

ACTIVITY

JOY SWAP: A LOW-STRESS WAY TO SPREAD HOLIDAY CHEER AMONGST STAFF

A heartfelt twist on the classic Secret Santa, Joy Swap is a low stress approach to bringing joy through a busy season.

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SHARE A LITTLE JOY, SPARK A LOT OF CONNECTION

Joy swap is a simple, low-stress way to spread cheer and connection among staff during busy seasons. It gives teachers a fun and meaningful way to surprise and delight one another without buying gifts.

Instead, participants share something that brings them joy, such as a favorite quote, song, snack, or classroom idea. These small, heartfelt exchanges help everyone rediscover moments of happiness and inspiration when they need it most.

It works especially well in December or during any high-stress stretch of the school year. Plan for one to two weeks so staff have time to share, reflect, and connect through **simple acts of kindness that brighten spirits and strengthen community.**

KEY BENEFITS



Stronger Sense of Connection. Sharing small sources of joy helps teachers see and appreciate one another as whole people, deepening trust and belonging across the school community.



Renewed Energy and Lightness. The Joy Swap offers a simple pause in the busy season, helping teachers laugh, breathe, and reconnect with what feels good about their work.



A Lasting Reminder of What's Good. The Staff Joy Journal becomes a tangible keepsake of positivity and perspective, something teachers can return to whenever they need a lift.

Pro Tip: Join the Joy Swap yourself to model participation and connection. When staff see you sharing your own small joys, it reinforces that this activity is about genuine community, not perfection or performance.

ACTIVITY PREPERATION

BEFORE YOU START

Prepare your message: Introduce the Joy Swap as an invitation, not an obligation. In your message, emphasize that it's about connection and celebration, not "one more thing." Use warm, simple language such as:

"This time of year can get busy fast. Let's pause to share what lifts us up, a favorite song, a small joy, a bit of light. Together, we'll create something that reminds us why this community matters."

If sharing in person, consider placing a quote or sentimental object that brings you joy on each table and incorporate that into your introduction.

Decide how you'll choose teams. Drawing from a hat or using an online random name generator both work great.

INTRODUCTION

Kick off with something like: "Good morning, everyone! Today we're going to try Make Time to Collaborate, which is all about creating the conditions for us to have a successful meeting together. Let's jump in!"



TIMEFRAME

This can vary, but one to two weeks works best. Keep it simple and flexible so everyone can join in at their own pace.



KEEP THE JOY GOING

- **Create a "Joy Wall":** Post photos, notes, or drawings of the items shared so everyone can see the ripple effect of joy across the building.
- **Host a Joy Spotlight:** Choose a few staff members to briefly share their swap items or stories at the next staff meeting.
- **Build a Collective Playlist:** Gather everyone's favorite "joy songs" from the swap and share the playlist with the whole staff.
- **Send a Joy Recap Email:** Highlight a few favorite moments or quotes from the activity with photos or shoutouts to participants.
- **Keep It Going:** Encourage staff to leave their shared items, quotes, or notes in a "Joy Basket" in the lounge for others to enjoy throughout the year.

ACTIVITY DIRECTIONS

Use these directions to try the Joy Swap activity with your staff.



Step 1: Send a note inviting staff to join.

Include a quick sign-up form (digital or paper) and note the start and reveal dates.

Step 2: Make the matches.

Randomly assign pairs. Keep it simple and fun by using a randomizer or pulling names from a hat.



Try this: "This season, we're celebrating what really sustains us, joy. Join our Joy Swap! You'll be matched with a colleague to surprise with something that brings you joy, no shopping required. A favorite recipe, a quote, a song, a podcast, a walk, a photo, a cozy drink suggestion..."

Step 3: Swap the Joy.

Over the course of a week or two, each participant delivers or shares their joy. Encourage simplicity; this is about meaning, not money.



Ideas include:

- A handwritten note with a quote or playlist
- A small homemade treat or favorite snack
- A "joy postcard" describing something they love (a TV show, local trail, or self-care ritual)
- A tiny plant, drawing, or doodle
- A short message of encouragement
- A book they love or that inspires them.

