



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 each other in what appears to be an impossible task. Group members twist and turn themselves to frustration, and find that a little creative thinking will do the trick.

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 and Key Points

- Have every group member find a partner. Ask partners to connect with each other 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 each other. Participants can and should share information with each other, but don't prompt them to do so. See if they will share information naturally.
- Provide hints when your group is struggling. Start by saying 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.

Safety

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

Variation

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 brain-teasers that you can take some time to explore. Here are some questions.

1. **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?*
2. **Discover:** *How many of you thought it couldn't be done, or said to yourself, "I am not good at these brain teasers?"*
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?*



Activity: Hands Are Tied

Sample Story

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.

Refer to *Experiential Ed. Background* in the Resources section of your *Inspire! Team Building & Group Development* CD-ROM for information about our **Discover, Connect, and Create** reflection approach.