GROUP INITIATIVES AND LOW ROPES COURSE CHALLENGES

ALL ABOARD
TASK: Group members must devise a way to share space on a series of low, nested platforms, ranging in size from nine square feet to one square foot. Everyone’s feet must be off the ground and on the platform. The group must hold this position for a prescribed period of time.
Element: Constructed of treated lumber, the 3 platforms nest inside one another, measuring 3x3, 2x2, and 1x1.

ANTS ON A LOG
Task: Standing on a log in two groups, each group facing the midpoint of the log, participants must arrange for each group to switch places on the log without allowing anyone to step down to the ground.
Element: Constructed from treated beams resting on base stands or built with a Class III utility pole. Can be portable or permanently installed.

BAG OF TRICKS
Includes: 1 sturdy duffle, 10 hula hoops, 6 tennis balls, 12 misc. throwables, 10 Raging River boards (6”x8”x12”), 24 bandanas, 1-50’ turnstile rope, 1-50’ length tubular webbing, 2-50; boundary markers, 1 Key Punch set, 4 Wing Nut sets, 1 Mondrian puzzle, 1 portable Spider Web, 1 Jumpshot, 1 Tangrams Puzzle, 1 Toxic Waste Retrieval kit, 1 Gutterball Set, 1 Carpet Maze, 1 portable rope swing (rope + setup kit), 1 portable Treasure Island kit, one 6-person Trolley set, 1 All Aboard set, 1 portable Croc Pit set, 1 Helium Pole, 8 Prisoner Sets, Elements: 1 All Aboard set, 1 Ants on a Log, 1 Croc Pit, 1 Disk Jockeys, 1 sunken Muse, 1 Rebirth, 1 Treasure Island, two 6-person Trolley set, 1 Spider Web, 1 Trust Fall platform, 1 Group Wall, 1 Whale Watch, 1 Mohawk Walk, 1 Triangle Traverse, 1 King’s Finger.

Other activities that can be led with props from the kit: Prisoner, Wing-It, Peanut Butter River, Monster, Tennis Ball Manufacturing, Warp Speed, Group Juggle, Great Divide, Gems, Willow-in-the-Wind, and many more.
15-Element Teams Course
CARPET MAZE
Task: Through trial and error, the group must find their way through an invisible maze represented by a piece of carpet on which a six-foot by nine-foot grid has been laid out. The facilitator holds a diagram of the route but does not show it to the group.
Element: Designed for durability and portability.

CROC PIT
Task: Group members must construct a bridge over a stretch of ground approximately eight feet wide. The deck of the bridge must rest above the beginning and ending lines, which are suspended six to eight inches above the ground. All group members must cross over the bridge and pass under a finish line suspended about four feet above the ground. Available construction equipment includes 2 milk crates, a 2” x 12” plank eight feet long, another 2” x 12” board four feet long, a 2” x 4” board four feet long, and a broom handle. Once everyone has crossed under the finish line, the bridge must be dismantled and brought across as well.
Element: Permanently attached to trees or posts or made portable with indoor/outdoor base stands for boundary lines.

GIANT TANGRAMS
Task: Members of the group must arrange a set of geometric shapes to match the silhouette provided by the facilitator. Shapes may not overlap. Each member may place only one shape.
Element: Constructed of ½’ hardwood veneer and plywood, the arranged pieces create a 4’ x 4’ square. Set comes with a variety of different silhouettes for use with

GROUP WALL
Task: Beginning at the base of a smooth wall eight to twelve feet high, each member of the group must go over the top and descend again by way of the rear ladder.
Element: Mounted on trees or poles with a large platform near the top. Walls available with adjustable heights for programs working with diverse populations, and permanent or removable ladders on the back. Indoor versions also available.

GUTTERBALL
Task: Group members must join together to construct a workable slide using a series of straight and angled PVC sections. The slide must be supported by all members of the group and be capable of transporting marbles or other similar rolling objects from start to finish.
Element: Constructed from durable PVC materials. Each set includes straights and turns.

