

Keep 'Em Afloat

Empathy

Grade(s): 2–8

Learning objective/s or description

To introduce the concept of doing a good job by yourself and in a team, and to have participants explore ways they can be helpful to each other and their communities.

Materials needed:

- Balloons blown up for each participant
- A large garbage bag to hold the balloons
- Chart paper and markers (optional)

Any tips or important information

Check for any latex allergies before starting. Keep the energy playful — chaos is part of the lesson. Watch for students who get overwhelmed and quietly help them rejoin the group when they're ready.

Lesson structure:

Opening Circle

Who is someone who helped you this week, and how did it feel?

Community Builder: Helping Hands

Each student turns to a partner and shares one thing they are good at and might help someone else with. Partners say “thank you” out loud after they listen, then switch.

Main Activity

1. Have all participants stand in a circle with their hands behind their backs and their eyes closed.
2. Walk around the outside of the circle and place 0–3 balloons in each person's hands.
3. Explain that you will play a game called Keep 'Em Afloat.
4. In this game, you (the facilitator) will stand in the middle of the circle and start bouncing one balloon in the air. The object of the game is to keep the balloons up in the air. After a few bounces, you will call someone's name.
5. That person will join you in the middle of the circle and help you keep the balloon up in the air. If they are holding any balloons behind their back, they need to send these up into the air as well. Now you will have to work together to keep all the balloons up in the air.
6. The person called into the middle can then call another person's name to come help — they will join the middle and introduce their balloons into the air as well.
7. This continues until all the balloons are in the air. Because everyone has a different number of balloons, some people will be more helpful, while others will add to the chaos with their own balloons.
8. Have the participants collect the balloons in a garbage bag and sit in a circle.

9. Have participants get into groups of four.
10. Ask each group to come up with a list of ways they can be more helpful to each other in class. Once they have brainstormed for 5–10 minutes, ask them to choose their favorite idea.
11. Have each group present their favorite idea to the whole group.
12. For the rest of the day, have participants notice when someone does something helpful from the list you came up with (you may choose to give prizes to the people who are noticed being helpful).

Debrief Questions

- What did we learn about being helpful today?
- What would happen if we never tried to help each other?
- Is it hard for you to ask for help sometimes?
- Who is someone who helps you a lot in your life?
- What are some ways you can let them know how thankful you are for them?

Closing Circle

What is one way you can be helpful to someone in our group this week?