

# GROUP INITIATIVES COURSE

## EDWARDS CAMP AND CONFERENCE CENTER

### **SUMMARY**

Students will participate as a team to overcome physical obstacles that represent environmental issues and concepts. Each obstacle requires group effort and problem solving skills to be completed, and helps promote team building and communication. Group discussion concentrating on cooperation and communication skills will follow each activity.

**OBJECTIVES:** Upon completion of this lesson students will...

- be able to communicate in group situations effectively and in a positive manner.
- be able to recognize that there is diversity within their own group and that it is beneficial.
- be able to recognize the different roles team members including themselves play, and the importance of each.
- be more aware of environmental issues and concepts.
- be able to state at least one positive and negative effect humans have on the environment.
- be able to give at least one example of how trust, teamwork and cooperation between people can solve environmental problems.

**MATERIALS:** Blindfolds may be needed for some of the stations

### **INTRODUCTION**

Gather the students together in a circle. (Run all discussions for these activities in a circle so that everyone can see and have an equal opportunity to participate.) Explain that they will be participating in activities where the entire group must work as a team to solve a specific problem. Some of the activities will be more physically oriented, others will be more mentally challenging. In any case, stress to them that the goal or most important thing is to work together and help each other. It may be beneficial to set up other guidelines such as no put downs or negative actions taken towards each other. Sometimes it is helpful to warn the students that they may become very frustrated. That way they will be more aware of their reactions in that situation. As part of the instructions, let them know that after each activity they will discuss how things went. Knowing this ahead of time helps the students focus on discussion questions.

### **WARM-UP ACTIVITIES**

Pick one or two of the following to help get the kids started before trying any of the physical obstacles or stations. Good spots for these activities are in the athletic field or in the opening by the lower parking lot. Some processing should be done after the warm-up activities as to what did and did not work.

#### **The Cycle of Nature**

Have the group form a hand in hand circle. Have one person pick a natural object (plant, animal, ect.) Then each consecutive person must pick another natural object that the person they are connected to depends on. Be sure the last persons choice is dependent on the objects on both sides of them (for example most things are dependent on water.)

Tell the students you would like them to rotate clockwise 360° in one direction then return 360° back to the start. The attempt can be timed. Time is stopped if anyone breaks his/her grip with their partner. Assign approximately 1 second per player, subtracting an additional second for every ten participants. Markers (sweatshirts) can be placed at both 6 o'clock & 12 o'clock inside the circle, for boundaries to rotate around, and reference points for start and finish. For increased difficulty, ask the group to begin sitting and finish in that position. The clock is stopped when the last person sits down.

### **Body English**

Half the group will try to spell out the name of a plant or animal using their bodies. They cannot form the letters using their fingers or hands. The other half of the group must decipher what the first group is trying to say. The groups will switch roles half way, so each gets a chance to participate.

### **Hog Call**

Have each student find a partner, then have each person pick an animal name that they will call out. (In a partnership the words should match eg: BALD and EAGLE). Ask everyone to call out their names to make sure you have no doubles in names.

Move the partners to opposite ends of the room/field, then tell them they will be blindfolded during the activity, at which time they will WALK around with their hands out in front, palms out, calling out their name. The object is for them to find their partner and then once found to find out what they can about their partner.

### **Leading the Group Initiatives Course**

There are 11 stations in this course. They have been set up into three groups ranging from less challenging (group A), to moderate (group B), to most challenging (group C). Most groups can expect to accomplish between 2-4 obstacles in 1 1/4 hours depending on the obstacles and the group. The course has been designed to allow several groups access at once. Please be prepared to share the course with another group while at camp.

To begin an element, give the students the problem and the parameters they have in which to solve the problem. Then give them all the safety instructions. Tell them that you may stop them periodically and change things if you feel what they are doing is unsafe. If at any time you feel your group is not ready to handle a specific obstacle, go to something different. Safety should always be the primary consideration. Although you do not have to do the obstacles in any specific order, it is recommended that you start with the easier activities first if possible.