Step 4: Document the Joy: Create a Staff Joy Journal

As joys are shared, invite participants to add them to a collective journal or bulletin board. Use a binder or display where each joy can be added throughout the week. At the end of the swap, share the finished Staff Joy Journal with everyone, either digitally or as a printed keepsake.

Add prompts like:

- "What did you receive that inspired you?"
- "Something I want to try now..."
- "A reminder this gave me about joy at work..."



Try this: Create a digital journal to add to throughout the year. Use a shared slide deck, Padlet, or Canva document to collect photos or descriptions of each joy.

Activity Printables





JOY SWAP INSPIRATION

A Joy Swap can be anything, but here are some ideas to get you started! Remember, simplicity is key.

SIMPLE COMFORTS

- A favorite tea bag or coffee recommendation
- A cozy recipe (soup, cookies, or comfort meal)
- A playlist or song that lifts your mood
- A podcast episode that makes you laugh or think
- A photo of something peaceful — a pet, a view, a morning mug

MOMENTS OF CALM

- A short breathing or mindfulness exercise you love
- A quote or mantra that helps you reset on tough days
- A small candle, essential oil sample, or sachet
- A nature photo or a mini pressed flower

BITS OF CREATIVE JOY

- A doodle, poem, or little sketch
- A favorite classroom or home playlist for background music
- An easy art or craft project to try with students

EVERYDAY DELIGHTS

- A good book or a "comfort read"
- A funny meme, comic, or GIF that never fails you
- A local place to grab a treat or go for a walk
- A "joy jar" idea: one small thing you add each week that made you smile
- A handwritten note about a joyful classroom moment

HEARTFELT AND PERSONAL

- A note starting with: "Joy, to me, looks like..."
- A "quote that reminds me why I teach"
- A gratitude card: "3 things I'm thankful for about this place"
- A little affirmation card: "You are doing the most important work."

→ When in doubt, share something that makes you smile.

JOY JOURNAL REFLECTION

DATE:



What I shared:

Something new I discovered i love through this:

Something new I discovered i love through this:

Quick reflection or doodle:

JOY JOURNAL REFLECTION

DATE:



What I shared:

Something new I discovered i love through this:

Something new I discovered i love through this:

Quick reflection or doodle:

— JOY BUDDIES —

JOY MAKER:

JOY RECIPIENT:



Deliver your joy any time this week.

— JOY BUDDIES —

JOY MAKER:

JOY RECIPIENT:



Deliver your joy any time this week.

— JOY BUDDIES —

JOY MAKER:

JOY RECIPIENT:



Deliver your joy any time this week.

— JOY BUDDIES —

JOY MAKER:

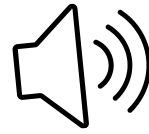
JOY RECIPIENT:



Deliver your joy any time this week.



JOY LOOKS LIKE:



JOY SOUNDS LIKE:



JOY, TO ME, IS:



JOY FEELS LIKE:

**Thank you for sharing
your joy this week!**

Thanks for all you do!

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your joy this week!**

Thanks for all you do!

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COLLABORATION

BUILT BY EDUCATORS, FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

This resource was created in collaboration with dedicated educators and school leaders who brought their experience, ideas, and insight to every step of the process. We're grateful for their partnership in building tools that truly make a difference in schools.



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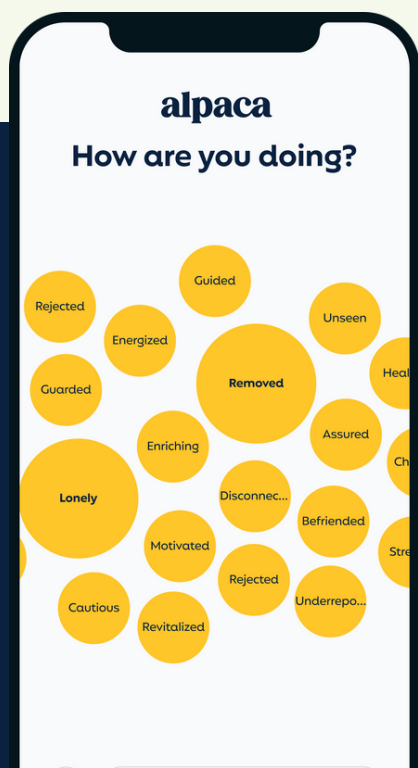
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