

OUTDOOR SCHOOL GROUP CHALLENGES

DESCRIPTION: Group Challenges are a series of activities that give groups of students a variety of problems, which must be resolved by the entire group. Each group is to work out their own solution to the problem safely and effectively.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION: These activities present a problem for each group to solve. None of the solutions to the problem can be done individually, but rather require a group effort. Some of the problems demand physical strength while others need a high degree of logical thinking skills, and still others require both. The situations all provide an opportunity for students to work together to solve a problem and to see each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Most of the problems involve some type of environmental theme. As is the case with most environmental problems, solutions tend to be difficult and require the cooperation of many people with diverse backgrounds to solve them. These group challenge activities have been created to show that no problem is unsolvable, given people's willingness to work together to find a solution.

We have found that these activities are particularly effective if the whole group does them on their first day of outdoor school!

OBJECTIVES:

1. To encourage group interaction
2. To increase student's ability to be effective group members
3. To increase student's awareness of group dynamics

AREA OF ACTIVITY: The GROUP CHALLENGE course is set up in the woods and field area on far side of the lake or over on the Day Camp upper trail system.

MATERIALS PROVIDED: Equipment for each station Copies of the station stories (all provided)

PROCEDURES: These activities may be done in several ways:

OPEN-ENDED ROTATION: *Smaller groups or more adults leading stations than there are groups.*

Groups work as long as necessary to complete the problem at each station. Upon completion, they return to a central location where a coordinator will occupy them until another station is available. This rotation allows students to complete each task they attempt, but they may not get to all of the stations.

TIMED ROTATION: Large groups or fewer adults leaders

Groups may move from one station to another at timed intervals, (e.g. every 15 to 20 minutes). Although this allows students to attempt more of the activities, they may not be able to complete all of them successfully.

RULES

This part of the challenge is extremely important. Basic guidelines for activity instructors include:

SAFETY is of prime importance. Always be aware of what the group you are responsible for is doing and be prepared to step in when necessary. This is particularly important for The Wall, Spider Web and Nitro activities.

Make all ground rules and procedures clear **BEFORE** the group attempts the problem.

Present the situation and ground rules, answer any questions, then **STEP BACK** and allow the group to work. Interaction among the group members is the most important process in all of these activities. Interfere only if it is imperative (i.e. safety concerns, someone is hurt, etc.), but always be prepared to act if necessary.

Problems and situations may be presented in many different ways. Some people create a "fantasy situation", others just present the problem as it is. The "situation" stories that accompany each station are there for you to use. Feel free to adapt them to your own style of leadership. The discussion questions at the end of the stories provide a good opportunity for students to share feelings, thoughts and ideas upon completion of the task. Select a method that you are comfortable with and that is suitable for the group.

CENTERED ACTIVITY It is hard to put a time limit on each activity. Some groups will do some tasks quickly while others will require more time.

Make sure you leave enough time at the end of each activity to discuss the group's ability or inability to solve the problem. Each activity has a set of possible discussion questions, but you may think of other questions as you watch the group perform the task. The group debriefing after each activity is essential for students to get the maximum benefit of the group challenges

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

Physically Challenging activities are marked either LOW (physically less difficult) MODERATE or HIGH (requires some team members to climb, jump or lift). All challenges can include team members who do not need to physically participate but can be coordinator, safety officer or communicator.

Alligator Pit The Alligator Pit is a series of three low 4'x4' platforms set out approximately 6 feet apart that the group must cross using and one 2" x 6" x 5' plank. The objective is to get the entire group from the first platform all the way to the last, without touching the ground. The group must do this without the aid of any foreign objects (sticks, rope, etc) EXCEPT the one 6-foot board they are given. The group must create a strategy, assign roles, work as a team, and safely cross the alligator pit without anyone becoming Alligator Lunch (touching the ground).

Challenge Level HIGH

Spider's Web The Spider's Web is a challenge element that is constructed of intertwined ropes strung between two poles. The objective is to cross from one side of the spider's web to the other without touching the web. Each participant must pass through a different "hole" in the web. If that person touches the web, that hole is closed and they must choose another. The group must create a plan that takes participant physical ability and size to lift, pass, and spot participants in order to get them through the web until all have safely passed to the other side

Challenge Level HIGH

Magic Carpet The group stands on a tarp that is spread on the ground. Then, they must fold the tarp in half without any team member stepping off. Then they must fold the tarp in half again, each time

using their team mates to ensure no person steps off and touches the ground. Repeat the above process as many times as possible. Each time you fold the blanket, the group will need to be more creative (and cozy) to successfully stand on the blanket. **Challenge Level**

