

PROBLEM-SOLVING INITIATIVE GAMES

WHAT ARE INITIATIVE GAMES?

Initiative games are fun, cooperative, challenging games in which the group is confronted with a specific problem to solve. In Exploring we use initiative games for two reasons: These games demonstrate and teach leadership skills to Advisors, which helps to promote the growth of Explorers; and these games demonstrate a process of thinking about experiences that helps Explorers learn and become responsible citizens.

Here are a few suggestions. Begin by clearly explaining the game. Make sure the rules are understood, including that everyone must complete the activity for the group to be successful.

Don't offer ideas for solving the problem. Stand back and let the group work and play with it even if the group has a difficult time. Don't interfere unless something is unsafe or the group has fallen apart.

Reflect on the activity. Spend a few minutes afterward talking about what the participants learned. This is most effective when you use the principles of reflection discussed in the *Explorer Leader Handbook* (page A-9). Talk about how effectively and efficiently they accomplished the task and how well they got along with each other. Ask open-ended questions to help the group talk about the issues. Don't be judgmental. In asking questions, first help the participants focus on what happened, then ask them to decide if what happened was good or bad. Finally, ask them to set some goals for the future.

The best impact that initiative games can have on your post program is for you to use the initiative games leadership style and the reflective methods in your post program. While initiative games are fun and meaningful lessons can be learned, a lasting impact will be achieved only by using the principles behind the games in the complete post program. As an adult leader, you help the youth learn to make decisions and solve problems in everything you do in Exploring. Teach them the skills they need and let them do it. As someone once said: "Train them and trust them!" Use reflection during and after post activities and experiences to help the youth learn. Get them in the habit of thinking and sharing together as a group.

If a game is too easy or if you have other motives, you can vary the skills of the participants by not allowing some to talk, by blindfolding, by not allowing the use of

various limbs, etc. You also can create a story line to go with the game.

See the reference list if you are interested in getting more games. Happy playing!

RADIOACTIVE FIELD I

Materials: three boards (pieces of plywood work fine) about a foot square

The goal is to transfer the entire group across an open, flat area using three protective shields without touching the ground with any body part. Boards must not be thrown across the open area.

RADIOACTIVE FIELD II

The goal is to transfer the entire group across an open area using one pair of magic boots. No body part can touch the ground except for feet wearing the magic boots. The boots cannot be thrown across the field. They can be carried. Each foot on each person can only wear a boot safely for one trip across. After that foot is used, it cannot be used for any more trips.

BLIND SQUARE

Materials: one length of rope 50–100 feet long; blindfolds

The group begins by forming a circle and putting the blindfolds on. Then each person picks up the rope, which has been tied into a circle. Everyone should be standing on the outside of the rope. The object is for the blindfolded group to form a square, triangle, pentagon, or any shape the players want to try.

LINE UP

Materials: blindfolds

Blindfold everyone in the group. Whisper to each person a number from one to the number of persons in the group. After you are done, tell the players they must line up by consecutive numbers without talking. Everyone should begin to move slowly around each other, putting palms up facing outward to protect themselves from collisions.

Variations: Line up by height, weight, age, Social Security number, etc. Or try this: Number all participants as above, but designate one player as the “fooler.” Do this by tapping a person on the shoulder without assigning a number. That person then opens his or her eyes (or removes a blindfold) and begins operating as the “fooler.” As the players attempt to align themselves, the “fooler” tries to mess up their attempts by giving (non-verbal) wrong information. Each person, to combat the “fooler,” has one hypodermic needle (a finger) filled with “truth serum.” If players think they are being fooled, they point their finger at the supposed culprit, and if their finger is still pointed at the “fooler” when they say, “Squirt,” the “fooler” is obliged to moan, “You got me.” The group then is awarded one minute of pure honesty. If a player uses his or her “needle” and misses the “fooler,” all the player’s serum is lost for the remainder of the game.

—from *The Bottomless Bag*

HUMAN LADDER

Materials: one smooth dowel rod, at least three feet long and 1¼ to 1½ inches in diameter for each two participants

The group lines up in two rows with each row facing the other. Each pair of persons (one from each row) facing each other will hold a dowel. The object is to have one person standing at the end who will crawl across the horizontal ladder formed by the dowels. The group can hold the dowels in any manner desired—high, low, or forming a turn. The only restriction is to not hold the dowels above shoulder height.

Caution: Make sure the dowels you have will support your group member’s weight!

—from *The Bottomless Bag*

BLIND TENT PITCH

Materials: one tent with all equipment needed to set it up; blindfolds

The goal is to set up the tent with everybody in the group blindfolded.

