



Camp Classen YMCA Challenge Course

Purpose: The Challenge Course is a set of activities designed to build group skills. These activities can be adapted to any age.

This is not a ropes course and this is not an obstacle course. It is a set of outdoor challenges, which can only be solved through group cooperation. Many of the events involve permanent wooden props, such as stumps set in the ground, stretching a cable between trees, or hanging a rope from a tree limb. Some activities use only a rope, or ball.

The elements or challenges are activities that require the group to create a solution to a task presented to them. Various behavior patterns emerge, such as leadership, cooperation, mediation, frustration, and group satisfaction. These activities are successfully completed when the group members all made contribute, and all perform the task as a team. Groups work best when non-traditional skills are involved, so that the proverbial playing field is made level. The strong or swift are not necessarily the best performers here. Creativity, dexterity, patience, leadership, or simply a cooperative spirit leads to success.

There are THREE STEPS to each element:

- 1. The group is given a task to solve.** The group is told what the task is, but not how to accomplish it. Any relevant safety rules are explained. Often the tasks are explained in a fanciful way.
- 2. The group is allowed to try to solve the task.** Here, the facilitator must stay back and keep the focus of attention on the group while they solve their own task. The leader only steps in if safety becomes an issue, or if the group is hopelessly off task.

Note to Teachers: Parents need to allow students the chance to solve the task. You may have to “silence” them for this to occur.

- 3. Processing the activity.** When the task is solved, or when time is up, the group leader begins a group discussion on how they did. Was there frustration? Cooperation? Leadership? What will make it better next time? This is the key step, in that the activity becomes more than a game, but a learning experience.

Teaching Techniques:

The students are the learners and the teacher should only be involved enough to help the learning occur. Do not set unreachable goals for your group. Instead, make it your goal for the group to grow from where they are now.

In order for this to occur:

1. The participants need to be the main problem solvers. The students are given a task, but not told how to complete it. The students must try to solve the problem. That is the crux of the course.
2. Failure is allowed and expected. Often a group must try to solve the problem several ways before finding a way that works for them. Do not deprive the students the joy of discovering the solution themselves. Even if trial and error is involved, it is part of the process.
3. Set the tone and atmosphere at the beginning. The course should be safe, non-threatening, purpose orientated, progress orientated, learner centered, friendly, thoughtful, fun and a little bit crazy all at the same time. The same techniques used in a four-walled classroom work here as well: tone of voice, choice of words, body language, etc.
4. Proper sequencing is vital to the success of the group. Sequencing is the order in which the activities occur. There is a progression of challenge complexity and learning. It is important to begin with non-threatening activities in order to develop a comfortable feeling about the group process. You cannot ask a group to do a major activity if they have not learned how to work with each other and communicate. Proper activity selection and sequencing gives the facilitator the opportunity to bring out the most in a group.

Sample Sequencing:

Group Juggling – Circle the Circle- **2 Person Trust Falls**- TP Shuffle-Trolley-All Aboard- Nitro Crossing- Spider's Web

Knots- Group Jump Rope- **2 Person Trust Fall**- All Aboard- Hot Stuff- Mountain Tops- Triangle Traverse

Group Juggling- Blind Polygon- **2 Person Trust Fall**- All Aboard- King's Finger- Spider Web

Circle the Circle – Knots- **2 Person Trust Fall**- TP Shuffle- Hot Stuff- Nitro Crossing- Mountain Tops

Note: You can adjust your sequencing based on your comfort level in doing the activities as well as the abilities of your students both at the beginning of the challenge course as well as when they are progressing through it.

***** **All Groups Need To Do 2 Person Trust Falls*******

This helps them learn spotting techniques as well as building trust.

Processing is key. Processing is guiding the students through the learning process. They are able to think about what has happened and attempt to learn from it. The debriefing allows the students to make sense of an experience, to fit group needs, and meet the objectives of the instruction. Just like the activities, it is important to sequence the debriefing to decrease defensiveness and increase involvement.

Processing is the group discussion, which builds the group. Discussions may include:

- Questions
- Positive Comments
- Ideas about the group's progress
- Comments
- Short Stories
- Thoughts
- Concepts
- Transference
- Feeling
- Ideas

Some samples of processing questions:

“ Was it easy?”

