

VOV ACTIVITIES

Preventing Feelings of Isolation Through Trust and Cooperation Grades 7-12

Bean Jar

Purpose: To introduce consensus decision-making.

Time: 45 minutes.

Materials: A jar filled with beans which have been counted by facilitators.

Directions: Set the jar of beans in a place where all participants can see it, or pass it around the circle for everyone to examine. Have each person estimate the number of beans in the jar. Record the estimates in a column on newsprint. Form pairs, and ask the pairs to agree on an estimate. Encourage people to share their reasoning with each other as they come to a joint decision. Record the estimates for the pairs in a second column. Have the pairs join into fours and ask them to repeat the process of sharing their reasoning and coming to a new estimate. Continue to have the groups merge, come to a joint decision, and record the estimates until the entire group reaches a joint consensus.

Tell the group the actual number of beans in the jar and compare it with estimates. Debrief the activity. You may ask, "How did group decision making help the process" and "What are the advantages and disadvantages of this type of decision making?"

Notes: This activity works well as a lead to making a group decision about what topics to cover in a VOV workshop.

Source: Nancy Schniedewind and Ellen Davidson, Open Minds to Equality. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1983.

Lap Sit

Purpose: To build trust and accomplish a task as a group.

Time: 5-10 minutes.

Materials: Just people.

Directions: Gather the group in a circle, standing shoulder to shoulder. Ask them to turn so that their left shoulder is on the inside of the circle. They will now be behind the person who was on their right. Then ask them to tighten the circle by taking one or two steps towards the center. Ask participants to put their hands on the shoulder of the person in front of them. When directed, they lower themselves slowly onto the lap of the person behind them. Make sure the group maintains a circle, not an oval; this makes it easier to land on the

lap behind each person. After they sit for a minute, direct them to stand at the same time.

Notes: As with other trust exercises, make sure that the group is ready for this activity.

This activity works well as a closing activity, towards the middle or end of the VOV workshop.

River Crossing

Purpose: To work together.

Time: 20 minutes.

Materials: Two pieces of rope. Pieces of paper 8 ½ x 11 or larger.

Directions: Lay down the two pieces of rope on opposite sides of the room, to represent the shores of a river. Ask all of the participants to stand on one “shore” and give them the “floatation devices” (pieces of paper). Explain that their challenge is to cross the river and get the whole group to the other shore. This river is very cold and very fast. You can’t swim through it. Here are the rules for crossing:

- The only way to cross the river is to step on floatation devices.
- Once a float is laid down, a participant must be touching the float at all times.
- If you lose contact with the float, it will be “carried away with the current.” In other words, it will be removed by the facilitator.
- You can’t slide the floats forward; you can only place them in the water. You may lift them and place them in a new spot.
- More than one person can be on a float at once.
- If anyone falls into the water, that person has to return to the shore and begin again.

If participants lose contact with a float, remove the paper.

Notes: It isn’t helpful to be extremely vigilant about taking away floats that no one is holding, at least not at first. It takes a few minutes for the group to understand the rules and create a strategy. You may want to give the group some practice time, without removing any floats, and then start the game for real.

Source: Adapted from William J. Kreidler and Lisa Furlong, *Adventures in Peacemaking*. Cambridge, MA: Educators for Social Responsibility/Work Family Directions, 1995.

Shelter From The Storm

- Purpose:** To work cooperatively towards a common goal.
- Time:** 40-60 minutes.
- Materials:** Lots of newspaper (a pile one foot high for each small group). Masking tape (one roll per small group).
- Directions:** Divide the participants into small groups. Give each group a pile of newspaper, approximately one foot high and a roll of masking tape. Explain that they must build a free-standing structure that the whole group can fit under. They have a few minutes to plan how they will do it, but once they start to build, they cannot talk.
- Debrief by asking what it was like for each person, what they think the point was, and what it has to do with real life. Ask what gets in the way of working together. This is a good opportunity to explore leadership. For example, you might ask, "If everyone follows the ideas of one person and it doesn't work out, whose fault is it?" Try to bring out in the discussion the point that good leadership is collective.
- Variations:** You may want to build the scene by telling participants that they are on an island in the sun. Walls are not essential, but you need a roof to keep the sun out.
- Notes:** If participants struggle for 40 minutes and are unsuccessful in making a shelter, they may feel disappointed, frustrated or have a sense of failure. Think ahead of time about how to deal with these feelings.

