

/How to engage an audience

WELCOME! This document is adapted from Jack.org's many resources to train and equip young leaders to take action for mental health across Canada. We're thrilled to be sharing our learnings externally with this resource.

Objectives:

- To learn how to present any type of content in a variety of engaging ways
- To understand how to adapt to diverse audiences with varying energy levels

To engage an audience effectively is to invite them into the presentation, have them interact with the material, and walk away with an understanding of how to apply it in their lives. In the words of Benjamin Franklin:

“Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I learn.”

TAILORING TO YOUR AUDIENCE

Every group is different, and no one tool will work with every audience! There are two major variables that affect how engaged an audience will be. These are their **energy** and the extent to which they “**buy-in**” to your presentation.

For **energy**, it's best to keep a medium-high level of energy. If energy is too high, audiences may become unruly, distracted and disruptive (most commonly in younger audiences). If energy is too low, audiences can become bored and anxious for the talk to end. We need to find and keep a middle ground where audiences can stay focused and motivated to listen.

The key to gaining **buy-in** is to focus on building your credibility and appealing to audience emotions. Let them get to know you, work to establish common ground, and be clear in why what you're saying is important to them. Give them the opportunity to attach emotion to your messages. This will motivate them to stay engaged and hear what you have to say.

The following are examples of engagement activities you can use based on your own style and the needs of the audience.

1. ENERGIZERS

Fun little games/exercises that are a response to energy that is too high or too low.

Purpose: These are for the explicit purpose of bringing the energy level to just the right amount to stay attentive and absorb information. Unlike other engagement strategies, this does not need to have content or messaging woven into it - it is **purely for energy management**.



High-energy audience: most useful for rowdy, younger audiences, the key is to help the audience work off some excess energy. Have them move/make noise with clear instructions.

Low-energy audience: you must meet them where they are. Acknowledging the low-energy being sensed is a first step. Then, get them a little more awake/comfortable. Try to open up the space for some simple conversation and maybe a chance to stretch.

2. ASKING QUESTIONS

Questions and discussion related to the presentation that help audiences digest material.

Purpose: to have the audience refocus and dig into the material that was just covered.

High-energy audience: ask surface level questions that relate to what you just spoke about and collect answers (note: keep it simple so they can participate easily). If they are not listening be sure to not show anger or frustration as that will rarely get you anywhere. Instead, try using pauses and sass - it often works!

Low-energy audience: it is easier for a shy audience to avoid engaging with you as they can hide in a large crowd. They cannot, however, hide from each other! Ask a clear question, give them time to think of a response independently, and then have them discuss with their neighbour. Having clear instructions and deliverables makes them accountable. Be sure to collect and celebrate responses.

3. PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Explicit games and activities that incorporate learnings from your presentation.

Purpose: to get audiences to critically think about how learnings can be applied to their lives and future behaviour, and to get them to **actually practice it**.

High-energy audience: getting a volunteer or multiple volunteers can help focus the audience attention to the stage and demonstrate how learnings can be tangibly used. Practice tools you've gone through with role-playing skits, competitions, or prepared activities.

Low-energy audience: if the audience is not interested in engaging with you, it may be difficult to get a volunteer. In this case, clear/ simple instructions and an opportunity for them to be accountable to each other is best. Ask deeper application-based questions to get them to digest material in a way that is relevant to them. "How" and "why" questions that touch on action are most useful in this case.

ACTIVITY – Brainstorm for Next Audience!

Think about an upcoming presentation you're likely to give and who is likely to be in that audience. What kind of audience is this? Would they buy-in easily? Would they be more likely to be high or low energy? Now, think of a topic that you are passionate about - it could be serious like solving world hunger or less serious like pineapple preferences on pizza. Plan out what you believe would be a great energizer, a great set of questions, and what you would do to have them practice what they've learned.