You also need to establish your role with the students. You are the facilitator. It is your job to help make sure the students stay on task and do not get hurt. You may need to help them identify why they are having difficulty. If a group is arguing too much or just not getting anywhere, you may need to stop them and help them get back on track. They often will not realize what they are doing wrong. They need someone to help them discover that everyone is talking and no one is listening rather than someone to tell them that the tall people should go first. This will probably be the hardest thing for you as facilitators.

You can facilitate as an observer or as a participant. Many people like to participate because it allows the students to see you in a different light. However, if you participate, you must resist all temptations to give solutions to the problem. You may only do what the students ask you to.

Some groups may never correctly complete an obstacle. Help them to keep the goals in mind. It is more important that they work together, and learn how to improve their group interactions, than to solve a specific obstacle. Sometimes it is best to stop them and finish with a discussion and move on to a new one than continue with one that is causing the group too much frustration.

Each activity is written up with a discussion that outlines questions that help process the activity and lead in to discussion about the environmental concept. Use the time after each activity to process it. This is where much of the learning and understanding of how and why things did or did not work takes place. Discuss the specific situations that arise relative to your group.

### **GROUP INITIATIVES ACTIVITIES:**

#### **Group A Station 1: The Diversity of Life (or Spider Web)**

**Objective:** Get every member of the group through the web without touching the ropes

**Environmental Scenario:** You are a group of moths, trying to pass through a spider's web without getting stuck. Once you use a hole you may not use it again. Place a clothespin on the edge of each hole as you use it so you can keep track. If any moth touches the web, the **WHOLE** group must start over, so remember to communicate and work together. Also, emphasize that all sizes of people are needed to lift and spot as well as to fit through the different sized holes.



**Discussion:** What is diversity? Why was it important for this challenge? Are plants and animals diverse? When someone touched the string on the web did it effect the rest of the web in any way? How is nature as delicate as this spider web? (The diversity of nature is very delicate, and all parts of it - animals, plants, and whole ecosystems - must co-exist together in order for nature to function and survive.) Is nature as easily effected as this spider web? How? (Yes-if part of a habitat is changed or dies, other animals and plants may not be able to adapt. They will either die or disappear if the resources that they have evolved to depend upon disappear. If those species die, even more will continue to suffer because all the species in a habitat depend on each other for survival.) What about humans? Is it good to have many different kinds of people? **YES!!!!**

**Safety:** Every student in the group must be a spotter for this activity, due to the risk that someone may be dropped as they are passed through a hole. Be sure to protect the head, neck and back of the person you are passing. Also, remember that a person's head must be higher than their feet as they are being passed through the web. Do not allow anyone to dive through holes in the web or over the top.

## Group A Station 2: The Wolf Pack

**Objective:** To move the group from behind the 2x4 board to the platform, using the tire swing.

**Environmental Situation:** You are all two week old wolf pups. Your den (home) is in danger due to heavy rains, and you are too young to care for or move yourselves. The Alpha female wolf (your mother), and other wolves in the pack will carry you to a new safer den. Using the Alpha Wolf tire swing, all of the young wolf pups must get safely from the 2x4 board (your old den) to the new den on the platform. If you touch the ground you must start over. Or for a greater lesson in group communication, have the whole group start over anytime a person touches the ground. (This can make it take awhile!).