“ Let's make a list of things that you did which helped to accomplish the task.”

“What were some of the barriers to success?”

“Tell how you would define the word teamwork? Communication? Cooperation?”

“ How can we take what we learned and apply it to the next activity? To school? To our Families?”

Two Kinds of Challenge Course Elements

Cooperative Games can build group dynamics as well as the “ structure elements”. These activities can be used in a very flexible manner. Use these as openings, closing or to fill time when other groups are on an element you want to do.

Challenges with Props are the “structured elements” requiring physical apparatus.

*******Spotting:** is the art of keeping your hands and attention ready to cushion someone in the event they should fall.

A rule of this course is:

If anyone is being lifted in the air, two or more people must **spot** this person. You should practice spotting as an icebreaker with your students (i.e. 2 person trust falls, Wind in the Willows).

In the Beginning...

When you begin your challenge course activities, each group will be different. The chemistry of each group is different. High functioning in the classroom does not necessarily mean the same on the challenge course.

Upon the arrival of the group, lay down the group rules and expectations immediately. This can occur through a group discussion of the benefits of this activity. A few sample questions are:

Facilitator: “ Who has done a challenge course/team course before?”

Facilitator: “ What do we want to gain from the challenge course?”

Facilitator: “ What is necessary for us to succeed at these activities?”

There are a few important expectations, which you may need to verbalize to group. These will help the overall success of the experience.

1. **No “put downs”**. Because we will be trying new activities, we need to support each other in a positive manner.
2. **The right to pass**. Everybody can choose “to pass” if they feel uncomfortable with an activity or a processing question. Do not force the issue. You can reassign them to another role whether it is the imaginary videotape to playback what they saw with the activity or another spotter.
3. **The facilitator is able to modify an activity at their digression**. It is important that the facilitator adapts an element if (1) the students struggle to the point of wanting to quit (2) The group complete the activity too quickly.

Introductory Activities

Circle the Circle:

Ask your group to form a hand-n-hand circle. Place one hula-hoop between two people (resting on their hands). See how quickly the group can cause the hoop to travel around the circle, through each other and back to the original position. The group cannot let go of each others hands. After this, add a second hoop going the opposite direction.

Possible Questions:

- Who won? This is how the challenge course is set up. Everything is team oriented.

Blind Polygon:

First blindfold everyone in the group. Now place the rope on the ground a few feet away from the group. Tell them to search for the rope with bumper up (hands up in front of them). When the rope is located ask everybody to grab it and hold it with both hands. Now ask them to form a square or triangle. Have the students raise their hands when they think they have formed the shape. If everybody agrees, then ask them to take their blindfold off. If not all have their hands raised, tell them that not everyone believes that they are finished. Do this until all the group believes they are finished. If it is a low functioning group, you can do this activity without the blindfolds.

Possible Questions:

- Was the end result what you expected? Why?
- What happened when frustration set in
- Did anyone feel left out? Why?

Knots:

Have the group stand shoulder to shoulder in a circle. Everybody will reach in and hold the hand of two other people. It is important the group has only one hand to one hand and they do not grab the hands of the people next to them. The group must untie the knot safely. Sometimes this will end up “chain links,” with two circles, and sometimes it is simply too knotty to untie. If so, try again.

Possible Questions:

- What would happen if somebody decided not to participate? To sabotage the group?
- Why is communication important in this activity?
- Why is safety important in this activity?

2 Person Trust Fall:

Have the group pair up with another of equal size. One person will be the faller and the other the spotter. The spotter stands behind the faller with their feet apart, one foot behind the other, hands up to provide a cushion, and knees bent to absorb the faller. The faller stands with back to the spotter, feet together, arms crossed over their chest and perfectly straight. The activity will begin with the spotter resting their hands on the shoulder blades of the faller. After each fall the spotter will move their hands 6 inches further away until one of the two does not feel “safe”.

Faller: “ Spotter ready?”

Spotter: “Ready”

Faller: “Falling”

Spotter: “Fall on”

Remind the faller not to fall until the spotter responds “Fall on”. It is also very important you demonstrate the process first.