MODERATE

Helium Stick The Helium Stick is a 8-10 ft stick that the group must slowly lower to the ground – with each participant maintaining contact with the stick with both index fingers. The group must work very hard to maintain contact with the stick while managing to actually lower the stick to the ground. This simple yet very funny group challenge can be one of the toughest challenges to complete on our course. **Challenge Level LOW**

Traffic Jam Each person in the group lines up and stands on a marker laid out in a semi circle. One vacant marker is placed in the middle of the line. The goal of the game is to get side A to side B and Side B to side A, all facing forward The rules are as follows: · No moving backwards · A person can only move forward to an empty space · A person can not “jump over” their own team mate · Only one person may move at a time · One spot per person, no sharing · If any of these rules are broken, the group must begin again **Challenge Level LOW**

The Wall This popular element challenges the group by offering a high physical barrier (an 11ft almost vertical wall) which must be climbed by group members of the group as efficiently as possible. The group must use only their own strength to lift and pull each other over the wall. This is an excellent closing activity the culmination of a challenging day's work (or several days), and the initiative that requires the group to use all of the trust, teamwork, and safety skills that they have learned. Once they have completed the challenge, participants can stand on the platform on the back side of the wall, which has a protective railing for safety. A ladder is used to help participants come down. **Challenge Level HIGH**

The Log Each member of the group is arranged in a sequential line, and steps up onto our log which is 10” of the ground. Then, the group is asked to rearrange themselves into the required order (e.g. by height, by birthday month, by eye color, etc.) without stepping off the pole. This challenge requires each participant to accept help in balancing from other team members.

Challenge Level MODERATE

Trolleys The objective is to move the group from point A to point B with the use of two long wooden boards fitted with for hand holds. The group must make it to point B safely without any body parts touching the ground. Obstacles in the path can increase the challenge of this event, which requires a lot of good group communication and coordination. **Challenge Level**

MODERATE

Acid River The group has three planks which they may use to cross the acid river There are a number of stepping stones rocks sticking above the river's surface. If any group member falls

off a plank or a rock while crossing the river, he or she might lose the ability to see or talk, or both! There are

also some other quirks of the challenge that make the Acid River slightly more complicated than it first seems. Participants need to use several strategies to successfully get across the river.

Challenge Level MODERATE

Mission Impossible The group has to crawl or step through a “maze” of strings that create a tunnel between six trees. The group has to avoid touching the strings or ringing the attached bells. Having a team member wearing a blindfold, or the team having to hold hands through the maze can increase the challenge of this event, which requires a lot of good group communication and coordination. **Challenge Level MODERATE**

Nitro Each member of the group must over an imaginary lava filled pool by swinging over the hot lava using a rope swing. The group must also transport a container full of nitroglycerin (water or woodchips) without spilling a drop. Participants must assist others in their swing across the lava, and creatively transport the nitro bucket. **Challenge Level HIGH**

A-Frame The A-Frame is a 9ft tall wooden frame with a board across the middle on which one group member must stand. The group member must be moved from point A to point B on the wooden A-Frame by the other participants, using ropes that are attached to the top (apex) of the structure. The A-Frame is a physically tough challenge but very popular with groups. **Challenge Level MODERATE**

Whale Watch The group must balance our giant 15 x 20 foot platform which sits upon a telephone pole – very much like a teeter totter. The goal of the challenge is to balance the board for 20 seconds without any of the 4 corners touching the ground while all participants standing on it. The challenge becomes increasingly more difficult as participants are given different locations that they must stand while on the platform. **Challenge Level MODERATE**

Marbles At our Marbles challenge, the team must connect segments of open and closed PVC pipes to create a channel for a marble to travel from point A to point B. This is a challenge that is physically easy but takes an incredible amount of good coordination and communication! **Challenge Level LOW**

Caterpillar Tracks The Our Caterpillar Tracks challenge involves the team standing inside a 15ft long x 4 ft wide “loop” of tarp. The team must stand single line and walk from point A to point B. The group must create a plan that takes participant physical ability and place them in the appropriate place in line, plus carefully coordinate their movements to keep the caterpillar tracks moving. **Challenge Level MODERATE**

The Equalizer The Equalizer has 4 ropes/bungees attached to a disc. The team must transport a ball using the disc from point A to point B without dropping the ball. **Challenge Level LOW**

Blind Polygon The team are blindfolded and hold on to a 30ft rope at random intervals. One team member is not blindfolded. That person must direct their blindfolded team members to move (without letting go of the rope) until the rope forms a predetermined shape (triangle or square, etc.) This challenge requires GREAT ability to give and follow directions. **Challenge Level LOW**

We have DOZENS more group challenges at all physical challenge levels and also some larger group challenges for groups of 50 and up.