every person comes up with a gesture/movement for their name, shows it, and the rest of the group repeats it. An extension is to have the gesture done in a particular mood/quality that characterizes the person.
- 47 Ask students to draw the path of their lives individually, marking the special moments in school or in their lives, drawing ups and downs, etc. They can share it with a partner or the group. It worked very well with seniors as a reflection of their experience, but I think it can be adapted to all ages.
- 48 Have each student choose something from personal backpack or on his/her body. Tell group about it. Why is it important? Why are you wearing it? Why did you bring it with you? Is it always with you? Where did it come from?
- 49 Do a baby picture match. Leads to great discussions of growth and change.
- 50 Towards the end of each quarter, when tension is running high, we have a group "B" session to air whatever is stressing us out. This helps us feel more connected and actually strengthens resolve to push on through. During the process, I can usually rely on a few students to accentuate the positive, thereby providing some balance and inspiration. The one time that did not happen, I added a final activity of going around and stating one thing that made each of us

happy that day.

- 51 Read a play out loud, with each person taking one or more parts and then discuss. This might take 2-3 sessions.
- 52 Write group stories: on a long piece of paper, each person writes a bit and folds it over. The next person writes with knowing what was before. This is a good icebreaker, providing many laughs and can lead to more intimate, personal subjects.
- 53 Provide movie and dinner at my house.
- 54 Have a family potluck with each family bringing a favorite dish or a dish representative of their heritage.
- 55 Ideas for middle school: trust walk/falls; conflict resolution: present scenarios on race, gender, cheating, anything; do role plays: act out an interview with your favorite athlete/actor; do relay races; put together an advising group constitution.
- 56 Create a sun with as many rays as there are advisees. In the circle have each student write something they need help on. As the paper goes around, each student will write in the appropriate spoke his/her advice to that problem.
- 57 Take high school students to a children's playground...and let them PLAY!
- 58 Brainstorm the items that "cause" good students. Usually students will come up with getting good grades, turning in homework on time, listening in class, using the internet, etc. Distribute a long checklist and discuss items. Ask students to rate themselves for each item. Draw profile. Distribute score sheet. Have students compute individual scores. Show students the areas over which they have control and how they can increase their scores by changing areas they had not considered. One student decided to set up a specific study area rather than just working anywhere. He was surprised to see his scores increase enough to move him to the next success category. If a teacher wants to carry this even farther, it is interesting to ask one teacher of each student to complete the profile, complete one herself, and give one to a parent. Compare profiles and note areas of agreement and disagreement. This project might expand over an entire term but has proved to be worth it.
- 59 I used Ohme's Checklist as the basis for discussion of things needed to change to increase success in school. (Note: This is taken from Learn How to Learn by Herman Ohme, Ed.D. It is published by California Education Plan, 942 Acacia St., Los Altos, CA 94022)