HELIUM POLE
Task: Standing in two lines facing each other, members of the group must lower a 10- to 15-foot aluminum tent pole to the ground.
Element: Lightweight, durable construction. Folds down for easy storage and transport.
HOOPS TRAVERSE
Task: The group must arrange themselves in a predefined pattern among the small spaces defined by a series of hoops or bicycle tires lying flat upon the ground. Group members must visit each of the spaces once and only once, and remain in the final hoop until all other members have taken their turns.
Element: Utilizes hoops and boundary markers from the Bag of Tricks and Portables Kit.

JUMP SHOT
Task: In a set period of time, group members must devise a plan of attack, determine how to allocate resources, and execute up to three time trials, trying to score as many points as possible. Points are scored by landing miniature balls in distant baskets.
Element: Includes 100 miniature basketballs, baskets, and boundary markers.

KEY PUNCH
Task: Group members must touch all numbered spot markers in order from 1 to 30 in as little time as possible.
Element: Included 30 sequentially numbered poly spots and boundary lines.

KING’S FINGER
Task: Without using any props, members of the group must remove a tire from the base of a vertical pole, lower it to the ground, and then place it back over the pole, lowering it again until it comes to rest at the base of the pole.
Element: Constructed using a utility pole or downed hardwood. Element height set for target population.

OBJECT RETRIEVAL
Task: Standing outside a circle approximately twenty-five feet in diameter with a mature tree at the center, group members must devise a method of retrieving randomly placed objects from inside the circle. The group is provided a 100-foot length of heavy rope. Neither the rope nor any person may make contact with the ground inside the circle.
Element: Requires at least one mature tree, utility pole, or fixed anchor point. Element can often be designed to share the rope of boundary lines with a Treasure Island set.

MOHAWK WALK
Task: Entering one or two at a time at the midline of a low platform balanced on a flat fulcrum, members of the group must arrange themselves on the platform decking without causing either end to dip down and touch the ground.
Element: Designed to be extremely rigid, the platform is constructed entirely of treated lumber and can be fashioned in several sizes to meet the needs of various target groups.
MONDRIAN PUZZLE
Task: In the shortest time possible group members must work to slot together a wooden puzzle consisting of 14 unique pieces.
Element: Puzzles available in large and small group sizes.

MUSE
Task: To build a moveable bridge using three wooden beams supported above the ground on any of a staggered series of concrete blocks. The group must get all of its members from the starting point to the ending point, taking the beams with them. The concrete blocks are placed so that they cannot be spanned diagonally, but this fact is not given to members of the group.
Element: Installed permanently with sunken concrete blocks or designed to be portable for use indoors or out.

RAGING RIVER
Task: Using an assortment of short boards, less than one to a participant, the group must construct a moveable bridge across a wide, undetermined stretch of ground. All must cross at one time and the boards must be taken with them.
Element: 10 Raging River boards (6”x8”x12”)

PORTHOLE
Task: Standing outside a circle approximately twenty-five feet in diameter with a mature tree at the center, group members must devise a method of retrieving randomly placed objects from inside the circle. The group is provided a 100-foot length of heavy rope. Neither the rope nor any person may make contact with the ground inside the circle.
Element: Requires at least one mature tree, utility pole, share the rope of boundary lines with a Treasure Island set.

ROPE SWING A.K.A. DISK JOCKEYS, PROUTY’S LANDING, NITRO CROSSING
Task: Using a rope suspended between two trees, members of the group must swing out from a starting platform and land on a small platform or on one of a series of disks closely spaced (Disk Jockeys) or on a small platform (Prouty’s Landing) some distance away.
Element: Kits can be constructed for installation in various locations, including wooded areas with mature trees, on open ground for mounting on utility poles, or indoors for attachment to structural members.
For portable use, a tree with a sturdy limb or some other sturdy upright structure is required. An understanding of basic anchor systems, structural requirements, and rope work is necessary for setup. Included are a take-off platform, landing platform (or eight 1’x1½” landing disks for Disk Jockeys), and rope swing with necessary attachment hardware.

