

Mine Field

Description of a Communication & Relationship-Building Activity

Mine Field

- A popular, engaging game involving communication and trust. Works for groups of various types and sizes. Moderately complex. The task is very flexible. Can be adapted to youth, adults, corporate, etc.
- The goal is to traverse, with eyes closed or blindfolded, a designated area full of obstacles without touching any obstacle or any person.
- Select a "playing field". Go outside, if possible. But can be done inside, even in rooms with fixed furniture (which can become objects to be avoided).
- Distribute "mines" e.g., balls or other objects such as bowling pins, cones, foam noodles, etc.
- Establish a concentrating and caring tone for this activity. Trust exercises require a serious atmosphere to help develop a genuine sense of trust and safety.
- Participants can begin by trying to cross the field by themselves. In a second round, participants can then ask someone else to help them traverse the field by "talking" them through the field.
- Participants operate in pairs. Consider how the pairs are formed - its a chance to work on relationships. One person is blind-folded (or keeps eyes closed) and (optional) cannot talk. The other person can see and talk, but cannot enter the field or touch the person.
- The challenge is for each blind-folded person to walk from one side of the field to the other, avoiding the mines, by listening to the verbal instructions of their partners.
- Be wary of blindfolded people bumping into each other. The instructor(s) can float around the playing area to help prevent collisions.
- Decide on the penalty for hitting a mine. It could be a restart (serious consequence) or time penalty or simply a count of hits, but without penalty.
- Allow participants a short period (e.g., 3 minutes) of planning time to decide on their communication commands. It can help participants if you suggest that they each develop a unique communication system. When participants swap roles, give participants some review and planning time to refine their communication method.
- Allow participants to swap over and even have several attempts, until a real, satisfied sense of skill and competence in being able to guide a partner through a minefield develops.
- The activity can be conducted one pair at a time (e.g., in a therapeutic situation), or with all pairs at once (creates a more demanding exercise due to the extra noise/confusion).

Equipment

- Lengths of rope or markers to indicate the boundaries (e.g., 50 yard rectangular field)
- Many soft objects, such as larger [balls and stuff](#) - the more the better
- Blind folds (optional)

Summary

- Objects are scattered in an indoor or outdoor place. In pairs, one person verbally guides his/her partner, a blindfolded person, through the minefield.

Time

- ~20 minutes to set up
- ~5-10 minutes to brief
- ~5 minutes planning/discussion
- ~15-30 minutes activity
- ~5-30 minutes debrief

Group Size

- 2 to 30 is possible; works well with larger groups e.g., 16 to 24.
- Can be conducted as a competitive task - e.g., which pair is the quickest or has the fewest hits?
- The facilitator plays an important role in creating an optimal level of challenge, e.g., consider introducing more items or removing items if it seems too easy or too hard. Also consider coaching participants with communication methods (e.g., for younger students, hint that they could benefit from coming up with clear commands for stop, forward, left, right, etc.).
- Be cautious about blind-folding people - it can provoke trust and care issues and trigger post-traumatic reactions. Minimize this risk by sequencing Mine Field within a longer program involving other get-to-know-you and trust building activities before Mine Field.

Variations

- Minefield in a Circle: Blindfolded people start on the outside of a large rope circle, go into middle, get an item ("treasure", e.g., a small ball or bean bag), then return to the outside; continue to see who can get the most objects within a time period).
- Metaphorical Framing: Some set ups for minefield get very elaborate and metaphor-rich, e.g., hanging objects which metaphorically reflect the participants' background and/or issues. For example, items which represent drugs, peer pressure, talking with parents about the problem, etc. have been used in a family adventure therapy program (Gillis & Simpson, 1994).
- Be aware that some participants may object to, or have previous traumatic experience around the metaphor of explosive mines which have caused and continue to cause much harm and suffering. It may be preferable to rename the activity, for example, as an "obstacle course" or "navigation course". Alternatively, the activity could be used to heighten awareness about the effect of land mines on the lives of people in countries such as Afghanistan and Nicaragua.

Processing Ideas

- How much did you trust your partner (out of 10) at the start?
- How much did you trust your partner (out of 10) at the end?
- What is the difference between going alone and being guided by another?
- What ingredients are needed when trusting and working with someone else?
- What did your partner do to help you feel safe and secure?
- What could your partner have done to help make you feel more safe/secure?

What communication strategies worked best?