

Activity: **Hands Are Tied**

Overview

Often, our perceptions about a problem affect our ability to solve it. In *Hands Are Tied*, participants work to disconnect from one another in what appears to be an impossible task. Group members twist and turn themselves with frustration, and find that a little creative thinking will do the trick.

Set Up

Props

- 1 Piece of string 4' to 5' long for each participant.

Set Up

Distribute one string to each participant. Ask group members to tie loops large enough for their hands to fit through at both ends of their string.

Instructions

Ask every group member to find a partner and connect with him or her by intertwining the strings and placing the loops on their wrists. Explain that the partners must disconnect from each other without untying the knots, cutting the string, or taking the loops off of their own wrists.

This is a team event. It is not over until all group members disconnect from one another. Participants can and should share information with one another, but don't prompt them to do so. See if they will naturally.

Provide hints when your group is struggling. Start by explaining that no amount of twisting or stepping through each other's loops will help. Tell them to think about the resources they have to work with. Later, if they are still struggling, let them know that the secret is in the loops around their wrists. Sometimes we very secretly show one pair of team members the solution.

How will they handle the information?

The solution: Take the middle of your partner's string and run it through your right or left wrist loop, through the bottom or "take your pulse" part of your wrist. With your partner's string make a loop big enough for a hand to fit through and put your hand through it. This will either allow you to separate, or create another twist in your string. If the latter occurs, re-connect just like you did the first time, but try running the loop through your other wrist loop. Even with knowledge of the solution, this can be somewhat confusing. Refer to the video to see a demonstration of the solution.

Sample Story Line

"What does the expression, 'my hands are tied,' mean?"

Get responses from your group.

"It can mean that you are unable to do something. In this activity, you may believe that you are unable to solve the problem, but I promise you, it can be done. I need everyone to get a partner. Stand face-to-face and connect with each other as shown."

It is a good idea to model for your group with a volunteer.

"To be successful, your whole team must escape from the grips of this situation. Partners must separate from each other without breaking, untying, or switching wrist loops. The loops on your wrists must remain on your wrist at all times. Remember, you are not free until everyone on your team has escaped."

Safety

Watch as pairs twist and turn into strange configurations while trying to escape. Make sure they are not hurting each other, and stop rough behavior.

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Variations

You could start by having everyone connected together in one large group. They employ the same technique to break free from each other, but the new configuration may throw them for a “loop!”

Reflection

Hands-Are-Tied is one of those brainteasers that you can take some time to explore. Here are some questions.

- Discover:** “What was this event like for you? What caused you to react to the challenge in that way?”

Connect: “Have you had similar responses to other challenges in your life? If so, can you give an example?”

Create: “The next time you are faced with a challenge, what will you say to yourself to fully prepare?”
- Discover:** “How many of you thought it couldn’t be done, or said to yourself, ‘I am not good at these brainteasers?’”

Connect: “How did your mindset in the beginning influence the way you approached the challenge? Can you think of other challenges where your beliefs going into it interfered with your ability to discover your true capabilities?”

Create: “What is one thing you learned from this exercise? How will you apply this learning in the future? If you applied this learning what would be the biggest change in your life?”