

Low Ropes Specific Activities

Ropes Course Values Contract

A successful experience on the ropes course begins with establishing boundaries and setting goals. The values contract lists several commitments individuals make to themselves and others before they begin participating in activities.

Presenting the values contract:

- Have the group stand in a circle (circles are best for all discussions).
- Explain that due to the physical, and sometimes risky, nature of the activities each person must sign a contract before they can participate. Then explain that you will read the contract to them, and they will sign it by saying “Yes,” not “yup” or “uh-huh,” etc.
- Read the following contract, and explain the meaning of each commitment.
- After you read the contract, go around the circle and have each member say “Yes” to sign the contract, and sign it yourself.

- I. I will protect the physical safety of myself and others. “You will need to take spotting seriously, be cautious during activities and on the course, and you will not take unnecessary risks that may cause harm to your self or others.”*
- II. I will protect the emotional safety of myself and others. “These activities will be challenging, fun, and sometimes frustrating. Keep in mind that your opinion counts as much as the next person’s. Voice your feeling appropriately, and be respectful that others may feel differently.”*
- III. I will respect Challenge by Choice for myself and others. “You will not be forced to do any activity, and you always have the option to pass on an activity if it makes you uncomfortable. We call this Challenge by Choice. Respecting Challenge by Choice means you don’t pass on an activity simply because you are unwilling to try or something seems too hard. Remember, the purpose of these activities is to challenge yourself. If you choose not to participate in an activity, you are still part of the group and your input is valued.”*
- IV. I will be honest, caring, responsible, and respectful. Great guidelines for life... and the ropes course!*

Tips & Key Points

- Using a values contract gives you a way to refocus the group during conflicts. You can remind everyone of the contract they ‘signed.’
- Change or add to the contract to include fundamental values of your organization.

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Mohawk Walk

The Mohawk Walk is series of foot cables strung between trees or poles, typically in a zig zag pattern. The object is to get the entire group from the first tree to the last without touching the ground, and without the aid of foreign objects (sticks, rope, etc). The group must create a strategy, assign roles, work as a team, and assess progress throughout the entire activity.

Sample Story Line

- Explain to the group that they have been wrongfully detained in a high security prison in a far off land.
- You've learned that the guard changes shift every night, and that for about 20 minutes, the walls at the top of the prison are unguarded. If the group is going to make a break for it, now is the time!
- Explain to the group that the walls are very high, and if anyone falls off, they are sure to be captured. Also, explain to the group that the entire team must make it across. If anyone from the team is caught before the group escapes, the guards will quickly turn on all of the lights, seal off the escape entrance, and then it's back to jail.

Some Facilitation Tips:

- Set out a rope or stick that defines the starting and ending points. Groups have a tendency to bunch up and get in the way at both ends.
- You could have the group carry an object, such as a bucket or stuffed animal, from start to finish.
- To make the activity easier for younger or less able groups, you can secure a hand rope between the trees or poles.
- Be sure to have spotters on both sides of the participants, in each section. You can rotate the individual's roles once they get to a certain point.



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Spider's Web

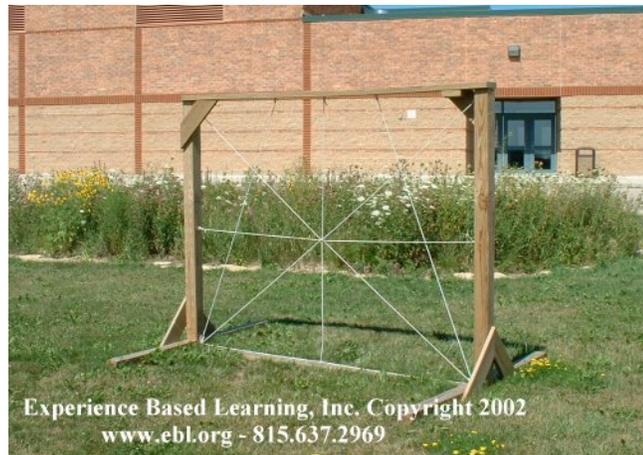
The Spider's Web is a popular ropes course that is constructed between tress, or on portable or stand-alone structures. The objective is to cross from one side of the spiders web to the other without touching the web. The group must creative a plan that takes participant physical ability and size to life, pass, and spot participants in order to get them through.

