

Knot Exchange

"Knot Exchange" is a problem-solving activity that work well for a group of 12 or more.

Purpose: Create a tangle of rope in the middle of a team and then see how quickly another team can undo it. Allows for great discussions of how one team makes a mess and another team has to clean it up.

Props Needed: One 5-foot rope or cord for each pair of people in the room

Directions: Figure out the group size that you want beforehand. Ideally, every team will have six or eight people in it. If there are an odd number of people, one person can grab two ends of the rope instead of one.

Lay three or four ropes on the ground in an asterisk formation for each group. Divide participants into groups of six, and have each group form a circle around an asterisk of rope.

Instruct the group that you would like everyone to grab one end of a rope, lift it off the ground, and hold on to it. Have them imagine that the rope is now superglued to their hand. In other words, they may not let go of the rope or break contact with the rope.

Tell the group that when you say, "Go" you want them to take two minutes to make the biggest tangle of rope in the middle of their team. The more you weave it, the bigger and more tangled it will be.

After two minutes are up, ask the group to carefully lay their rope ends back on the ground and let go of the ropes. Now everyone should move to a new area and pick up the ends of the ropes of another team. Wait until you give them the signal before they begin untangling their mess. You can have this be a competition to see who can untangle the mess the fastest. The rules about the superglued hands are still in effect.

Variations:

- Ask people to close their eyes. It is possible; it just takes longer to untangle.
- Use much longer cord. Everything starts looking like a May Pole event without the pole. People also may tie real knots in the cords since the cords are longer.

Debriefing Topics:

- Tell me about the teamwork you used to untangle this mess.
- What was your reaction when we switched to a new tangle of rope?
- What was it like making a mess compared to undoing someone else's mess?
- How is this activity like solving a conflict between two co-workers?
- Have you ever witnessed a conflict begin because you were constantly cleaning up someone else's mess?

Where to find it/How to make it: You can make this out of any type of rope. We recommend clothesline or other small rope that comes in multiple colors.

Source: Sam Sikes, DoingWorks, www.doingworks.com