

Making Sense of Things

Step-by-Step Instructions:

1. Ask for a volunteer advising that they will be blindfolded (or must agree to close eyes if they don't wish to be blindfolded) and must guess what an item is based on their sense of smell. Have the volunteer come to the front of the class. Blindfold the volunteer or ask the volunteer to close his or her eyes.
2. Remove objects from the box one at a time. Hold the item up to the participant's nose and ask him or her to identify the item based on smell. If the guess is correct, return the object to the box.
3. If the participant guesses an item incorrectly, let him or her hear the item. Place the item near the ear and shake. Of course, many items will not make sounds. Put any items that he or she guessed correctly back into the box. Set the items that were guessed incorrectly on the table.
4. Now ask the volunteer to feel each item on the table one at a time and guess what it is. The correct items go back in the box and the incorrect ones remain on the table.
5. Remove the blindfold or have the volunteer open his or her eyes.
6. Ask the volunteer why he or she made the wrong guesses and to describe the experience of the exercise.

Tips for Discussion and Processing

Discuss how we often jump to conclusions based on our first sensory experience. For example, many times a spouse will say "I knew he was mad just by looking at him," or "I could tell she was angry by the tone of her voice," or a parent may say "I knew my child was ignoring me to make me mad." Ask the group for examples of times they reached the wrong conclusions based on their assumptions. Discuss how we should use all of our "senses" before we jump to conclusions about other people or events.

Group Size: 11 to 25

Time Needed: 1 to 10 minutes

Goal: To understand that assumptions may be incorrect

Audience: Couples, Teens, Parents, Children, Singles

Special Considerations: With some cultural groups, blindfolding a participant may be inappropriate. If this is the case, allow them to close their eyes and agree not to peek.

Resources Needed:

1. A variety of objects (5 to 7) that will stimulate the sense of smell; including objects that have no smell. Offer things such as candles, bath salts, wood pieces, scratch-and-sniff stickers, food, lotion, tea, coffee, rubber bands, paper clips, envelopes, pens and so forth. Place items in a box so participants will not be able to see them ahead of time. Try to find some things that participants will guess incorrectly (e.g. coffee-scented candle that they may mistake for ground coffee).
2. A table for display