Let’s Talk About Nerves

Participating in the public speaking activities will help young people develop their ability to organize their thoughts and ideas and communicate information to someone else in a confident and convincing manner. They will also learn problem-solving techniques, how to manage stress, and to be flexible (for example, overcoming stage nerves or adapting information to different audiences and situations). Public speaking activities can help teens develop useful, marketable skills (for example, speech writing and delivery techniques).

Youth Will Learn:
Workforce Skills: Communication, problem-solving, thinking skills, confidentiality
Success Indicators: Youth will identify public speaking fears and how to overcome them. Youth will determine ways to relax before working on public presentation skills.

What You Need:
Time Involved: 20-30 minutes
Suggested Group Size: Any size
Materials Needed:
- Pencils or pens
- “Are You Nervous?” handout
- “Tips for Reducing Stage Nerves” handout

Facilitator Tips: If space allows, have teens arrange themselves comfortably on the floor in a circle. Allow them to get comfortable so they feel more at ease sharing with the group.

Try This Too: Ask a local radio, television or sports celebrity to speak to your group about his or her experiences with performance nerves.
The Activity

1. Introduce the topic by sharing a personal story about a public speaking experience. Tell the teens something you learned about yourself or overcoming your fears of public speaking as a result.

2. Ask the teens if they also have a fear of speaking in front of groups. This could be giving a speech, reading out loud, having to lead a group, etc. Explain that some fears and symptoms of nervousness will go away with practice. However, they need to learn what they might be afraid of and how they can work around it and still be able to share their ideas.

3. Hand out pencils or pens and the “Are You Nervous?” handout to each person. Give them 5 to 7 minutes to write down some of the fears they may have and to check off some of the symptoms this stress causes.

4. Bring the group back together to discuss their answers.
Share

Share with them some of the common fears that people have noted about public speaking:

- Boring the audience to sleep
- Burping uncontrollably
- Tripping on the way up to the stage
- Passing out from nervousness
- Forgetting what to say and standing there totally speechless

Ask for volunteers to talk about the nervous symptoms they have had before or while speaking in public. Write out the list of fears they have about public speaking and the symptoms they have experienced on large pieces of paper or poster board. Give the group an opportunity to talk about experiences they have had with speaking or reading aloud and how they felt.

Process

Then have the teens come up with some ways they can reduce the nervous symptoms they may have before speaking in front of a group (for example, to remedy or minimize an upset stomach, eat only a light meal before speaking). Ask the group to come up with at least one solution or problem-solving technique for each fear they listed. Encourage them to be creative and not to worry about whether the solution will work for every public speaking situation.

Generalize

- Are you surprised at all the things people fear about public speaking?
- What are some of the instances when you might become fearful of speaking in front of others? Reading out loud at school? Having to give a speech? Having to lead a group as a camp counselor? Participating in an interview for a job or for a college scholarship?

Apply

- How could public speaking be key to being successful in the workplace?
- In what instances may you have to use your public speaking skills on the job?

Remind your group that being scared or nervous is not a good reason to avoid public speaking. Being able to express their ideas and share information is very important. Even though public speaking may be hard now, the more they do it the easier it will become.
Think, Speak, Success! Communication and Thinking Skills
Activity 1

Are You Nervous?

Write a sentence or two about the things that scare you about speaking in front of others.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

This is how I feel if I have to talk in front of others…
(Check all that apply)

☐ My hands shake.
☐ I get a headache.
☐ My shoulders ache.
☐ I get dizzy.
☐ My mouth gets dry.
☐ My neck hurts.
☐ I get sweaty palms.
☐ My heart beats faster than usual.
☐ My stomach gets upset.
☐ My legs are shaky.
☐ I feel nauseated.
☐ I fidget with my hair, clothing, or jewelry.
☐ I tap my foot.
☐ Other______________________________

Remember that being scared or nervous is not a good reason to avoid public speaking. Being able to express their ideas and share information is very important. Even though public speaking may be hard now, the more they do it the easier it will become.
**Tips For Reducing Stage Nerves**

To reduce your stage nerves and work toward becoming a confident speaker, follow these tips:

- **Be prepared.** A well-planned and well-rehearsed talk will sound clear and organized and seem natural to deliver.

- **Only speak about things you know well or that interest you,** so you feel confident you have something to offer the audience.

- If you get nervous speaking in front of strangers, try to chat with a few members of the audience before you have to give your speech. This helps establish contact and make you feel as though you are on friendly ground.

- **Practice giving your presentation several ways** so you are comfortable making last-minute adjustments.

- **Pause.** Allow yourself and your audience a little time to reflect and think. Do not race through your presentation and leave your audience, as well as yourself, feeling out of breath.

- **Learn a quick stress-reducing routine** for relaxing your neck, shoulder and facial muscles just before giving your talk.

- **Visualize yourself succeeding and enjoy the applause!**