

Activity: Don't Touch Me**Overview**

Don't Touch Me specifically targets shifting paradigms, the concept of “what you see and hear is not always what you get,” and the idea of thinking outside the box. *Don't Touch Me* playfully engages your group and challenges them to use their minds.

This activity has been written in many books, and used because it is wildly successful. Kudos to games guru Karl Rhonke at High 5 Adventure Learning Center, and our good friend Sam Sikes and his crew from Learning Unlimited.

Set Up**Props**

- A relatively flat object such as a throwing disc, a mouse pad, or a paper plate. Referred to as the “dot.”
- A stopwatch or timepiece to keep track of the group's accomplishments.

Setup

To begin, have your group stand in a circle while you give instructions.

Instructions

Have group members pick a partner across the circle from their position. Each participant must have only one partner. To ensure proper pairing, have partners step to the middle, high-five, and return to their spots. If you have an odd number, you may want to step in and play so that everyone has a partner.

Explain to the group that this is a timed event and that they are trying to satisfy the following 4 rules in the quickest time possible:

1. Participants must switch positions with their partner.

2. Participants must repeat the words “don't touch me!” anytime they are in motion.
3. Everyone must touch the “dot” in the center sometime during the process.
4. No one may touch anyone else in the group. For each touch, a second is added to the overall time.

Let the group know that after you are finished explaining the rules, you will only respond to the phrases “timer ready,” “timer stop,” and “would you please repeat the rules.” Anytime the group asks a question, simply repeat the four rules.

Give the group their time and then add the extra second(s) for touches after each attempt.

Allow your team to creatively establish their interpretation of the rules. For example, groups tend to make the circle smaller, stand next to their switching partner, pick the “dot” up, and even challenge what switching positions means. Positions switched could be from left eye open to left eye closed—not necessarily physical location as was initially thought. The group may also start the activity with everyone touching the dot. The instructions you gave in the beginning limit their ability to see these solutions.

As the facilitator, check-in to see how satisfied they are with their time after each try. After numerous attempts, if they are hovering around 5 to 7 seconds, ask them what they would say if you told them that you had seen it done in about a second. Watch the fire ignite, and how they begin to challenge their own set of assumptions to meet or beat that time.

Sample Story Line

“Your company is working to establish new, more efficient ways of doing its work. You have been assembled to design a process of satisfying 4 requirements of the job in the quickest, most efficient way. By cutting costly time and quality issues, you will all be rewarded.”

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"First, pick a work partner across the circle from you, come to the center, and give that person a high five. You should only have one partner. Next are the requirements. First, you must switch positions with your partner. Second, you must repeat 'don't touch me' anytime you are in motion. Third, everyone must touch the 'dot' sometime during the process. Finally, no one may touch anyone else. For every touch, an unwanted second is added to your time. These are your only requirements. When I am done speaking, I will be a limited resource and only respond to 'timer ready,' 'timer stop,' and 'would you please repeat the rules.' This is a timed event and time will start and stop when you indicate that you are ready and/or have completed the task."

Safety

Remind the participants to be careful as they move across the circle.

Variations

If the group is larger, you may use larger "dots." Garbage can lids or storage lids work well for this. You could also try the dual approach, dividing your team up into two groups each with their own dot and timer. They could independently work on the problem and decide to share or withhold information with each other. Many times you'll notice groups trying to catch a glimpse of the other's strategy. This variation leads to interesting conversations around competition.

Reflection

Don't Touch Me can lead to many types of conversation. The lines of questioning we have provided revolve around thinking outside the box and challenging assumptions.

- Discover:** "Describe how you felt: When I gave you the instructions. As you worked through the challenge. As you completed the exercise."
Connect: "How did your thinking change as you worked through the problem? How did the rules initially limit you and your group? Are there other rules that you live by that may limit your ability to work more effectively?"
Create: "If you were to create a new rule to work/live/learn by what would it be? How would your life be different if you asked for more clarity and were clear about your outcomes?"
- Discover:** "What did you notice the group doing as you kept working to lower your time?"
Connect: "Are there work processes that could be changed if you were to rethink the way you see the problem(s)?"
Create: "As a group, what rules are we going to live by to take on the challenges we face? How will we know if we are living by them?"