Sample Story Line

- Explain to the group that they were exploring caves, looking for treasure, in a remote part of the world. (You'll notice a lot of "remote" locations in our activities).
- Fortunately, they were able to find the treasure in the last cave they were looking in. Unfortunately, a giant poisonous spider has spun a web across the entrance to the cave while they were inside. There are no other ways out of the cave.
- The group must help each other through the web without touching it, else that person would become stuck in the extremely sticky web. Really! Just brushing against a strand ever so slightly would cause someone to become stuck.
- Although very strong and sticky. The web is very sensitive. The vibrations from someone passing through a hole cause it to close, making it impossible to pass another full body through the hole. For some unknown reason, it is still large enough to put hands through.
- The entire group must get through, because each member of the team has a special piece of the map needed to get back to safety. You can't just give the map pieces to save the others, either, as it is tattooed on your body.
- Good Luck!

Some Facilitation Tips:

- Be sure the group has practiced spotting and lifting, and that they are mature enough to safely do both. This activity requires lifting and must be taken seriously.
- Use clothespins to mark holes that have been passed through. After the first few people go through, it's almost impossible to remember which holes are available to use.
- You can add a time restriction if you like. The spider will be back in 15 minutes, after all.
- Rope Variation: You can use this element by threading a rope through all of the holes without it ever touching the web. This variation is difficult in its own right, but is perfect for groups that you do not want to do lifting for any reason.



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Tee Pee Shuffle

The Tee Pee Shuffle is simply a log or pole on the ground that groups can balance on. You can make one with more of a finished look by elevating the log. The objective is to have the group perform various tasks while balanced on the log.

Sample Tasks

- Build the challenges in increasing degrees of physical demand. Start with having the group stay on the log for a certain length of time.
- Once balanced, have the group do "bobs" by collectively squatting up and down a certain number of times.
- Have the group arrange themselves by shortest to tallest while balancing on the log.
- Have the group arrange themselves by birth month, number of siblings, or age.
- Some facilitation tips:
 - Be aware of the group's success rate. Remember that the process is important, not just the product. By progressively making the challenges harder, you can provide opportunities for success.
 - If the group is working as a team, but has reached their balancing limits, stop and debrief.



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Crossing The Line

INTRODUCTION: When facilitated right, "Crossing the Line" is a powerful, interactive, and effective activity that builds diversity awareness within a group. The goals of this activity include helping participants learn about themselves; give participants an opportunity to reflect upon their self- and cultural identity; allowing the community involved to appreciate its own diversity more and learn to treat each other like the diverse human beings we all are, instead of as homogenized, singular, cultureless beings.

POINT TO PONDER: "Education should not be the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." - *William Butler Yeats*

DIRECTIONS: The following is a list of recommended instructions for Crossing the Line. This activity requires thorough facilitation, and should not be conducted carelessly or lightly. Read over the directions closely, and email any questions you have to info [at] freechild.org.

Time needed

- About 35 minutes for the activity. About 45 minutes for discussion.

Room set-up

- Plenty of open space (All chairs to the side or out of the room)
- Note on the door (Workshop in Progress, DO NOT DISTURB!)
- Dim the lights a bit if possible.
- Facilitator should be off to the side so he is not the center of attention.

Publicity

- Keep it vague. It seems fair to describe it as "a workshop where we find ways in which we are both different from and similar to each other." Be careful about over billing the workshop.

Content

Introduction of The Facilitator

- Be careful not to draw too much attention to the facilitator; the focus should be on the exercise and the group.

Statement of Purpose

- "This is a diverse organization and we have spent the last couple days exploring that diversity. In this exercise we continue exploring that diversity. Much of our earlier exercises addressed diversity that was obvious. We want to acknowledge and address those differences but also bring to the surface other differences that we may not have recognized. This process might prove difficult at first, or a bit awkward. This afternoon we want to break down stereotypes and make it easier to know one another as full human beings."

Description of the Process

- "I would like everyone to gather on one side of the room and face towards its center." (Wait for everyone to move.)
- "I will call out specific categories/labels/descriptions. I will ask that all those who fit this description walk to the other side of the room and turn around, facing the rest of the group." (As an example, the facilitator names a category that only he or she would fit, and then walks to the other side of the room, and turns around.)
- "After several seconds I will ask you to return to the group."

