

Activity: **Diminishing Circles**

Overview

Diminishing Circles challenges participants to become aware of personal patterns, beliefs (limiting or otherwise), and reactions around issues of scarcity and how those reactions affect cooperation and collaboration. In *Diminishing Circles*, the team begins with an abundance of circles in which they can stand. Throughout play, the circles are stripped away, forcing participants to move together into smaller circles until only one circle remains.

Set Up

Props

- Varying sizes of rope, string, or webbing
- In the Mobile Team Challenge course, you can use the Big Foot ropes (without the sliders), the 20-foot ropes, the 12-foot ropes, and the 75-foot rope as props.

Create circles of various sizes using rope, string, or webbing and lay them out in the area of play. The number of circles depends upon the number of people in play.

Create enough circles of various sizes so that everyone can easily stand within a circle.

Instructions

Create various sized circles and spread them around your play area. In general, you want most of the circles to be about 5–10 feet apart.

Invite the participants to “get in a circle.” (This phrasing is important. They will interpret the phrase as “go stand in a circle of rope.”)

The facilitator will announce “a change” (e.g., one boat is swept away or multiple boats are capsized and people are thrown overboard) and remove one of the circles. Everyone must leave their circle. Everyone must always get into another circle when “change happens.”

The following rules apply:

- Both feet must be inside the circle and at least one foot must be on the ground.
- Participants may not move circles.
- There is no way to prevent the removal of circles by the facilitator.
- No running or otherwise unsafe behavior is allowed. This includes hoisting anyone on shoulders.

If the circle is too small, encourage them to challenge their assumptions. Repeat the instructions: “Everyone must always be in a circle.”

Sample Story Line

You were on a cruise with your team when a storm hit. The ship was struck by lightning and caught fire. All of you managed to escape uninjured and found your way onto a lifeboat, raft, or a buoy. Unfortunately, the sea is rough. When big waves come, all boats capsize and must be righted so that people can climb aboard. You must swim to another lifeboat and get on board for safety. The water is ice-cold, and if any part of your body is in the water it will get frostbite.

Safety

- In order to prevent collisions, make sure people walk as they move from circle to circle.
- Make sure participants do not try to lift other participants; at least one foot on the ground is a rule.
- As the challenge increases, spot participants who might be at risk of falling from the circle.
- Take care when moving not to step on other participants’ feet.

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Variations

Try these variations for a change of pace.

- Allow all the circles to be moved and manipulated.
- Require both feet to be on the ground.
- Have only the displaced participants relocate.

Reflection

When resources are removed, it often brings up scarcity issues for people. (If there is not enough to go around, then I might lose.) This activity invites participants to become aware of their reactions (“There isn’t room for me”) and how they respond to those reactions. The goal is to invite people to shift to abundance mentality so those reactions become open, creative, and positive (“Join us!” and “There’ll be another space—who wants me?”). It is easy to see how one set of reactions leads more easily into conflict and the other more readily toward collaboration. In addition, limiting assumptions creates conflict where there may not be conflict.

Discover

- What thoughts or feelings did you have when the first circle was removed? How did this reaction lead to conflict or collaboration?
- What key behaviors in your group’s effort allowed you to succeed without conflict?
- What unspoken rules, beliefs, and attitudes did you have?
- What were the areas for potential conflict in this activity?

Connect

- How does this activity parallel your work, school, or home life?
- How did your decisions and commitment to the team enable you to avoid potential conflict?
- What skills and characteristics were key components to your working without conflict?
- If you encountered conflict, what skills and characteristics supported your ability to move through that conflict? Did you collaborate or manage the conflict?
- Can you recall a time in life when you experienced diminishing resources or limiting beliefs and assumptions? Recall what happened, what supported your movement through that time, what you valued about yourself during the process, and what you valued about the organization or others at the time. How did you and others successfully resolve conflicts during that time? What enabled you to shift to “common ground” or move past limiting beliefs?

Create

- How did innovative thinking play a significant role in the group’s success? What conditions were necessary for such thinking? What supported the thought process?
- Think of a current situation where you might apply some of what you learned here. Are there situations where cooperative/collaborative efforts might lead to innovative ideas that would take you far beyond imagined goals? Can you be specific?