**Discussion:** Think of some animals that do not take any part in raising their young (turtles, frogs, salmon, butterflies). Now think of some animals that care for their young for an extended period after birth (humans, wolves, ducks, raccoons, deer, possums). Why might it be important for the Alpha wolf to take such good care of her young? What would that do for the wolf family (the pack)? Why is the pack important for wolf survival? (Wolf packs usually have from 5-10 members at any time, led by the strongest male, the Alpha wolf . The pack is a tightly knit, organized group. Wolves depend on the pack for hunting, defending territory, and raising their young. In fact, wolves are some of the best animal parents in the world.). What kinds of dangers do newborn creatures face? (Starvation, predation, exposure to bad weather) Which animals have more babies, those that spend more time raising their young or those that never even see their offspring born? (Those that never see their offspring) Why? (Those that do not play any role in raising their young have more babies in order to insure that some will survive. Animals that spend time raising their young will be able to help protect, feed, and teach their young and thus increase their chance of survival.)

**Safety:** Only one person on the tire swing at a time. Make sure people on the platform are paying attention to the swinging tire so no one is accidentally kicked or hit by a person swinging across.

## Group A Station 3: The Balance of Nature

**Objective:** With roughly an equal number of students seated or standing (use spotters to help watch people on ends that stand for safety) on each side of the balance beam, maintain a level position for as long as the group can. A good goal time is about 10 seconds.



**Environmental Scenario:** In nature a strong balance exists between animals that are predators, and their prey. Each depends on the other for survival. Have the students decide where and how these two sides can exist together in a “balance of nature”. As students get on to the beam one at a time have them name a predator if they get on the right side or a prey animal on the left side.

**Discussion:** Was it easy to make your group balance? What would happen if one person was removed from the log while you were balancing? Do you think nature works in the same way? What would happen if a predator or a prey animal were removed from nature (due to extinction or a rapid decrease in population). (Some predators would starve if prey was removed and some prey would starve if there weren't enough predators around to control their populations.) If you have time, go over different types of predators and prey animals and how they create a balance with each other.

**Safety:** Keep fingers and toes away from the pivot point in the middle of the log and the ends where it rests on the supports, to avoid injuries. Do not allow students to jump on or off the log at any time.

### **Group B Station 4: Toxic River**

**Objective:** To get your WHOLE group from one end of the element to the other by balancing on the posts provided.

**Environmental Scenario:** Your group is a bunch of Blanding's Turtles, a threatened species here in Wisconsin. You prefer to live in marshes or near lakes and rivers. The river you currently live near, however, has been contaminated with toxic waste from the factory upstream and you have to find a new home. It is your job to get all the nearby Blanding's Turtles across the river without touching the toxic waste. To move from post to post you can only cross on the 2x4's when they are in the groves. Because you are a threatened species, that means you could become endangered or even extinct if any of you fall into the toxic river. If one turtle touches the river you must all start over, so be sure to work together. This activity can be made more difficult, by blindfolding some of the students or not allowing anyone to talk.



**Discussion:** What is an endangered species? (An animal or plant species whose population is so low they are in jeopardy of becoming extinct.) Can you name some? Why do animals become endangered or go extinct? What happens to an animals habitat if it is polluted by chemicals? What are adaptations? (Physical or behavioral characteristics that allow a plant or animal to survive). Give some examples of adaptations (not just for turtles). What adaptations does a turtle have that could allow it to survive the toxic river?

**Safety:** This activity should not be used if the posts or boards are icy or deemed to be too dangerous due to weather. Watch out for students who may be swinging planks to move from post to post.

### **Group B Station 5: Don't Fence Me In**

**Objective:** Get everyone outside of the fence without going under or touching it.

**Environmental Scenario:** Your group is a herd of elk that inhabit the forest. The fence represents obstacles created by human activity like roads, fences, and buildings that hinder migration between wintering and breeding grounds, and diminish the amount of inhabitable land. You have to figure out how to get out before you starve. Only one person at a time may leave the fenced in area and you may only go over the top of the fence (real fences go all the way to the ground!) To make the activity more or less difficult, you may adjust the height of the fence.



