

Activity: Trust Me

Overview

Trust Me is a classic activity designed to help participants develop a bond of trust and commitment. Participants lean back into the supporting arms of a partner, relying on their partner to keep them safe both physically and mentally. Partners switch and are exposed to both sides of the activity as the “truster” and the “trusted.”

Trust Me also serves as a prelude to the trust activities *Willow in the Wind* and *Group Lift*.

Instructions

1. Bring your group together and address the requirements for this activity. As the most fundamental requirement, explain that everyone must be committed to one another and take this seriously to avoid incident.
2. Next, you will need to demonstrate the different player positions in this activity. First, demonstrate the proper leaning position with the help of a volunteer. Volunteers should stand tall and straight, feet together, with their arms crossed over the chest, holding onto their shirt. The preferred position is arms crossed, hands locked and pulled in to the chest. This position reduces the risk of injury by flying elbows. However, participants may choose the method that is most comfortable. Ask participants to practice, on their own, standing where they are.
3. Next, introduce and demonstrate the proper spotting position with a volunteer. Be very clear in your explanation of this position.
4. The spotter stands directly behind the leaner. The spotter's feet must be shoulder width apart, one foot back and one foot forward, with the back foot acting as a brace. Spotters must remember to keep their knees slightly bent. Hands must remain up at all times, palms open and elbows slightly bent. The palms of the hand should be approximately 4–6 inches or closer from the leaning participant's back. Once again, ask participants to practice this position on their own without a partner. Offer feedback and help ensure everyone understands the position. Be sure to address the spotter's primary areas of concern--the head and neck.
5. Now ask participants to break into pairs, aligning by height as much as possible, and introduce the specific communication required in this activity. The commands are simple, meaningful, and name-specific in order to eliminate confusion and possible accidents. The commands are as follows:
 - a. When the leaning participant is ready, he/she asks, “Ready, _____ (name of spotter)?”
 - b. When the spotting participant is in proper position and ready to catch, he/she replies, “Ready, _____ (name of person leaning).”
 - c. The person leaning then passes control to the spotter by saying, “Trusting, _____ (name of spotter).”
 - d. The spotter responds, “Trusting, _____ (name of person leaning).”
6. When the leaning participant hears this final command, he or she will have full confidence that the spotting participant is in position, hands within 4–6 inches from the upper back. The leaning participant then leans back, pivoting on the heels, and commits her/his weight to the spotting participant. The spotter then returns the leaning participant to a neutral standing position.
7. Allow each group several attempts, and make sure they switch roles at least once. Remind group members to be safe and follow the instructions on each attempt.

Safety

1. First and foremost, participants must be introduced to the challenge and have the opportunity to choose whether or not to participate. It is important that no one is coerced into participating. A serious commitment to safety is also equally important.
2. Observe participants to make sure they are using proper body position and appropriate communication.

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3. Assess the group for their readiness and willingness to trust one another.
4. Back up individuals if you think there is a safety concern. This means standing behind them in order to help spot if needed. Assume they are capable of spotting effectively, but be prepared in case they are not. For example, a very short person pairs up with a tall person or a very heavy person with a lightweight individual.
5. Make sure there are no “screamers.” These are spotters who stand about twelve inches away from their partner, preparing to “give them a thrill.”
6. **Stop jokes and sarcastic comments** as soon as they occur. Trust takes many small steps to build, but can be broken in one.

Variations

The following are two very successful variations of *Trust Me*. In fact, they may be considered “next steps” to trust building in your group, and can be used successfully in the following sequence.

Willow in the Wind is the next step in building group trust. Ask your group to form a tight circle of approximately 8–15 participants per circle. Each participant may choose to take a turn stepping into the center of the circle. Those around the circle stand in the proper spotting position; the participant in the center assumes the leaning position. After repeating the commands, “Ready,” “Ready,” “Trusting,” and “Trusting,” the center person leans back keeping the body stiff like a board and his or feet in one position. The group *gently* passes her/him around the circle (rotating). You can invite the “willows” to close their eyes if they like. The same communication system is required before any leaning participant begins: “Ready,” “Ready,” “Trusting,” and “Trusting!”

In *Willow in the Wind*, there are a few **extra safety concerns** to keep in mind. First, make sure there are no

holes in the circle and that the distance the person will lean is less than 8 inches to anyone’s hands. The facilitator should stand behind any spotter that she/he feels might need additional support. Make sure the person in the center is not panicky and that they are comfortable communicating their needs.

Group Lift is an activity where the group lifts each willing participant off of the ground and up into the air. This is recommended for highly functional groups dedicated to each member’s safety.

Ask participants to stand in a tight circle in the spotting stance, just as they did in *Willow in the Wind*. A volunteer steps to the center of the circle and assumes the leaning stance. Using the same communication system, the volunteer leans back. This time, the spotter directly behind the volunteer lowers the upper body and the rest of the participants move in under the body with both hands, lifting the volunteer into the air (using their legs, not their backs). The volunteer should only be lifted as high as the shortest person’s arms in the group can reach. Make sure that one member of the spotting team supports the head and neck region at all times. After a brief time, spotters lower volunteers to the ground feet first, and support them until they are standing in a comfortable position.

Additional Safety Concerns

1. Make sure that all volunteers understand what is required, and have no preexisting back problems that may be aggravated by this activity.
2. Make sure the person leaning has an opportunity to position spotters as they feel fit (e.g., who touches where and who carries the greatest weight).
3. Make sure there are a sufficient number of participants to do this safely (generally 8–10 for every person being lifted).

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Reflection

Trust is a valuable factor in developing relationships and moving through conflict more easily and quickly.

Discover

- What factors are important in building trust? Which ones surfaced during this activity?
- Trust is built in small steps, and it is developed over time. How did this occur in this activity?
- What did support look like in this activity and how did it contribute to your success?

Connect

- What communication skills added trust during this activity? Where are these skills used at work or in life?
- In situations of conflict, what role does support from others play in the resolution of the conflict? What does it specifically look, sound, or feel like?
- When have you had support in your life? Describe this support.
- When have you supported someone and what did you experience while giving support?

Create

- How can you bring more trust and support into your life?
- What can you do to create a more trusting environment?

Additional Topics to Explore

- Sometimes, getting others to trust us may be difficult. It may have *nothing* to do with our ability to be there for

them and *everything* to do with the other person's fear.

- Past experiences, all the way from childhood, form the foundation for trust.
- Sometimes, we may not be sure we can support someone, but we are willing to risk doing so. When we discover how easy it is, our anxiety diminishes.
- How much easier is it to support a person when a whole team pulls together to do so?
- When there is only one person supporting you, it is a much bigger risk than when the whole team is there for you.
- Some projects cannot be supported by only one person. If it is supported by only a few people, it may cause great strain on the individuals or the system. When a whole team or organization comes together to support an initiative, the initiative seems to fly effortlessly.

Facilitation Note

These activities should be done before doing any activity where spotting is needed. This allows participants to help keep one another safe and establishes a shared language that the facilitator can use when spotting is needed. If participants show true panic or are unable to lean even partially in any of these activities, the facilitator should consider it a "red flag." Trust for such a person is a *major* issue, and it may surface as an obstacle in other activities.

Group Lift also serves to show a group how to "carry" and pass a person as a team. This is useful when doing some low ropes-course initiatives.