## Oklahoma 4-H Youth Development Program
# Building Leaders for Tomorrow
Instilling and developing leadership capabilities in youth and adults.

# ACTIVITY 27: "Knot or Not"

## THINGS TO KNOW:

**AGE LEVEL** – Intermediate and Advanced

**CONCEPT OR SKILL** – Communications; Accepting Difference; Conflict resolution; Verbal vs. non-verbal (panel discussions; debate; extemporaneous; etc.)

**LIFE SKILL(S)** – **Heart** – Communications, Conflict Resolution, Accepting Differences; **Health** – Managing Feelings; **Head** – Critical Thinking

**BEHAVIORAL INDICATOR** – Have high social needs and desires. Often need an adult to talk to outside of their family.

When two or more people need to solve a problem, develop a plan, resolve a conflict or come to a group consensus having the ability "to think, to plan and to reason" or better yet the ability to solve problems becomes an essential life skill to be developed in the local club setting. Open and non-threatening discussion allows people to search for the best solution based on the known information.

Consensus means an opinion held by all or most or it is the general agreement of the group. When forming a consensus, individuals need to consider the pros and cons and what is in the best interest for the group as a whole. In order to come to a consensus, it is sometimes necessary to be flexible by being willing to listen to the ideas and opinions of others. Youth who are naturally outspoken leaders may need help in learning when to voice their ideas and when to listen to others. At the same time, youth who tend to be quiet need encouragement from peers, mentors and volunteers to exhibit the confidence to share their thoughts with a group.

The manner in which information is presented can influence whether it is heard and legitimately processed. Learning to present information can be critical in it being heard and processed by a group. Learning to present your ideas using appropriate statements can be beneficial in having a productive

**Input Statements:** facts, opinions, definition, proposals or suggestions

**Orienting Statements:** identifying the group accomplishment

**Orienting Responses:** focus on common goals

**Summary Statements:** condensing information

**Clarifying Statements:** paraphrasing and simplifying to help understanding

**Surveying Statements:** testing for agreement

**Process Check Statements:** examination of the way the group works

**Climate Building Statements:** establishing a friendly atmosphere

(*Suggest that the facilitator prepare example statements or responses to help the group understand each concept.*)

| Discussions that Fall FLAT! | Discussions that FLY HIGH! |
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| **Poor Presentation of Problem**. If the problem sounds boring, negative or favors one solution, people respond negatively. "We've been having such poor attendance, maybe we should not meet for a couple of months." | Present the problem in a positive way, without offering any suggestions for the solution to the problem. "We have been having a small attendance lately. What can we do about it?" |
| **Lack of Knowledge**. If no one knows enough about the subject or there is little interest, it's hard to have a good discussion. | Choose discussion topics that are familiar. If a topic that needs to be discussed is unfamiliar, then provide background when you present the problem. |
| **Ideas Rejected**. Some groups habitually reject ideas, which often cause members to contain their thought to avoid criticism. | Set ground rules that avoid allowing people to make judgments or discuss suggestions until later in the process. Brainstorm a lot of ideas before beginning to judge them makes the group feel more free to participate. |
| **Size of Group**. If the group is large, some members won't speak up. They may feel that their ideas are silly, won't be welcome or are shy about talking in front of people. Some people need time to think about how they feel and can't decide things immediately. This may mean that just a few people will dominate the discussion. | If the group is large, break the group into small groups or have people work individually. Allow time for people to think and respond. Sometimes you may even need to postpone the discussion to a later meeting. |
| **Arrangement of Group**. Group arrangement can make a difference. It is usually easier to discuss things if you can see the other members of the group. If the leader is standing behind a table with the group seated in rows, it is more difficult for the group to discuss freely. | Arrange the group so eye contact is possible. If the group is small, a circle that includes the leader is best. If the group is large, make some decisions in small circles and then share in the whole group. |
| **Apathy**. Sometimes people "go along" with what the group is discussing just to avoid problems. They don't like to see people upset, so they choose what they think they should favor. This can lead to the whole group continuing a project they don't want to do. | If the group tends to go along with decisions but does not volunteer to participate or plan the activity after a vote. Then, it will be apparent it was a poor group decision and should be re-visited. |

This activity is a fun way for youth to explore skills in consensus building while developing a sense of connectedness between group members. If this activity is being done with a group that is not at the advanced level, it may be beneficial for the volunteer to take some time to discuss what it means to form a consensus.

**Materials Needed:** Approximately 6 feet each of 5 different colors of rope/yarn/heavy string and 6 feet each of 5 identical colors of rope/yarn/heavy string.

**Do:** Prior to the arrival of the group, tie four of the different colored raccoon circles into separate loops, and then tie the fifth raccoon circle through the other four. Place all five circles on the ground making sure that it is not immediately obvious which one of the five raccoon circles is holding the other four together. Repeat this with the identical raccoon circles. The goal is for the group to come to a consensus on which raccoon circle they believe is holding the other four together. Remind group members that they must rely on sight alone; they are not allowed to touch the circles. When they have reached a consensus, move on to the five circles that are identical in color and repeat the activity. Remember, the true goal of this activity is to come to a group consensus, not to be correct in solving the puzzle.

**Reflect:**

1) How did you know when the group has arrived at a consensus? What were the signs? (example: visual cues, voting, verbal confirmation, etc.

2) What verbal and non-verbal clues did you receive that influenced whether you listened to someone? (make sure they are positive as well as negative clues)

3) What would have made the "processing" part of the experience better?

**Apply:**

1) Have you ever assumed there was a consensus when there wasn't? What happened?

2) In what ways can we present our ideas and thoughts so they will be heard and considered?

3) Why is it important that there be consensus among members of a club/committee/team?

4) Are there times when it is okay not to have a consensus?

5) What do you think about the statement "*Agee to disagree agreeably.*"?

6) In this activity you were asked to make a decision and come to a consensus with limited information (you could only look at the circles, you couldn't touch them or take them apart). Name some situations when you would have to make a decision based on limited information?



Source: Cain, Jim and Smith, Tom. 2002 The Book on Raccoon Circles. Learning Unlimited Cooperation, Tulsa, Oklahoma.