**Discussion:** Why will the elk have trouble surviving if they are confined within a certain space? What are the 5 resources that they need to survive? (Food, water, shelter, air, space) Do you think that this actually happens to animals? (Roads, fences, highways, houses, parking lots and dams are all human-made obstructions that fragment and disturb an animal's habitat. More development of the land will mean that more and more animals will need to search for a new place to live or enough resources to survive.) What can we humans do to help prevent this from happening?

**Safety:** Be careful when lifting students over the fence line. Spotters must be used at all times. Do not allow anyone to dive, or be thrown over the fence. Also, you may not climb the trees to jump over the fence.

### **Group B Station 6: Going, Going...Gone**

**Objective:** To get the whole group balanced onto each of the platforms for at least 10 seconds.

**Environmental Scenario:** You are a group of animals that uses wetlands as your habitat (i.e.: ducks, turtles, raccoons, frogs, etc.) Developers have been draining wetlands all over the country in order to build homes, and create agricultural land. Your habitat is quickly disappearing, and your home is becoming increasingly crowded. To demonstrate this, the whole group will start by trying to balance together on the largest (3'x3') platform. Since your habitat is decreasing you must now try the same thing on the middle platform and finally on the smallest (1'x1') platform.



**Discussion:** How difficult was it when you started on the larger platform? What happened as the group tried balancing on even smaller platforms? In most states in the Midwest, 70-99% of the wetlands have been drained and used for building houses, roads, towns and farms. Why do animals need wetlands? What problems do loss of habitat and overcrowding pose on the environment? What are the 5 things all living things need to survive? (Plants and animals compete for

diminishing resources and many will die out because there is simply not enough - food, water, shelter, air or space - for everything to survive.) Many birds use wetlands as stopovers during migration because wetlands are abundant sources of all these resources.

**Safety:** Leaders may need to help spot groups on the platform in case the whole group begins to fall off. Inform students that if they begin to fall they should let go of other people to prevent them from falling too. Do not allow students to lay on platform, sit on each others shoulders or backs (no “piggy backs”), or stack people.

### **Group B Station 7: Migration**

**Objective:** To have the group get from the smaller platform, to the larger platform without touching the ground. The whole group must finish on the final platform together.

**Environmental Scenario:** The group is a bunch of warblers that are migrating from Wisconsin to the tropics for the winter. They must travel thousands of miles over the ocean, and along the way they may stop at islands to rest. Each platform represents a rest spot-but don't let the group rest too long, you have to get south before it gets too cold or you run out of energy! Using the plank provided, all the warblers must move from island to island without falling off. If anyone touches the ground, that person must start over. To make the activity more challenging for the group, have everyone start over if any person touches the ground. Your final destination is the largest platform at the end. You must get the whole group to balance on that platform at once to complete this activity. No one may step off the platform until the whole group has migrated over the islands and balanced on the platform.



**Discussion:** What are some other types of migratory birds? (ducks, geese, herons, robins, hummingbirds, and egrets). Why do birds migrate? (They migrate to look for food. They fly to their wintering grounds in the south, and will return to their breeding grounds again in spring.) How does a migrating bird know where to go? (They follow highways in the sky called flyways. They navigate their way by using a variety of clues such as topographic features, the stars, the sun, the Earth's magnetic field, and their sense of smell.) What dangers do birds face while they are migrating? (The biggest danger is sudden storms, which may blow birds off course. Human-made dangers include electric lines, tall buildings, lighthouses, glass windows, and television and radio antennas. These human obstacles actually kill a large number of migrating birds every year, and are jeopardizing the survival of many species.)

**Safety:** Leaders may need to help spot people on the platforms in case there is a large number of people balancing at one time (especially the large platform at the end). Inform students that if they begin to fall they should let go of other people to prevent them from falling too. Do not allow students to lay on platform, sit on each others shoulders or backs (no “piggy backs”), or stack people. Warn students to be careful not to hit anyone when moving the plank around.