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Guidelines

- "Over the next half hour or so, we will share some of our experiences and vulnerabilities with one another. This will demand a safe atmosphere. To insure that we remain sensitive to one another's feelings, we need to follow two critical guidelines."
- "The first involves LISTENING. Let's have silence throughout the exercise--no talking, snickering, giggling, etc. Silence will allow all of us to participate fully. Silence will also enable us to experience our personal thoughts and feelings more clearly."
- "The second guideline is RESPECT. It is imperative that we respect the dignity of each person who is here this evening. Everything that is shared should remain confidential. Nothing that is offered should leave this room. However, if--having gone through the workshop--you truly need to talk to a particular individual about something he or she has shared, be sure you ask that person's permission."
- "I need a nod of the head to indicate that you understand the importance of our keeping an atmosphere both silent and respectful..."
- "Before we begin there are several other guidelines that we need to consider."
- NO PRESSURE. "No one here is under any pressure to respond in any particular way to any of the questions. If you have any doubts about sharing some part of yourself, you should feel perfectly comfortable with your decision not to walk across the room."
- "One final point. Each of the categories I use will have some GRAY AREAS. If you find yourself stuck in a gray area, simply define the words from your own point of view. In other words, define the terms as you yourself understand them when thinking of yourself. For example, suppose the question asks everyone who is religious to walk across the room. If you think of yourself as religious, then the word fits, regardless of whether or not someone else would use the word "religious" in the same way, and regardless of other meanings the word might have. If you have serious reservations about the clarity or meaningfulness of any particular category, then the best thing to do is to not cross to the other side of the room."

Suggestions to Facilitator

- Speak clearly. If the group is large, people may have trouble hearing you, and their questions will cause an interruption.
- Don't rush the process. Allow time for reflection. Don't ask the next question too soon.

Beginning

- "So that's it for the format and the guidelines to be followed. Any questions?"
- "If you cannot stay for the entire exercise, don't feel comfortable with the guidelines, or simply don't believe like the workshop is going to be beneficial for you, it's OK to wait outside the room during the exercise."
- "To start, let's try a simple category. It will help me clarify the process."
- "CROSS TO THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM IF YOU WEAR GLASSES OR CONTACT LENSES. THANK YOU."
- Once we begin, please, no interruptions.
- ONCE WE BEGIN, PLEASE DO NOT ASK ANY QUESTIONS.
- Often during the process you may feel like you want to say something. There will be plenty of time at the end for discussion about the process."

The Questions

- Cross to the other side of the room if you are not from _____.
- Cross to the other side of the room if you feel your home is _____.

Reminder about Grayness – Remember, all the legal and philosophical questions about "home" don't matter. What matters is what the word "home" means to you. If you are confused or uncomfortable, the best policy is NOT to cross to the other side of the room.

- You are male
- You are female
- Since joining (this program), you have broken off a serious relationship.

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Reminder – No talking... (Consider issuing this and other reminders as an ounce of prevention, even if a problem isn't coming up at the moment.)

- In the past year you have been in a relationship and been hurt.
- You feel that you have not formed a close friendship in national service.
- You take pride in your work in national service.
- You are Catholic
- You are Protestant
- You are Jewish
- You are another religion other than those three major U.S. religions.
- You are an atheist or agnostic.
- You are a person of color.
- You know little about you cultural heritage
- You wish you had more money
- You consider your family as working class
- You consider your family as middle class
- You consider your family as upper class (VERY FEW WILL GO, BECAUSE THAT NOT HOW THEY THINK OF THEMSELVES, BUT THAT'S OK)
- You have felt embarrassed about the economic class your family is in

Reminder – Walk across the room only when you feel comfortable identifying yourself in this way.

- You come from a family of four or more children you are an only child
- You live independently of your parents
- You have taken primary responsibility either for raising another member of
- Your family or caring for an elderly member of your family
- You have low self-esteem
- You would like to lose ten or more pounds
- You feel lonely (ALWAYS AN IMPORTANT QUESTION)
- You have been to college or plan to go to college
- You have not graduated from high school
- You have had serious thoughts about leaving national service
- You feel physically unattractive

Note – As the workshop is structured it makes one dip into the personal with the previous question. Then we back up to what is easier before making a deeper trip.

- You consider yourself a Democrat
- You consider yourself a Republican
- You consider yourself a socialist
- You consider yourself a feminist
- Your parents have either divorced, separated, or never married
- At least one of your parents have died
- You feel estranged or unconnected
- There have been times when you have seriously felt that, if you could choose, you would not choose
- The ethnicity into which you were born
- You find yourself thinking about food considerably more often than you want
- You have medical problem
- You have a learning disability
- You have a physical disability
- You have questioned your sexual orientation
- You have experienced the effects of alcoholism in your family
- You have experienced the effects of drug addiction in your family
- You have had a sexual experience that you regretted
- You have experienced suicidal thoughts at some point in your life
- You have cried at least once this year

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- You have cried at least once this year for someone or something other than yourself
- Since you joined _____, you have laughed at yourself at least once
- Cross the room if you could use a hug right now. (People generally begin hugging each other during this time.)

