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# What is a Ropes Course?

 A Ropes Course is a carefully developed set of obstacles and posed problems, usually built in a wooded area. Our Ropes Courses and programming are designed to be fun, challenging and to promote team-building and leadership skills and to improve group dynamics. The series of elements begin with simple, team exercises and progress into more difficult problem-solving endeavors.

Why Use Ropes Courses? Ropes Courses offer improved group dynamics and leadership training in a unique format. Participants are encouraged to work cooperatively to accomplish a series of set obstacles. Communication skills, cooperation, trust and caring are increased within the group by the shared risks and sense of achievement through the completion of the obstacles. In no other activity are groups challenged in such a way, and nowhere else do those involved come away with such a team spirit.

## What Benefits Do Participants Gain?

1. An enjoyable day of thoughtful, shared activity, where individuals can grow to know one another better and feel more comfortable as part of an effective team.

2. Improved social and communication skills.

3. Enhanced problem-solving techniques.

4. Greater confidence and self-esteem.

5. Development of leadership skills.

 6. Cultivated cooperation skills.

7. Greater group cohesiveness and support.

## Your Role as a Facilitator:

The Mission you have been given is not easy. Consider what legacy of leadership and influence you intend to leave behind. Every day others look at what you have done and drawn their own conclusions about YOU. Prepare to learn more about yourself, to grow more than ever before, and to struggle for what is GOOD and RIGHT.

To be a Facilitator, you must be both a leader and a role-model. Many participants will place absolute trust in you; they will have complete faith in your judgment and may develop ties with you quickly. With your guidance, participants may have some of the most memorable experiences of their lives. Assuming the role of a Facilitator can become an awesome responsibility. Therefore, when you accept the position, you must take it very seriously. The course and its programming are designed to help people experience success. You must structure the programs and operate in such a manner that there is a graduated series of challenges from which participants can emerge with a sense of mastery. Safety must be your overriding concern at all times; therefore, a set of standard and principles which should guide everything you do. Not only must you be safety–conscious, you must also teach your participants how to be responsible for themselves and others. Specific activities and exercises are tools to help teams build cohesion and work through common group issues. These activities provide opportunities for participants to combine individual talents and abilities with the need to develop cooperation and trust within the group. The processes occurring during the activities create opportunities for reflection and transference of this experience to everyday life. This reflection transforms the one–time experience into a method for bringing about long term, positive changes.

## Processing: (the most important part)

Processing is a method of reflecting back on an activity to help participants learn and grow through challenges and teamwork. It should lead participants to greater self-awareness and assist them in applying what they have learned to other situations in life.

The role of the leader is to facilitate meaningful exchange of thoughts, awareness, feeling, reaction and support within the group. The leader acts as a guide and a lens. The principal tools of the leader are observation and questioning focused by specific goals and objectives.

Rules of Processing

1. Everyone has the right to speak his or her mind. They are to be allowed to speak freely, without interruption.
2. Everyone has the right to not speak. If someone is feeling uncomfortable, do not call on him or her. Let them volunteer the information. (If the entire group is silent, call on the more “outspoken” members to get the processing started.)
3. The goal of processing is for the group to exchange ideas, not to have the leader tell the group how they did. The job of the leader is to ask questions and moderate the discussion. They are NOT to contribute to the group’s assessment except to encourage them if they become overly negative. A Facilitator must NEVER degrade the work of a group. If they are pleased with it, you are too!
4. Check your interpretation of what was said with the participant. Never assume you understood perfectly. To do this, rephrase the question. “So what you mean is...” This will not only serve to clarify their statement for you, but will also provide a clearer understanding for their group.
5. Reward disclosure by thanking individuals and/or restating what they said in a supportive way.
6. Do not skimp on processing. The activities, in and of themselves, are great for exercise and general problem-solving, however to allow the group to realize the full value of a Low Ropes program, they must be able to stop and refocus from the activity to the goal! Your job is to help them to do just that!