Snowball Decision-Making

- Purpose:** To use consensus to reach a decision about what to cover in the VOV workshop.
- Time:** 45 minutes.
- Materials:** Just people.
- Directions:** Explain to the group that in a VOV workshop, participants can begin by using consensus to decide what the workshop will focus on. Explain the guidelines for consensus decision-making.
- In consensus decision-making, we share our ideas, learn from one another and find a solution that everyone is satisfied with, not a win/lose solution.
 - Share your ideas, but avoid arguing for your side.
 - Explore the differences within the group.
 - Be creative.
 - Be open to changing your mind, but don't do so to avoid conflict.

- If there is an impasse, individuals can “stand aside.” This means that they do not agree with the decisions being made, but they won’t “block” it. “Blocking,” or preventing the group from making a decision, is usually reserved for decisions which are morally offensive to an individual.

Let the group know what topics you are prepared to build an agenda around.

This activity follows the basic procedure outlined in the Bean Jar activity. In this case, the steps are:

1. Ask participants to individually select a theme.
2. Divide participants into groups of four or five to share their selections and come to consensus on one topic.
3. Have the each group report their chosen topic to the whole group.
4. Choose 1-3 topics to cover as a whole group.

Debriefing:

- Was it hard to come to a consensus?
- What helped the groups come to a decision?
- Were you comfortable with the outcome?

Tinker Toy Construction

Purpose: To work cooperatively toward a common goal.

To develop nonverbal communication skills.

Time: 25 minutes.

Materials: One Tinker Toy set for each small group.

Directions: Divide the participants into small groups of 4 to 6 and let each group find a working area. Give each group a set of Tinker Toys.

Explain the procedures: “This is a cooperative building project. The Tinker Toys are the building materials. Each group will have five minutes to discuss the project, decide what to build, and plan how to coordinate the building. During this period, you may talk to each other, but you may not open the Tinker Toy boxes. You may look at the models suggested for building, or you may build something of your own design. At the end of five minutes, I will call “time.” You may then open the boxes and begin to build, but from then on, you may no longer talk. You may communicate in other ways.”

To debrief, ask each small group:

- Did you build what you planned to build?
- If not, what modifications were necessary? How did you communicate about these?

- Did everyone participate in the same way? Why did it happen this way?

Ask the whole group:

- How did it feel to do this exercise?
- Did you learn anything?

Variations: Build a bridge: Have the participants use the Tinker Toys to build a bridge.

Trust Circle

Purpose: To build trust within the group.

Time: 10 minutes.

Materials: Just people.

Directions: Stand close together in a circle and ask for a volunteer to stand in the center. The other participants stand in a circle, with their hands held out in front of them. The person in the center, with eyes closed and arms crossed over his/her chest, leans back and is supported by several people. The group gently passes the center person around the circle several times. Give several (or all) people a chance to be in the center.

Variations: With a large number of participants, form two trust circles, with one facilitator coaching each group.

Notes: As with other trust exercises, make sure that the group is ready for this activity. This activity requires that the group be serious, not playful. If participants aren't focusing, stop the activity.

Trust Walk

Purpose: To build trust.

Time: 10 minutes.

Materials: Just people.

Directions: Get into pairs. One person closes their eyes. The other person gently guides them around the room, trying to give them varied experiences (different textures, spaces, etc.), being very aware of safety. Have the pairs leave the room, go up stairs, outside, etc. Halfway through the "tour," have the pairs switch roles. Encourage the pairs to talk through the tour. Have the person with closed eyes hold on to the arm of their guide, just about the elbow.

Variations: Blindfolds.

Notes: As with other trust exercises, make sure that the group is ready for this activity.

Yurt Circle

Purpose: To demonstrate how each person supports the whole.

To build trust.

Time: 10 minutes.

Materials: An even number of participants.

Directions: Form a circle, standing shoulder to shoulder and holding hands. Count off by twos, ones calling out "Forward" and twos calling out "Back." Explain that when you count to three, the "forwards" will lean in towards the center of the circle, and the "backs" will lean backwards, with everyone keeping their feet in place and supporting themselves with their grasped hands. See how far you can lean. Count to three, and switch directions. Now the "Backs" will be leaning in and the "Forwards" leaning out.

Variations: A very cooperative group can try to switch back and forth in rhythm.

Notes: The name is derived from the Mongolian nomad's tent which stands because the roof is pushing against the walls in equilibrium.

Source: Adapted from New Games Book.