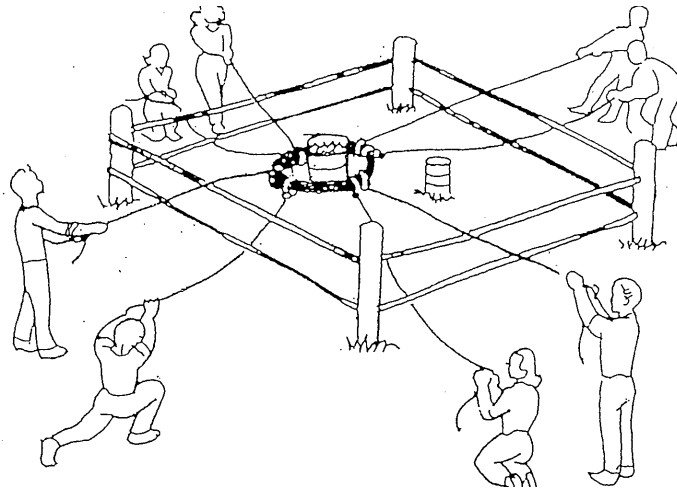
Wind in the Willow:

Group stands with one foot behind the other in a tight circle with their hands up in the spotter position. The faller stands in the middle of the circle crosses their arms and legs and stiffens their body. Following the same commands used above, the faller falls and is passed around the circle slowly.

Possible Questions:

- How did you feel about trusting others with your safety?
- When do you do that at school? Home?
- Did you feel you could trust others in your group more or less now? Why?
- Why is communication important in this activity?
- Why is safety important in this activity?

Hot Stuff



Objective: The participants will move the can containing the hot stuff (water, tennis ball, etc) on top of the other and then remove the apparatus. They will then reposition the apparatus and dump one can into the other.

Guidelines:

- Students need to stay at the end of the ropes represent the “safe distance” from radiation.
- If students grab higher than the end of the rope, they will be replaced by other members of the group (due to prolonged radiation exposure) or lose usage of their dominate hand (also due to prolonged radiation exposure).
- If the radioactive waste spills out of the can, students will have to try again.

Spotting Techniques/Safety:

- Do not allow students to untie the ropes on the apparatus.
- This is one of the safest activities from a spotting standpoint.

Debriefing Questions:

- How did the group deal with one or more ideas to solve the task?
- How many vocal leaders were there?
- Whose ideas were chosen? Why?

Optional Story:

Having just taken a job at a low budget nuclear power plant, you work in the reactor core. Your job is to transport high-level nuclear waste from the reactor core to a lead lined storage container. Because no expense has been spared, you have the latest in high tech equipment. Good Luck!

Notes:

Australian Trolley



Objective: For the group to cross a designated area or follow a predetermined course

Guidelines:

- Group will position themselves on the trolley so that each person has hold of a rope for each of their feet.
- Set up visible markers the group needs to go to, around, over.
- DO NOT give them advice on how to accomplished their goal.

Spotting Techniques/ Safety:

- Remind students they need to avoid getting their feet underneath the trolley. Otherwise they will have flat feet.
- Watch for a rocking side motion or the domino effect with the group toppling over.
- If the group is high functioning, throw in a few twists. (1) Have group try to move backwards on the trolley. (2) Have group count off by apples and oranges; then have the apples turn around and try to walk.

Debriefing Questions:

- Who became the leader for this activity?
- How much did your position on the trolley effect your role? Why?
- How many of your parents car-pool to work? How is this like car-pooling?

Notes:

All Aboard



Objective: To get the entire group onto the platform without any part of their bodies touching the ground for one chorus of “Row Your Boat”

Guidelines:

- When positioning yourselves on the platform, you cannot climb on someone else’s back or lay down on the platform allowing others to stand on a participant.
- Do not stack bodies like firewood. It’s painful for the bottom people.
- Balance is the key. Give students a hint after they have tried a number of options

Spotting Techniques/ Safety:

- Watch for signals that the group is learning one direction or another. If the group is going to fall, have them stop and reposition themselves.
- Do not allow students to grab each other around the neck.
- Be aware of the physical limitations of some members of your group. Students with ankle injuries should not attempt this.

