What if we didn't need enemies?

30 small experiments in relating to people without making them opponents. Most take a few minutes, and many work without anyone knowing an experiment is happening. Each one ends with a question, not a conclusion.

HOW TO USE THESE

- Print the card sheets on card stock at 100% scale.
- Trim at the crop marks. Each card is one experiment, with its question at the bottom.
- Pick one, or let chance decide. Try it today.
- Keep the question in mind afterward. There's no right answer.
- Give a card to a friend. Change one and try your version.

GUIDING IDEAS

You don't need an enemy to know who you are. · Difference is not opposition. · Curiosity creates possibilities. · Affirmation is not approval. · Invitations are better than obligations. · Create more than you oppose. · Try it on.

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Tell us what happened: hello@affirmativism.com · affirmativism.com

TRY THIS · 01/30 PERMISSION

Say No Without a Villain

Decline something honestly, without inventing reasons to make the other person wrong for asking.

Can a boundary be complete without blame?

WHAT HAPPENED? AFFIRMATIVISM.COM

TRY THIS · 02/30 CURIOSITY

Meet the Person

Talk to someone new without asking what they do for a living.

Who do you meet when you don't know their job?

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TRY THIS · 03/30 CONNECTION

Give Away the Best Seat

When you have the most desirable seat, offer it to someone else.

What happens when you give up a tiny advantage?

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TRY THIS · 04/30 DISAGREEMENT

Trade Stories

When someone expresses an opinion you disagree with, ask about an experience that shaped it.

What changes when an opinion becomes a story?

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TRY THIS · 05/30 CONNECTION

Don't Fix It

The next time someone tells you about a problem, don't offer a solution. Just listen.

What happens when you stop being useful?

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TRY THIS · 06/30 DISAGREEMENT

Don't Take the Bait

When someone invites you into an argument, decline the argument, not the person.

What's left when the argument doesn't happen?

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TRY THIS · 07/30 CONNECTION

Make an Unexpected Invitation

Invite someone you wouldn't normally include. Make it easy for them to decline.

What becomes possible simply by asking?

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TRY THIS · 08/30 CURIOSITY

Look for Cooperation

Spend a day counting the times people help each other, however small the help.

Is the world as adversarial as it appears?

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TRY THIS · 09/30 CURIOSITY

Find the Exception

Notice a generalization you're making about a group of people. Find one person who complicates it.

What happens to the category?

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TRY THIS · 10/30 PERMISSION

Be Wrong in Public

Casually admit you're wrong about something. Don't apologize for having learned.

What does it cost to be seen changing your mind?

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TRY THIS · 11/30 DISAGREEMENT

Give Away the Last Word

In a disagreement, let the other person finish. Don't add a final correction.

What did you actually lose?

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TRY THIS · 12/30 CONNECTION

Sit Side by Side

When you have a choice, sit beside someone rather than across from them.

Does changing the geometry change the relationship?

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TRY THIS · 13/30 CURIOSITY

Refuse the Two Choices

The next time someone presents a situation as having only two sides, find a third way of understanding it. You don't have to defend it. Just see whether it exists.

How many sides did it actually have?

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TRY THIS · 14/30 DISAGREEMENT

Find the Third Thing

With someone you disagree with, find something you could both enjoy or accomplish without settling the disagreement.

What else can your relationship contain?

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TRY THIS · 15/30 CONNECTION

Invent a Holiday

Find something you and another person both appreciate. Declare a new holiday celebrating it. Celebrate immediately.

What do you share that was worth celebrating all along?

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TRY THIS · 16/30 DISAGREEMENT

Appreciate Without Agreeing

Find something you genuinely appreciate about a person whose views you oppose. Tell them, if it fits the moment.

Can appreciation exist without approval?

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TRY THIS · 17/30 PERMISSION

Let Someone Finish Your Drawing

Start a drawing and invite someone else to finish it. Don't explain what you intended.

Can something become better without remaining yours?

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TRY THIS · 18/30 CURIOSITY

Ask One More Question

When you think you understand someone's position, ask one more sincere question.

What hadn't you considered?

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TRY THIS · 19/30 DISAGREEMENT

Agree With Your Enemy

Find one thing you genuinely agree about with someone you consider an opponent.

Does one agreement change who they are to you?

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TRY THIS · 20/30 DISAGREEMENT

Let It Be Unresolved

Leave a disagreement unfinished. Talk about something else.

Does every difference need an ending?

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TRY THIS · 21/30 CONNECTION

Remove a Small Obstacle

Notice something making a shared space more difficult to use. If it's safe and appropriate, fix it without being asked.

Can you help people you never meet?

WHAT HAPPENED? AFFIRMATIVISM.COM

TRY THIS · 22/30 PERMISSION

Share an Unfinished Thought

Tell someone an idea you're still figuring out, without presenting it as a position you have to defend.

What changes when certainty isn't required?

WHAT HAPPENED? AFFIRMATIVISM.COM

TRY THIS · 23/30 CURIOSITY

Let Someone Be Complicated

Resist the urge to decide whether someone is good or bad.

Who do you see when you stop sorting?

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TRY THIS · 24/30 CONNECTION

Notice the Invisible

Pay attention to someone whose work usually goes unnoticed. Acknowledge something specific they did.

Who makes your day possible?

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TRY THIS · 25/30 CURIOSITY

Replace a Label

Catch yourself describing someone mainly by a category. Describe something specific about the person instead.

What did the label leave out?

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TRY THIS · 26/30 PERMISSION

Cancel a Rivalry

Quietly stop participating in a rivalry. You don't need the other person's permission.

Does a rivalry still exist when only one person participates?

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TRY THIS · 27/30 CURIOSITY

Try Their Language

Ask someone what a word or phrase means to them instead of assuming you share a definition.

Were you even disagreeing about the same thing?

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TRY THIS · 28/30 PERMISSION

Stop Keeping Score

During a friendly game or shared activity, stop tracking who is ahead for a while.

Does the activity become less interesting, or more?

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TRY THIS · 29/30 CONNECTION

Make a Generous Introduction

Introduce two people who might enjoy knowing each other, without expecting anything in return.

What connections can you create without being part of them?

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TRY THIS · 30/30 PERMISSION

Break the Experiment

Choose an experiment, change its instructions and try your version.

What did you discover that the original missed?

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