### Ways to process:

These are different ways to process groups. These questions are just a guide.

Leadership and Followers: Leaders and followers. How many were there? How many are necessary to a group? Does leadership ever change from activity to activity? Who was/were the leader(s) in this activity? Why?

**Group Support:** What is it? Where does it come from?

***Peer Pressure:*** Negative or positive in its effects? (I.e. Did one member’s attitude sway the entire group?)

***Negativism-Hostility:*** How do you handle it? Why is it there? (Frustration? Fear?)

***Efficiency:*** The step beyond just doing it... (Where could they improve in the activity?)

 How much processing is necessary? This question can be answered by another question: how much does your group need? Take at least 3-4 minutes to discuss the activity. Any less, and you are depriving the group of a valuable learning opportunity. How long is too long? Some Facilitators process for up to ½ hour (or more!) for each activity. In my opinion, that is simply too much. Most people (me included) will tune out. Keep it short, sweet and to the point, however do not stifle the discussion. If the group is involved in a dialogue, do not cut it short in order to run off to the next activity. Judge for yourself how much time you need. You’ll know if it’s too long and, by the end of the day, if it was too short.

***Competition:*** Against self, teams, a nebulous group or record... (Why did they want to accomplish the task set before them?)

***Spotting:*** Why is it essential?

Sexism: Who plays what role?

***Carry Over:*** Do these fabricated problems have real-life significance?

***Fear, Physical and Psychological:*** Fear of height? Falling? Failure? Looking bad?

***What? So What? Now What?***

This approach stresses three main questions:

***What?*** What did you have to do? What was your task? What was your goal? How did you accomplish your task? Did it help to achieve your goal?

***So What?*** So what does it mean that you succeeded/failed? What lessons have you learned? Who was the leader? Were there too many leaders?

***Now What?*** Now what can you do with the knowledge you’ve gained? How will it benefit you in the rest of these activities? How will it benefit you in life?

***Scale of 1 to 10***

This is one of the simplest, non-threatening ways to achieve a dialogue with your group. It can tailored to specific questions you want the group to answer and promotes discussion due to the nature of the processing style. This method also lends itself to a humorous perspective, as will be explained later. Very simply, it goes like this:

***On a scale of 1 to 10...***

 - How well did you cooperate? - How well did you communicate? - How well did you talk to each other? - How well did you listen to each other? - How well did you trust each other? - How much did you care for each other?

Now that the dialogue has begun, ask people why they said a specific number. Those who said that they group was a perfect “10”, why? Were they truly perfect? Those who said “1”, why? Was there nothing the group did right? Is there a general consensus as to what number best fits the group? What is it? Why? Can there ever be a perfect “10”? Why or why not? If yes, isn’t there always room for improvement in a group? If no, what about teams that function incredibly well? Is there no such thing as a perfect group? What if they got to pick who would be on their team, then could they come up with a “10”?

The way to add humor to the processing is to set criteria for a 1 and a 10. The typical way of doing this is by saying, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how did you do on Caring? One being that you hate each other’s guts and would happily stomp your fellow teammates into the ground the second I turn my back; and 10 being that you are best friends and would lay down your life, wallets/purses, etc. for the other members of the team.”

By doing this, you take the threat out of the dialogue. It takes some of the seriousness out of the discussion, but allows group members to feel more at ease as their answers, provided that they lie somewhere between the two extremes mentioned above, are more generally accepted and realistic than the alternatives given to them. In addition, this approach subtly allows the group to realize that they aren’t as bad as they could be and gives them a goal to strive for.

Remember, as with all processing, do not allow them to be too negative. If they made a mistake, that’s fine as long as they realize it! Your job is to also point out what they did right! Success in the goal (teamwork) is the overriding concern, and that cannot be accomplished if the group feels that they are a failure!

***Complete the Sentence***

Very simply, provide open-ended questions that the group must answer. The questions, listed below, are basic and can serve to promote discussion. I recommend starting with these (especially in groups which will not volunteer information) before moving on to any other processing structure. These will provide a deeper level of understanding about the fears of other group members, and will allow the team to rally around those who may have difficulties accomplishing a given activity.