**Group C Station 9: Interdependence** \*\*\*Not a good activity for young students (6th grade or younger), if not done properly students can get very hurt.\*\*\*



**Objective:** To build and demonstrate group trust by falling backward into arms of spotters standing on ground.

**Environmental Scenario:** As the human population continues to increase, and more and more resources are used and/or misused, some resources will begin to run out. For example our fossil fuels are expected to, within the next 200 years, be virtually depleted, and it will be very expensive to recover the few remaining. To demonstrate how important it is that we have all these resources in place, the person who will do the falling will represent the human population of the Earth. Those on the ground, doing the catching, represent different resources (you may have the students pick which resources they feel are necessary for survival).

**Faller:** Choose one person to be the Faller (You may want to choose a smaller person first, as a warm up). The Faller must stand on the platform with his/her feet together and heels placed on the edge facing the Catchers. Faller must secure hands to prevent flailing arms or elbows from hitting the Catchers. This is best accomplished if Faller crosses arms over chest and grabs a piece of clothing to keep hands from letting go. Explain to the Faller that he/she must keep body rigid, with chin up and arms crossed when falling. The Faller should envision being straight as a tree while falling, so that he/she does not bend at the waist or sit down.

**Leader:** Check the Faller for any sharp objects such as jewelry or key rings that may cause injury. The Leader should stand on the ground facing the Faller on the platform, and be able to see the rows of Catchers clearly. The Leader needs to help the Faller visualize keeping his/her body straight and rigid.

**Catchers:** The Catchers should form two lines facing each other, and stand shoulder to shoulder with their heads back and turned to face the Faller on the platform. Catchers should stand with knees bent and strong leg back to absorb the shock of the Faller. To establish proper positioning, Catchers should extend their arms, turn palms upward, and touch elbows and thumbs with the people on either side of them. Each Catcher should have the hands of two different people between their own. (See diagram below)

Before the Faller falls, a verbal contract of trust and commitment must be made between the Faller and Catchers. This ensures that everybody is ready, and understands their responsibilities for each others' safety. The following commands work well for this exercise:

Faller: Spotters are you ready?

Spotters: Ready!

Faller: Falling!

Spotters: Fall on!

After catching the Faller, Catchers should hold the person for a moment so they may complete the experience and then slowly lower the Faller to the ground feet first.

**Discussion:** Why was it important for every catcher to be properly positioned and ready before anyone fell? What would happen if one of the catchers wasn't paying attention during the fall? The faller was depending on all of the catchers to catch him/her, and if even one person was not there, the faller could have landed on the ground. Now think of different resources that you depend on every day, for example water, heat, electricity, food, etc. What do those things come from (groundwater, oil, fossil fuels, plants, animals, lakes, rivers, etc.) Now consider what would happen if one of those resources ran out. Pick one or two and discuss the consequences. If humans continue to use resources at the rate that we are using them now, do you think they will last forever? Currently the United States consumes more energy resources than it produces, and as the human population in the U.S. continues to increase, so will the rate at which our resources are used up. What are some things you can do to conserve our resources?

**Safety:** Carefully follow the instructions for Fallers, Catchers and Leader as outlined above. If at any time the group begins to get silly and is not taking the activity seriously, do not continue. If anyone states they are uncomfortable being the faller, or says they do not trust the spotters in the group, that person should not fall. ALWAYS make sure the platform is safe and not slippery due to water or ice!

### **Group C Station 10: The Circle of Life**

**Objective:** To get each member of the team over the wall and safely back onto the ground.

**Environmental Scenario:** You are all about to experience the life cycle of a typical plant. The soil you are standing on below the wall gives you many of the nutrients you need to grow as well as the water that keeps you alive. The other students standing around you represent those many nutrients. One at a time, your group must figure out how to get each individual over the top of the wall. In that way the "nutrients" are helping you grow. Once a student has reached the top, he or she may stay there to help the next person up over the wall. In this way, he or she represents the sun, air, and rain that helps nourish all plant-life. As soon as one other person gets to the top, the previous person must climb down the ladder to the ground (only one or two people may help from the top at a time). To complete the flow of energy, the person returning to the ground represents a plant that has died and is decomposing back into the soil. As a decomposing plant, this person is helping other plants grow by returning nutrients to the soil, so once a person has come down from the wall they must help spot other students that are being helped over. To keep the course challenging, the students that have already climbed the wall and come back down may not help "boost" other students over. They may only help spot in case someone falls off the wall.