Debriefing Questions:

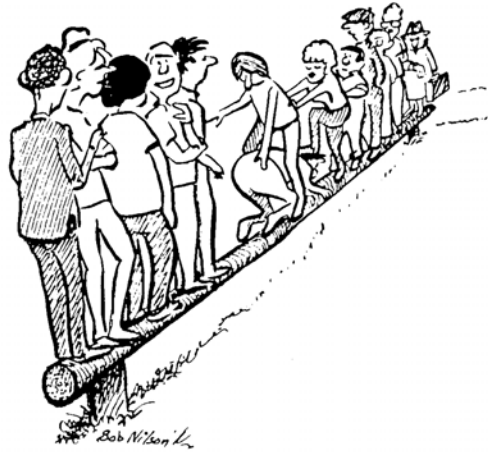
- What was the key to your success?
- Why did it take you so long to come up with a solution?
- How does the “all aboard” reflect the idea of carrying in the environment?

Optional Story:

The captain of the Old Spanish Galleon allowed you to take a turn at sailing. Unfortunately, you ran the boat onto a reef and it quickly sank into shark-infested waters. The only part of the boat sticking out of the water is the very top of the mast: the crow’s nest. Your job is to get your entire crew out of the water and into the crow’s nest until you can be rescued.

Notes:

T.P. Shuffle



Objective: A group of students standing balanced on a horizontal telephone pole need to change positions and move from one end of the pole to another.

Guidelines:

- Starting positions for the group is to have each half facing the center while balanced on the log.
- Participants may not touch the ground as they do the activity. You can use creative stories such as having to balance over shark-infested water; acid baths or pools of lime green Jell-O with pineapples.
- If the group is “high functioning” (i.e. performing well together), this can be a timed activity, which they will repeat at the end of the teams’ course to try and better.
- Variations of this activity would allow the students to get on the log in any order. They then have to line up based upon age, the alphabet, height, shoe size, etc.

Safety/Spotting Techniques:

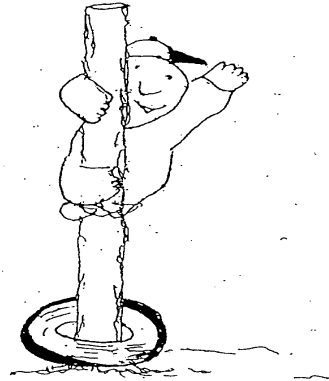
- If a person falls of or thinks he/she is falling off, have them step off the log without grabbing other people.
- Spotters need to be near the participants.

Debriefing Questions:

- Did you trust others to help you at first? Did you trust them more or less at the end? Why?
- What could the group have done differently to succeed?
- What could you have done differently to succeed?

Notes:

Giant's Finger



Objective: The group will work as a team to get the golden ring (tire) off the pole, make it touch the ground and put it back on the pole.

Guidelines:

- The tire is taken off the pole, placed on the ground and back on the pole while someone is always touching it.
- The tire cannot be thrown over the pole.
- The participants can build a human ladder/ pyramid shape to accomplish the task. Boards and stick cannot be utilized.
- The participants may not use the pole to support the group.

Spotting Techniques/ Safety:

- Pay close attention to the technique use to prevent any careless accidents.
- The tires needs to be empty of water before beginning activity
- Prevention is part of the spotter's job, not just breaking the fall.

Debriefing Questions:

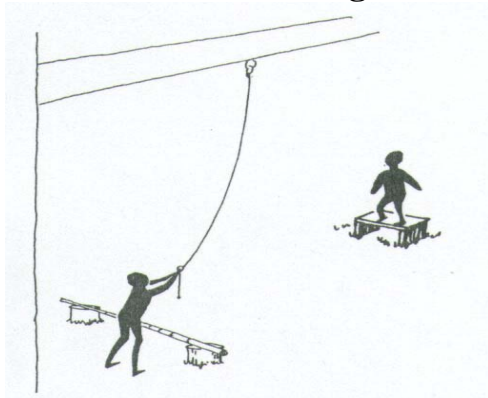
- What were some of the barriers to our success?
- How did you determine the positions? Who assigned them?