“I am glad that...” “Success, to me, is...” “I was scared when...” “A leader is someone who...” “The first time I did that, I felt...” “I learned that...”

As I said at the start of this section, these are merely ideas. If you have a method that works better, use it! If not, I strongly recommend reviewing all options and finding the processing style that works best for you.

### Closure Questions

At the end of the day, sit the group down once again. This time, the goal of processing is to find out how the group thinks they did overall. The following questions represent a sampling of closure questions:

1. What did you learn about yourself? 2. What did you learn about others? 3. How do you feel about yourself and others? 4. What new questions do you have about yourself and others? 5. What did you do today that you are particularly proud of? 6. What skill are you working on to improve? 7. How can you use what you learned today in other life situations? 8. Would you do anything different if you could restart the day with the knowledge you have now? 9. Was your behavior in the group today typical of the way you usually act in a group? Explain.

These questions serve to wrap up the day with a final group introspective moment. It also enables the group members to reflect on how far they have come throughout the course of the day.

## Warm Up Games:

### Giants, Wizards, and Elves:

 Giants beat wizards, Wizards beat elves, Elves beat giants GOAL: Set up 3 ropes about 10 yards apart each. Two teams start at the middle rope, on “go” they make their teams choice. If you are the winning symbol, you chase the other team down and tag them. If you tag them, they join your team. The goal is to get everyone on one side.

### *Partner Push and Partner Balance:*

Stand face to face with your partner and try to push them over. You can only use the palms of your hands - Lock Elbows and lean sideway. Try your hands too.

### Group Juggle:

The game begins with participants standing in a circle. Each participant will throw the ball to only one person, so that each person is receiving the ball from the same person each time. To increase the difficulty of this game, facilitators may want to change the rules, saying that the ball must make it around the entire circle without anyone dropping it, or the group must increase the speed at which they are throwing the ball. If a group successfully completes this, the facilitators may want to add a second and third ball.

### Warp Speed :

 This game is almost identical to the group juggle. The same rules apply as in the group juggle, only in this game; participants must see how fast they can get the ball to complete the full pattern in the shortest amount of time.

### Blind Line Up:

The facilitators will tie a rope between two trees. Participants will line up facing the rope with their hands on the rope. The facilitators will give the participants a topic (i.e. birthday, height, first letter of mother’s maiden name, etc.) and the participants will have to line up in that order with their eyes closed and without talking.

### Blind Square

A rope is placed near the blindfolded participants. The team must first find the rope, then unravel it completely and make a perfect square on the ground, all within the allotted time. This activity focuses on communication, problem solving, leadership and team effectiveness.

Variation: To make it more challenging, mute them and/or make them get into an order around the shape they make (birthday, height, shoe size...)

### Tarp Flip (Turn Over a New Leaf)

A seemingly simple task, while standing on top of a completely open tarp, the group must create a plan to get everyone on the opposite side of the tarp without anyone stepping off. This activity requires problem solving skills, communication and effective team involvement.

### Sherpa Walk

Participants are given blindfolds and can be asked to get into a formation (typically a line) that can move or they can hold onto a rope. The person in front guides the group by following the clapping hands of the facilitator. Make sure that participants are aware that if at any time they feel uncomfortable, they can let you know, take off the blindfold, or say the word "freeze"

### Elephant Relay

Teams of 5 students in a line with 1 hoop at the front of the line. Once the music starts, the entire team holds hands facing sideways and passes the first hoop down the line. Once the hoop reaches the far hand of the last person, he/she lets go, runs to the front of the line and begins passing the hoop again. The first team to return to the original position and sit down wins. Can also do this game in a circle.

### Pass the Can

Whole group is seated in a circle with their knees bent at a 90 degree angle and their hands on the floor behind them. The objective is to pass a large coffee can (LARGE can) around the circle without using your hands.