Discussion Afterwards

REMINDER OF GUIDELINES

- "I want to remind the group again of the guidelines. During this discussion we must have the utmost respect. Again, no talking while others speak, no side comments, giggling, etc.
- "I also want to remind people that everything spoken in this room stays in the room."

DEBRIEF OF DISCUSSION

- (The discussion should feel a bit confessional. If the exercise has run well, people will be very introspective and quiet. **FOCUS THE DISCUSSION ON TWO QUESTIONS:**
- "How are you feeling right now?"
- "Is there anything you want to say to your fellow participants about why you crossed the room on a particular questions?"
- (Use the discussion to allow people to **EXPLAIN, SHARE, AND TELL STORIES** about any of the statements. Use the discussion to allow people to talk about **HOW THEY FEEL** right now and how they feel about the exercise.)

WARNINGS

- **BE CAREFUL ABOUT THE DISCUSSION CENTERING THE MERITS OF THE WORKSHOP.**
 - One person says they did not like how we had only two choices, crossing the room or not. Another defends the workshop and the workshop becomes the center of the discussion. (If someone makes a comment about the workshop, thank them for their comment and refocus the discussion towards people's feelings and stories.)
- **BE CAREFUL ABOUT COMMENTS THAT FOCUS ON OTHERS RATHER THAN THEMSELVES.**
 - The discussion can become a group of people questioning other people why they crossed. Try to gently steer the discussion to give space for those who really feel the need to explain and tell the group something about themselves.

Closure

- End the discussion by thanking everyone for participating. You may want to describe how this workshop has affected you.

REMINDER

- Remind everyone again that whatever was said in the room stays in the room. It is a serious breach of respect and trust if you share any of this with anyone outside this room. If you feel like you need to speak with an individual about something he or she said, please ask them first.

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Helium Stick

Deceptively simple but powerful exercise for learning how to work together and communicate in small to medium sized groups.

- Line up in two rows that face each other.
- Introduce the Helium Stick – a long, thin, lightweight rod.
- Ask participants to point their index fingers and hold their arms out.
- Lay the Helium Stick down on their fingers. Get the group to adjust their finger heights until the Helium Stick is horizontal and everyone's index fingers are touching the stick.
- Explain that the challenge is to lower the Helium Stick to the ground.
- The catch: Each person's fingers must be in contact with the Helium Stick at all times. Pinching or grabbing the pole is not allowed - it must rest on top of fingers.
- Reiterate to the group that if anyone's finger is caught not touching the Helium Stick, the task will be restarted. Let the task begin....
- Warning: Particularly in the early stages, the Helium Stick has a habit of mysteriously 'floating' up rather than coming down, causing much laughter. A bit of clever humoring can help - e.g., act surprised and ask what are they doing raising the Helium Stick instead of lowering it! For added drama, jump up and pull it down!
- Participants may be confused initially about the paradoxical behavior of the Helium Stick.
- Some groups or individuals (most often larger size groups) after 5 to 10 minutes of trying may be inclined to give up, believing it not to be possible or that it is too hard.
- The facilitator can offer direct suggestions or suggest the group stops the task, discusses their strategy, and then has another go.
- Less often, a group may appear to be succeeding too fast. In response, be particularly vigilant about fingers not touching the pole. Also make sure participants lower the pole all the way onto the ground. You can add further difficulty by adding a large washer to each end of the stick and explain that the washers should not fall off during the exercise; otherwise it's a restart. Similarly, you can have participants close their eyes and you, as the facilitator, can secretly add your finger pushing down on the top of the stick. As a result, the group will grow frustrated as they feel the opposing force.
- Eventually the group needs to calm down, concentrate, and very slowly, patiently lower the Helium Stick - easier said than done.

How Does it Work?

- The stick does not contain helium. The secret (keep it to yourself) is that the collective upwards pressure created by everyone's fingers tends to be greater than the weight of the stick. As a result, the more a group tries, the more the stick tends to 'float' upwards.

Processing Ideas

- What was the initial reaction of the group?
- How well did the group cope with this challenge?
- What skills did it take to be successful as a group?
- What creative solutions were suggested and how were they received?
- What would an outside observer have seen as the strengths and weaknesses of the group?
- What roles did people play?
- What did each group member learn about him/her self as an individual?
- What other situations (e.g., at school, home or work) are like the Helium Stick?

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Equipment

- 1 thin, light-weight, 10 foot stick

Time

- Total Time – 25 minutes
 - 5 minute set up and briefing
 - 10-15 minutes of action problem-solving, until success
 - 10 minutes or so for discussion