Optional Story:

Just like Jack and the Beanstalk, you have come upon a huge giant who is fast asleep. Your job is to as quietly as possible remove his solid gold ring. This ring will provide your family enough money to send you and your siblings to a 4-year college. But, if you wake up the giant by either dropping the golden ring or touching his finger, just like the story, he will grind your bones into flour. (embellish this as you feel fit)

Notes:

Nitro Crossing



Objective: For the group to swing across an open area on a rope while transporting a Number 10 can $\frac{3}{4}$ full of nitro (water) without spilling.

Guidelines:

- The group is required to reach the swing rope by using only what they have in the group (outside materials can not be used i.e. stick etc.). Because we have turned up the gravity in this area, the group cannot jump to reach the rope.
- The entire group must make it from one side to the other.
- Anyone who touches the ground inside the danger area must start over. If a child has difficulty swinging, you can adapt guidelines as you see fit (i.e. one free touch).
- Once a team member gets to the other side, he/she must stay on that side.
- Challenge the group to challenge roles. On the previous activities, if they were the leaders, become a follower. If they have been the followers, encourage them to step outside their comfort zone and become the leader.

Spotting Techniques/ Safety:

- Spotting is vital in this activity. Spot both when a person is swinging and when they land.
- Do not allow the student to wrap the rope around their wrists, arms, ect.
- Care must be exercised when the rope is pushed back across after unloading.

Debriefing Questions:

- How many of you were able to change roles and become either a leader or follower?
- What was that like?
- Why do you think you do not do more often?

Optional Story:

You are a group of secret agents who have invaded the evil Dr. Theopolis's underground laboratory. In Dr. Theopolis's laboratory you found the most powerful explosive known

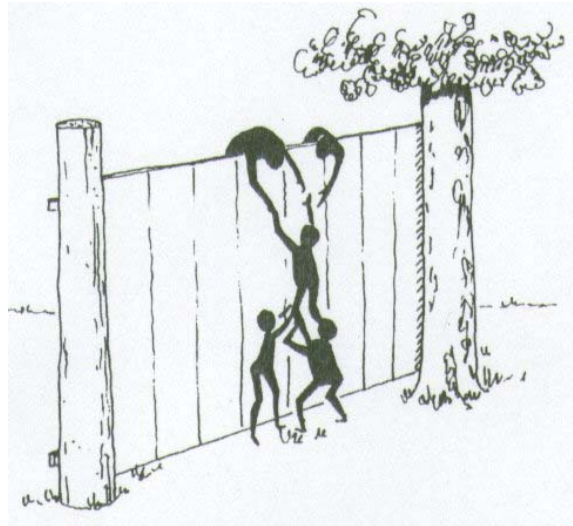
to mankind. You need to escape from the laboratory with the “nitro”, but you have taken a wrong turn. In front of you is a pool of acid (green Jell-O, liver, dirty gym socks, etc.) and you must get across to safety. Good luck.

Note:

This activity can become Prouty’s Landing by having all the students swing across and land on the wooden platform. For Prouty’s landing, it is not necessary to carry the nitro. If you have a large group, you can require a maximum number on the platform and then the first one will step off until the whole team is across (i.e. 6 people on).

Notes:

Wall



Objective: The group must get over the wall.

Guidelines:

- No one is allowed to go under the wall
- No one is allowed to grab trees on the side of the wall
- The entire group needs to over the wall

Spotting Techniques/ Safety:

- There must be at least two spotters on each side of the wall when passing people over. Spotters can walk around the wall
- No diving or jumping over the wall
- Support head and neck

Debriefing Questions:

- If you could change one rule for this activity, what would it be? Why?
- What was the hardest part of this activity? How did you overcome the challenge?

Notes:

Mountain Tops

Objective: The entire group must get across the mountaintops (or across the lava pit) by moving from platform to platform.

Guidelines:

- The group begins on the edge of the volcano, and has only two boards to help with the crossing.
- Because of the increase in gravity, you cannot jump onto the platforms or use the boards to pole vault to a platform.
- Do not throw the boards.
- If anyone fails, the group will be instantly transported back to the beginning.
- Optional: if the boards hit the lava, it may splash up and cause (a) temporary blindness or (b) loss of your voice.

Spotting Techniques/Safety:

- Watch closely the position of the boards on the platforms. If a board is too close to an edge, have the students reposition it. Boards will be slick when wet.
- The boards may be heavy for smaller children, adapt your assistance accordingly.
- Spotting is important as the students walk across the boards.