SPIDER WEB
Task: Beginning on one side of a rope web hung between two trees or poles, each member of the group must select a space and pass through to the other side.
Element: Made removable and fastened to trees or poles with quick links or webbing and fastex anchors; or supported by a PVC or steel pipe frame, depending on your needs. The web is constructed of durable, UV protected 3/8” nylon multi-line rope.
TOXIC WASTE
Task: Using a bungee cord ring with several lengths of rope attached at intervals around the circumference, group members must pick up a #10 can filled with water, gravel, beans, or other such material and then, without any spilling, carry the can a certain distance and transfer the contents into an empty #10 can. Each can is placed in the center of a roped off circle about ten feet in diameter. The two circles are about fifteen feet apart.
Element: A bungee apparatus for use in moving #10 cans full of water (or dry materials) from one bounded area to another. The apparatus can be constructed with any number of lines and designed to be more or less difficult depending on the age group and population served.

TREASURE ISLAND
Task: All members of the group must cross from a small “island” with a tree in the center to another “island” with a tree in the center, using a long rope attached about eight feet up the trunk of the second tree.
Element: 60-80' of 1" unmanila rope eye-spliced with a rapid link on one end for quick setup and back-spliced to prevent fraying on the other.

TROLLEYS
Task: Group members must devise a way to move across a stretch of ground while standing on a set of long beams with hand ropes attached.
Element: Classic design, constructed with cedar or treated 4x4 beams and ½” spliced multiline handles for durability. Trolleys can be made in the following lengths (in feet): 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, or 12. All trolley segments can be attached to one another to create longer sets.

WHALE WATCH
Task: Entering one or two at a time at the midline of a low platform balanced on a flat fulcrum, members of the group must arrange themselves on the platform decking without causing either end to dip down and touch the ground.
Element: Designed to be extremely rigid, the platform is constructed entirely of treated lumber and can be fashioned in several sizes to meet the needs of various target groups.

The Whale Watch is a popular ropes course activity that is constructed by create a large platform with a see saw action, which imitates the rocking back and forth of a ship. The objective is to have the group perform various functions on the platform without allowing the edges of the platform to touch the ground.

Sample Story Line
- Before you begin. Be sure that the whale watch is properly balanced, so no ends are touching. The group should be standing off to the side.
- Your group is the worthy crew of a commercial whale watch ship. As deck hands, there job is simply to do what the captain says, without tipping the boat.
- The first thing the group needs to do is line up in the very center of the boat (above the fulcrum of the boat) and await their orders.
- Once the group lines up, apologize for not being clear on the instructions. They must line up in the center by age. Or height. Or whatever you choose.
- Once the group has completed this task, advise them that they must report to their stations on either end of the ship. Divide the group in half however you like.
- Once the group is separated on either end of the boat, apologize for giving them the wrong stations. They must switch sides.
• When in place, you can give one side a bucket of water and tell them that they must make a chain from one end of the boat to the other and begin to bail out the extra water that has collected in the hull of the boat.
• Feel free to add your own challenges before having them exit the boat - without capsizing it.

Some facilitation tips:
• This is a great universal activity. It is very challenging and fun, and participants with all levels of physical ability can be successful.
• You can blindfold folks, or make the group silent, to increase the level of difficulty.
• If you have time, have the group sit and eat lunch on it.

Willow in the Wind
This requires a calm, supportive atmosphere. If participants are unable to genuinely sustain this kind of atmosphere, then look for a less serious activity. There is the potential for physical and psychological injury. The group needs to be taught correct spotting technique:
• One foot in front of another
• Arms outstretched, elbows locked, fingers loose
• Ready and alert

In groups of about 8, one person volunteers to be the "willow" in the middle. Facilitator demonstrates the "willow":
• Feet together
• Closes his/her eyes
• Arms crossed and hands on shoulders
• Keep butt cheeks tight and body straight
• Establishes contract with group (see below)
• Does a "trust lean" and allows him/herself to be "passed around" the group.

The final step before leaning is to create a contract between the "willow" and the group. It can go like this:
• Willow: "I am ready to fall. Are you ready to catch me?"
• Group: "We are ready to catch you. Fall away."
• Willow: "Falling."
• Group: "OK"

Important: Ensure the group is tight, should-to-shoulder, arms outstretched. In this position, hands should almost touch the person standing in the middle. This ensures that the initial fall will be very gentle. Gradually the group can ease back to allow a more expansive lean. Distribute large and small people evenly, to avoid weak points in the circle. The "willow" should allow him/herself to be passed around by the group as long as she/he likes (usually a couple of minutes). When he/she has had enough, simply open eyes, stand up, and thank the group.