**Discussion:** What do all living things need to survive? (Resources: Food, water, shelter, air, space) Where do plants get their resources from? (Food = sunlight, air, nutrients in the soil; Water = groundwater, rain, moisture in the air; Shelter = rock outcrops or larger plants may provide shade or protection from wind; Air = Carbon dioxide; Space = the amount of space needed depends on the

type of plant.) Review how all of these resources combine into a flow of energy that sustains the plant. How is a plant's life like a cycle? Name some plants that you come across or use in your daily life (fruits, vegetables, wildflowers, trees, shrubs, flower gardens) In what ways are plants important for the Earth? (provide oxygen, food, shelter, control erosion, aesthetically pleasing, paper, clothing). What will happen to humans if we do not protect plant-life, including forests, prairies and marshes?

**Safety:** Check for slippery conditions! Spotting is very important. This means all students on the ground should have their eyes and hands up to watch the climber and protect both themselves and the person climbing. No props may be used for getting over the wall (i.e.: belts, logs, jackets, etc.)

**Group C Station 11: Eagles Nest (located near the climbing tower)** \*\*\*There are two different heights, use the one most appropriate for your group\*\*\*

**Objective:** To remove (or place back on) the tire from the pole without the tire ever touching the pole.

**Environmental Scenario:** Eagles need to have their nests very high up in the highest of trees or mounting peaks. Help the eagles get there nest to safe spot by removing (or adding) the tire from the pole without disturbing (touching the pole) the natural surroundings.

**Discussion:** What did you like about this activity? What posed the biggest challenge "threat" to your success in this activity, was it a natural or un-natural threat? Now that you have finished the activity, what could you have done to make it even more successful, if anything?



**Safety:** Sitting on someone's shoulders is fine, as long as there is two spotters for every one person off the ground. However, as soon as there are feet, lifted or rested above the shoulder lines of someone who is on the ground, it is no longer safe. A good rule of thumb is one and half persons high, ok, two persons high, not ok.

**Station 12: Animal Talk (located by low ropes course shelter)**

**Objective:** To get the group to practice working together and communicating while moving the trolleys from the beginning to the end of a given space.

**Environmental Scenario:** Have the students pick an animal and imagine that they are that animal. Mark off a start and a finish line and tell the students that they must figure out how to get themselves across that distance by moving on the trolleys. Emphasize the need to communicate, but point out that they may only "talk" the way their chosen animal talks. (For example, geese honk and fly in formation). They may not talk to each other using human words or signals,

however they may make up their own animal signals for LEFT, RIGHT, GO, STOP, etc. Let them decide upon these signals themselves.

The trolleys should be kept in the study station by the ropes course and can be used at most any point of the course. Most groups should start with students trying the 8ft. trolleys. Then consider trying the 16ft. if your group is working together well. Groups having more difficulty may want to try using the short trolleys. The more people on a set of trolleys the more difficult it is. To make this activity more challenging, tell the group they may not make any noise.

**Discussion:** How difficult was it to communicate with each other? Did everyone follow the signals correctly? Do all animals talk when they need to communicate? What are some other ways animals communicate? Name some animals and the ways in which they communicate.

### **FINAL WRAP-UP**

Be sure to save at least five minutes for this. Gather the group in a circle to process what happened. Discuss the group's teamwork, cooperation, communication, the importance of leaders and followers, and how everybody played different and important roles. Touch on peoples roles with the environment.

*Revised 11/5/08*