Debriefing Questions:

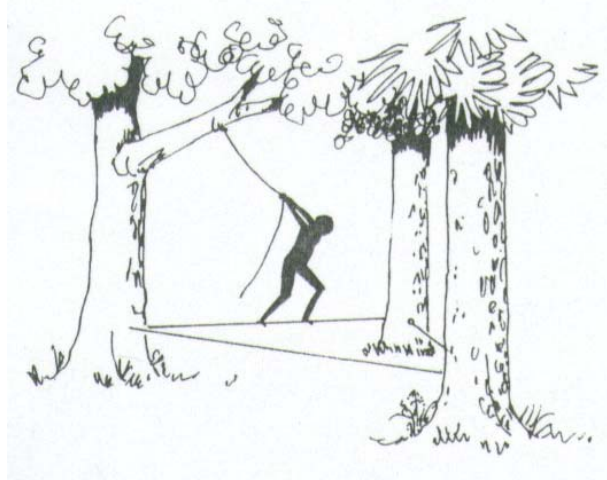
- Why does your attitude matter in this activity?
- Who went first in your group? Last?
- Why is order important?
- How is this activity like a company working together?

Optional Story:

Some years ago, old man Ves U. Veus, a hermit and well-known magician built his house in a volcano pit on Warren Mountain. He changed the calm streams that used to be here into lava and created these magical floating platforms. You must use the boards to get across to the other side and safety.

Notes:

Triangle Traverse



Objective: The group must balance on a wire crossing from one side of the element to the other

Guidelines:

- The whole team needs to get from one side of the element to the other using only each other for support.
- Anybody who touches the ground needs to start over.
- Communication is important. If you think you are falling, let the group know. This is one element you do not want the “domino effect”.

Spotting Techniques/ Safety:

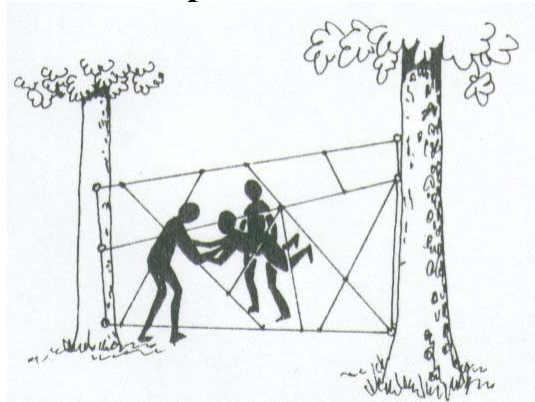
- At least two people need to be spotting this element. Have one person on each side of the cable to help spot.
- If it is wet, the cable will be slippery.
- After a student is able to cross the element, they can help spot if they are qualified.

Debriefing Questions:

- Instead of jumping into problems feet first, what might be another way of problem solving?
- How many ideas were expressed and why were they not all tried?
- How did you determine the order people crossed the traverse? Why?
- What do you think you gained from this activity?

Notes:

Spider's Web



Objective: The group must get through the holes in the web without ringing the bell

Guidelines:

- Depending on the size of the group, holes in the web may be used more than once
- No one is allowed to go under the web
- No one is allowed to grab the web
- The entire group needs to pass through the Spider's Web
- If the group realizes they have made a mistake, someone can return through an opening and it would then become open again (this may come into play when a group realizes only the high openings are still available).

Spotting Techniques/ Safety:

- There must be at least two spotters on each side of the web when passing people through. Spotters can walk around the web; they do not have to be passed through.
- No diving through the web
- Support head and neck all the way through the web.

Debriefing Questions:

- If you could change one rule for this activity, what would it be? Why?
- What was the hardest part of this activity? How did you overcome the challenge?

Optional Story:

In the Amazon Rain forest, there are varieties of animals, which only exist there. Scientists have found spiders that eat bugs, fish and even small birds. On your expedition to the Rain Forest, you have come across the largest spider ever seen. It preys on large animals, including humans. Because the spider has formed its web across the middle of your trail and there are huge cliffs on each side, you need to get your group through its web without disturbing the spider.

Notes:

Camp Classen YMCA Main Camp Challenge Course