Trust Fall***:***



The trust fall is a powerful event that elicits team support and trust. Participants must climb onto a platform above the ground. After discussing a few key thoughts about the strengths and blind spots they as an individual bring to the team and the support they need to be most effective they fall backwards into the arms of their teammates.

**Objective:**

* To perform a controlled fall into the arms of a least 8 arranged spotters.
* This activity presents a high level of risk, therefore your group should communicating well to safely participate in this activity.

**Life-Skills Focus:**

* Trust
* Leadership

**Maintenance:**

Check condition of boards, supports, and nails. Check ground cover. Make sure the platform is placed on level ground.

**How to set up:**

* Ask for a volunteer- form 2 parallel lines facing eachother, directly inline with the platform. Spotter’s arms should be in an “L” position with legs apart- one about two feet in front of the other. Knees bent. Heads back.

**Time and Group Size:**

* Plan on 30-45 minutes. Minimum of 8-10 participants, maximum of 16-18

**Rules and Safety Concerns:**

* All sharp objects and loose jewelry should be removed before participating.
* Ensure the catchers rotate throughout the line so individuals don’t always catch the torso
* Make sure that the participants are positioned appropriately to best catch faller: stronger people to catch larger people
* ALWAYS USE THESE COMMANDS:

PARTICIPANT “GROUP READY?”

GROUP: “READY” (stated with conviction)

PARTICIPANT: “I AM READY TO FALL”

GROUP: “READY NOW” (stated with conviction)

\*\* After participant falls, ensure the group stands him/her up and cradles them until they regain their footing.

* Additional facilitator roles:
	+ On facilitator stand on platform with participants
	+ The other facilitator is spotting on the ground where the participants head will land.

**Individual and Group Issues:**

* Emotional and physical trust
* Clear and assertive communication
* Gender and Body Image
* Focus

## The Wall:



Objective: This group event challenges participants to carefully move their team up and over to the other side of the vertical wall. Once a person has gone over the wall they are no longer able to help lift - thus leaving the last person to get up and over the wall with only the help of the last three people to make it to the platform.

**Life Skills Focus:**

* Trust
* Problem-Solving
* Communication

**Rules and Safety Concerns:**

* All sharp objects and loose jewelry should be removed
* No one should end up in a position where their head is below their feet. This prevents hanging someone over The Wall upside down.
* After a person has gone over The Wall and has come down on the far side, that person cannot provide physical aid to other climbers. Those people can and should act as spotters. Spotters are needed on the front and back of The Wall.
* Three people are allowed on the element, with one in the process of climbing The Wall. If there are 3 participants on top, one must descend. Whenever possible, one facilitator should be positioned on top of The Wall to insure proper safety.
* Only one action is allowed at a time (either one climber going up or one climber coming down).

**Individual and Group Issues:**

* Perceived and actual strength.
* Individual and group problem-solving.
* Appropriate touching
* Leadership
* Persistence!!!

## The Spider’s Web:



The Web (or spider’s web) challenges participants to carefully move their team from one side of the giant web to the other side without touching the web itself. Consequences are applied when participants accidentally cross the line, or overstep their boundaries while trying to be successful.

**Objective and Description:**

* The object is to move the entire group through the web openings so that each person goes through a distinct opening without touching the web. If a participant is successful, that opening conceptually closes for the remainder of the problem.
* If anyone touches the web during an attempt, the person being passed through must return and try again though that same opening.

**Life Skills Focus:**

* Communication
* Team Work

**Time and Group Size:**

* This initiative does not lend itself to being timed.
* With a group of 20, allow 25-30 minutes.
* No more than a group of 20 people.

**Rules and Safety Concerns:**

* The web consists of 16 web openings.
* If a person is being guided through a web opening, they should be passed through “head first and face up” so that efficient spotting of the head is possible.
* Each person being passed through an opeing should be spotted the eintire time that they are off the ground.
* At least two participants should step though a lower web opeing before anone is lifted so that they will be on the far side to protect the people being passed.
* The facilitator should spot where they are most likely to be needed, often on the side of the web with least lifters/catchers.
* Act early if an incident is going to occur. It is easier to stop n unsafe lift than to catch someone who is being dropped.