The quality of the atmosphere and caring will generally determine the proportion of people prepared to volunteer. Above 80% is usually a sign of a reasonably healthy group.

As a debrief or an intervention if a group isn’t creating a trusting atmosphere, I’ve asked people to individually rate out of 10 how supported they felt by the group -- and show this to the group by holding the number of fingers up. This allows the facilitator to draw out more objectively which people felt supported and what else the group might do to support more people.

Peanut Butter River
• For this game you need two ropes to represent the banks of a river. The goal is to have the group cross the river.
• Give the team six carpet squares (or something similar) to use as "rafts".
• Each raft can only support one hand and two feet at any one time.
• Any more than that and it will sink (meaning a leader takes it away and it's no longer available to the group).
• If a raft is left untouched for more than a few seconds, it floats away (again, have a leader monitor for this and remove any rafts).
• If anyone in the group touches the water, the team must start again.

The game sounds simple, but it’s great for team building, as it requires everyone to participate and contribute towards the goal.
Group Juggle
Throw balls to others in a sequence, using each person's name. Works every time. Can be extended to "Warp Speed" (to see how fast the group can throw balls through a set order to each group member).

- Fun way to start working together.
- Can be used to learn names and develop a sense of interconnectedness.
- Stand in a circle, toss a ball to someone, using his/her name, and they in turn toss it to someone else, using the next person's name.
- Keep it going, then more balls are introduced and it starts gets crazy.

How to Run a Group Juggle Session
- Set up & instructions (1st round)
  - 2nd round - have another go!
  - 3rd round - do it faster!
  - 4th round - adding more balls!

Set up & instructions for 1st round of group juggling
- Arrange participants in a circle, not too close, not too far from one another
- Include yourself in the circle
- Explain that you are going to throw a ball to someone - pick someone out & ask their name, then say
  "Hi Freddy, my name is James...here you go!" [underarm throw a ball to Freddy]
- Freddy then says
  "Thank you James", picks someone and says
  "Hi X, my name is Freddy...here you go!" [throw]...they say
  "Thank you, Freddy] and on we go.
- If you're not trying to learn names, skip the naming part & just throw!
- The challenge from here is simply to get the ball thrown around to everyone in the circle, and finally back to the trainer.

2nd round of group juggling
- I then say, "Right, well done, now let's see if we can that again - making sure we use the same order, and using each other's names. Remember to say the name of the person you are throwing to, and thank the person, by name, for throwing it to you, OK?"
- On the second round, most people will be challenged to remember who to throw it to, and the two names! Take it slow, help the group out, so that each person has a successful second round.

3rd round of group juggling
- I then say, "Good, so how about we do it again, but this time, let's see how fast we can do it, OK? Here we go...Hi Freddy, my name is James...." [throw]
- It will go pretty fast this time, and the group will probably feel quite pleased with themselves.

4th round of group juggling - introducing more balls
- I then say, "That's great, but I think you can do faster than that. Come on, let's see how fast we can really go..." [I then throw and say the name with super fast enthusiasm to set the tone!]
- After the first ball has passed through a few hands, I take a 2nd ball out of my pocket (surprise!), and casually, but earnestly say "Hi Freddy...." [throw].
- By now everyone is so well trained, the 2nd ball will automatically keep going, and there will be a detectable sense of challenge/excitement.
- After a bit, I introduce a 3rd and 4th ball, up to about 6 balls.
- Usually I let 4 to 6 balls be juggled for a while (note the balls will be coming back again to the trainer - just keep them going). A group of 12 adults can usually handle 4 to 6 quite well.
- If I'm feeling conservative, I just let the group have the success of doing this number of balls, and collect them in when that seems to have been achieved.
- But usually, once the group seems competent at 4 to 6 balls I gradually then introduce an unmanageable number of balls into the juggle & maybe also weird objects (e.g., kids soft toys) which all gets crazy, fun, out of control, etc. and ends in a hilarious shambles.
- Generally doesn't require debriefing.