KNOTS

A group of six to 12 people forms a circle. Each person puts the right hand into the center of the circle and clasps hands with one other person who is not standing next to him or her. Then everyone puts their left hand into the circle and clasps hands, again making sure that person is not standing next to them. They should be holding two different people’s hands. The goal is to untangle the knot without letting go of anyone’s hand.

SPIDERWEB

Materials: For this activity you will need to do some construction. A spiderweb will need to be built between two trees with about one hole in the web for each person in the group. Holes should be of varying sizes and heights. Nylon cord works well in constructing the web.

The group is to pass people through the web without anyone touching it. If a person does touch the web, you must restart that player.

ALL ABOARD

Materials: an old towel or rag or a preconstructed platform about 2 feet by 2 feet

The goal is to get everyone in the group to stand on the towel or platform without touching the ground around it. You can start with the towel unfolded and gradually increase the challenge by folding it smaller and smaller. The only restriction is that you may not “stack” more than one person on another.

QUICKSAND

Materials: platform such as in “All Aboard,” or a towel; Frisbee-size disks to step on

Place the platform or towel about six giant steps away from a boundary line. The goal is to get everyone from behind the line across the open area onto the platform without touching the ground. The disks can be used to cross the area, but once they are put on the ground they cannot be moved. Also, someone’s foot must be on the disk at all times until the last person crosses.

REVERSING PYRAMID

Have 10 people form a 4-3-2-1 horizontal pyramid (arranged like bowling pins). Tell them to reverse the apex and the base of the pyramid by moving only three people.

—from *The Bottomless Bag*

GIMME A LEG TO STAND ON

The goal of this activity is to get your group to have a minimum of contact points with the ground. In other words, you want to find out how few legs and arms you must use to maintain a balance point for, say, five seconds.

—from *The Bottomless Bag*

POPSICLE PUSH-UP

This is a variation of the standard one-person push-up. The easiest way to teach it is to start doing a four-person push-up. The first person lies down on his or her stomach. The second person lies down perpendicular to the first, with feet and ankles over the lower back of the first. The third and fourth people do the same thing, with the first person's feet over the lower back of the fourth so that the torsos form a square.

The challenge is to have all four people do a push-up at the same time. When they have done this, the goal is to add more people until you are doing a push-up with everyone in the group involved. (It is possible with some creative thinking.)

Variation: A challenging alternative is to tell the group at the beginning that the goal is to get everybody off the ground with only their hands touching, without telling them about any possible solutions like the four-person variation.

THE GREAT EGG DROP

The goal is to build a structure that will prevent an egg from breaking when it is dropped from a height of 8 feet. The only materials allowed are 20 straws and 30 inches of ½-inch masking tape. Try to do it with as few materials as possible.

—from *The Bottomless Bag*

TRAFFIC JAM

Materials: something to mark spaces that individuals in the group stand on. (There should be one more space than the number of people in the group.)

Half of the group stands in a row back to front facing the other half of the group, which also is back to front but, of course, facing the first group. It does not matter if you have an odd number of people in your group and one side has one more person than the other. Everyone should be standing on a marked spot. The empty spot should be in the middle between the two facing groups. The goal is for each group to exchange places.

As you might expect, there are some restrictions on movement. First, only one person moves at a time. Second, a person may not move around anyone facing the same direction. Third, they may not move backward. Fourth, no one can move around more than one person on the other team at a time.

TWO BY FOUR

Have eight people line up shoulder to shoulder, alternating male and female, with everyone facing the same direction. The object is to get all the females on one end and all the males on the other. If you prefer you can use some other identification to distinguish alternate people.

These are the rules: First, the goal is to solve the problem in the fewest possible moves, with a maximum of four moves. It's probably a good idea not to tell the players the maximum until they have had some successes in solving the problem. Second, all moves are made in pairs. A pair is you and anyone standing next to you. Third, when a pair moves out of the middle of the group, the empty spot they left must be filled by another pair. Fourth, pairs may not pivot or turn around. Fifth, there should be no gaps in the solution of the problem.

—from *Silver Bullets*

DIMINISHING LOAD

The object is to move the group across an open area. To cross the area, a person must be carried. The carrier must return and be carried. If a carried person touches the ground, the carrier(s) and the carried person must return.

PROUTY'S LANDING

Materials: one rope large enough and long enough to accomplish the swing and something to serve as a platform

The object is to get everyone in the group onto a 3-by-3-foot platform from a point about 20 feet away by swinging on a rope. The platform should be set about 10 feet away from the point from which the plumb line of the rope swings.

—from *Silver Bullets*

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