

Knots

Sequence: Problem Solving

Focus: Working together, common sense, cooperation

Materials: 2-4 foot length rope for each person (optional)

Sources: See *The New Games Book* (1974) by Fluegelman, *Silver Bullets* (1984) by Rohnke, and *Journey Toward the Caring Classroom* (2004) by Frank. See also "Tangles" in *Adventure Play* (1998) by Bower, "All Knotted Up" in *Adventures in Peacemaking* (1996) by Kreidler & Furlong, and "Knot Me" in *The Incredible Indoor Games Book* (1982) by Gregson

Suggested Procedure

1. This activity can be done with groups of 8 - 12 participants. The difficulty level rises with the number of participants. (you might want to try it with smaller groups first, and then work up to larger groups).
2. The addition of short a short rope (2 - 4 feet) for each person is optional, but helps to spread the group out for ease in discussion, and allows people who are uncomfortable with touching to participate.
3. Divide the class into smaller groups. Ask each small group to stand in a circle.
4. They are then asked to grab the hand (or rope) of two other people in the group -- they must be different people, and they cannot be on either side of the participant. No one moves from their original place when grabbing hands. If using ropes, ask them to grab the rope of the people.
5. The object, then, is to untangle the knot without letting go of hands or ropes. Participants are allowed to change an uncomfortable grip.
6. Sometimes groups end up in a circle, but sometimes they end up in two or more circles. There are even cases where two circles are joined in the middle like a figure 8, and it is impossible to form one complete circle.

Sample Processing Questions

- How did you go about solving this problem? How did you decide who would move and when?
- Did you think this through or just move at random? Did it work for you? Why?
- Do you think you used Common Sense to solve this problem? Why or why not?

Facilitation Notes

This is a classic adventure activity dating back to the early *New Games* era. One reason it continues to be used is that the outcome is never assured. Sometimes groups end up in a circle, but sometimes they end up in two or more circles. There are even cases where two circles are joined in the middle like a figure 8, and it is impossible to form one complete circle. If you do this in smaller groups, you may have one group that just cannot seem to unravel the knot, while the others speed through it.

In a case where there seems to be no obvious solution, the option of "Knot Aid" can be offered. The group can choose one hand connection to be unclasped, and re-clasped in a different place.