**Individual and Group Issues:**

* Appropriate Touching
* Gender Issues
* Trust
* Effective Communication
* Setting boundaries
* Body Image

**Inclusion and Other Options:**

* If there is a group bigger than 16 (there are 16 openings) allow the extra to use how man extra needed holes twice.
* Such handicaps for expert groups can be: blind fold a leader, no talking; some people have no use of one or both arms, etc.

## Team Shuffle:

******

**Objective and Description:**

* Different ways to use the Shuffle:
1. Place your entire group on top of the horizontal pole. Divide the group in half and ask those two halves to face one another and trade ends without stepping off the pole, or making contact with the ground.
2. Place the entire group on top of the horizontal pole, ask them to get in alphabetical order without stepping off the pole.
3. Once everyone is on the pole, the group has to line up in a specific order without talking (birthdays, height or something else instead).

**Life Skills Focus:**

* Communication
* Problem Solving
* Team Work

**Time and Group Size:**

* This is ordinarily a time event. As such, the objective should be attempted a second time so that the group can benefit from their first experience. Indicate that for each ground touch, a 15-second penalty will be assessed.
* If there are more than 20 people on the log, this may become awkward.

**Rules and Safety Concerns:**

* This is a self-spotted event: the participants should be aware that a fall to the ground is possible, and they should be responsible for themselves to stay on top, as well as for the members of their team.
* If a participant feels unbalanced, the participant must let go of all other participants and step to the ground. (This is to prevent a participant from pulling people down on top of himself/herself).
* Participants should not jump or run on the beam.
* Participants should be careful not to step on each other’s hands.

**Individual and Group Issues:**

* Working together, communication, problem solving.
* Physical balancing
* Appropriate touch

## Nitro Crossing:



Objective: During the Nitro Crossing event participants must pass over an imaginary canyon transporting everyone safely using only a swinging rope and each other without touching the ground. Variations on this activity provide several different scenarios and potential outcomes. Group members will have much fun solving this highly energizing problem together.

### Disc Jockeys:

**Objective and Description:**

* By utilizing the same rope, swing the entire group, person-by-person into a ground level pyramid of hoola hoops.
* The objective is to fill the entire pyramid with students, one participant per tire. The pyramids base should be facing the swingers.

### Do I Go?:



**Objective and Description:**

* Using the All Aboard platforms placed equidistant from the swing’s plum (imagine the number five on a di, where the swing is the center dot and the platforms are the surrounding dots), ask the group to divide themselves equally onto the four platforms, then try to see how quickly it takes for each participant to end up on a different platform.
* The swing rope is obviously the only way to make the crossing from platform to platform.
* Do not allow more than four on a platform.

*Life Skills Focus:*

* Trust
* Team Work
* Conflict Resolution
* Problem Solving

**Rules and Safety Concerns:**

* Spotting is essential during swinging events. Most of the spotting is the responsibility of the facilitator, but the participants should be aware enough not to attempt bizarre swinging positions.
* A loop should be spliced into the end of the swing rope to allow those students without requisite upper body strength to make the crossing. Knees as opposed to feet should be places in the loop.
* Participants cannot jump, lunge, use sticks, or throw rocks to get the rope.

**Individual and Group Issues:**

* Trust
* High level problem-solving initiative
* Gender stereotyping- males assume greater expertise and finesse

## All Aboard:



Objective:

The All Aboard activity challenges teams to all get on the same page. A small platform is used to accomplish this seemingly impossible task of supporting every member of the team for a minimum of 15 seconds. Every participant’s feet must be off the ground and only the support of the platform and fellow group members may be used. Once finished they have to do it 2 more times on smaller platforms.

Description: The nearby volcano has erupted and the lava is coming. In order to survive, everyone must help each other stay on the platform and be safe from the lava.

**Life Skills Focus:**

* Communications
* Leadership
* Problem Solving

**Time and Group Size:**

* 15-17 people maximum
* Challenge them to stay on the board for 10 seconds or complete a song or a section of a song while “all-aboard”

**Rules and Safety Concerns:**

* Do not allow participants to climb on each other. Participants piled up in this fashion can cause serious injury to one another.
* If students choose to climb on each other, allow them to climb on their backs but not on their shoulders. Facilitators must be spotting on each side of the platform.

**Individual and Group Issues:**

* Appropriate Touch
* Body Size
* Effectively communicating ideas
* Problem-solving skills

## The Trolley



In using the trolleys, participants must work together in unison to move across an open area. One misstep and it’s back to the starting line. This activity is more difficult than it appears.

**Objective and Description:**

* Using the provided props, to cross an “area of toxic material.”
* This can be a race between two groups or a single group activitiy. The group has to work together to use the wooden trolleys to walk to a specific destination using only each other and the trolleys as the means of movement- not the ground.
* Put cones or rope to designate the areas.

Description: Your group has come across a puddle of quick-sand and cannot get to the other side. Fortunately, there is a supply of special shoes on board. Unfortunately, there is only one pair. You and your group must cross using the trolleys and go for it!

* Additional rules may include blind-folding, silencing the group( may be good for a communication life skills session), or having them turn backwards on the trolleys

Life Skills Focus:

* Leadership
* Communication
* Teamwork
* Problem Solving

**Safety:**

* Make sure participants are aware that the trolleys are heavy and may possibly roll over on their feet.
* If a participant is falling or has fallen off the trolleys, the group must wait until they are safely back aboard before moving again.

**Time and Group Size:**

* This can be a times event, but applying penalties for slips off the log works well also.
* Allow 20-25 minutes on your schedule

**Individual and Group Issues:**

* Clear communication, including effective listening.
* Leadership concepts, such as communication across the lines, placement of leaders within a group, and assumption about leaders and followers’ roles.

## The Island Crossing:

******

Objective: The Island Crossing event challenges participants to discover a way to cross from one island to the other island without touching the ground in between. Given limited resources, participants must work toward their strengths to be successful.

* The object is for a group of people to move, one personal at a time, from the first island throughout a series of islands.
* This element involves a series of platforms, or islands (All-Aboard boxes) that are approximately seven feet apart. The group works together to figure out how to get from the first to the finals.
* The participants are provided two pieces of 2 x 6 lumber, one 4 foot section and one 6-foot section.

Description: You are part of a really unlucky group. Your ship has half-submerged and you and your companions are stuck on the rear section… all the food and provisions are on the front section. All you have to avoid entering the shark infested water is two boards and a floating gas drum to get you and your group to the front before you starve.

The group must begin their attempt on the first platform, once they have finished planning. They get both boards, neither of which will reach the next platform. They must cross the gaps between the platforms with the boards suspended. IF the boards touch the group, it’s OK but if they are touching the ground while someone’s weight is on either one, it is a penalty and the person who was on them must return to the platform from whence they came. Also, if anyone steps off any platform, it is a penalty.

## Life Skills Focus:

* Conflict resolution
* Problem Solving/ group decision making

**Time and Group Size:**

* This is not a timed event.
* The group should be limited to 12-15 people, depending on size and age of participants.
* Allow 25-30 minutes for the group.

**Rules and Safety Concerns:**

* Participants are not allowed to jump from island to the next. If the board itself, or any participant, touches the ground the group must return to the first island and start again.
* Participants should be advised that if they begin to feel themselves falling, they should step off the platform rather than brining the group down.
* Facilitators should spot the platform until the group is stable upon it. Only then should they be given the boards.

**Individual and Group Issues:**

* Trust in self and group members
* Communication
* Gender and size issues
* Problem-solving and group decision making

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