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# Building group cohesiveness

## PASS THE ENERGY

**TO THE LEADER** This experiment lets everyone be a magician and pull a shape out of the air. It can build a sense of group contact and develop resources for learning *how* to learn. It seems most effective when done with between ten and fifteen participants. If your group is larger, you might want to divide into two circles, in fishbowl style (one circle within the other, outer circle watching) or in two distinct circles with a leader for each group. Keep the action moving briskly until students get more familiar with the experiment.

**INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP** Let's sit in a circle. Take a moment to check that you can see everyone else. We're go-

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ing to learn to create something out of nothing. First, rub your hands together very quickly until they're warm and tingly feeling. Now move them apart from and closer to each other several times, really paying attention to the space between them. The air may feel heavier, or as though you're pushing against something.

*(Take a moment to share short words and phrases describing this sensation.)*

Okay, now rub your hands together again and build up another tingle.

*(Choose a student to demonstrate the activity.)*

Form that space between your hands into a ball, any size, any weight. Let us see from your movements what it's like. Good, now throw it to someone. See if you catch the same ball that was thrown. Good, now change its size and throw it to someone else . . . catch it and change its weight, and throw it.

*(Continue for 3-4 more throws.)*

Now toss the ball up into the air and stick it to the ceiling.

I'm going to use the space between my hands to make a shape. See if you can tell what it is. I'll pass it now to \_\_\_\_\_ *(person on right or left)*. When you receive the shape just as it is, then you can remold it, adding energy or taking it away as you like. See what the energy wants to do with your hands. Pass it when it's done, on around the circle.

**COMMENT** Your focus and attention as leader can spark the students' enthusiasm and encourage development of

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coordination and group rapport. Sometimes two or more trips around the circle may seem appropriate if new ideas and forms arise. The last person can “dispose” of the energy or find a way to include the whole group in giving it away.

### GET MY ATTENTION

**TO THE LEADER** Attention is an important aspect of our communication with each other. Discovering what works and what doesn't in establishing contact with another person is a crucial building block in effective interaction styles. This experiment can give participants feedback about their style of communicating. It also can provide a safe outlet for what psychologists call resistance and what you may call orneryness.

**INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP** Find a partner and stand next to her or him. Decide who will be Partner One and who will be Partner Two. In this experiment Partner One is going to try to get Partner Two's attention. You'll know that's happened when Partner One *looks* at you, makes eye contact. Partner Two, you can wait a while to make eye contact if you wish. Any questions? Okay, go!

*(Continue for 2-3 minutes. Students might want to know what behaviors are permissible or off limits such as making loud noises, touching, etc. From your knowledge of your students, decide what boundaries will provide safety and also let your students experiment spontaneously.)*

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Now take some time to talk with your partner about what you liked and didn't like, what seemed to work. You may notice that some ways of getting attention were familiar and some ways that other people were using were unfamiliar.

Now switch roles. Partner Two, you try to get Partner One's attention, and Partner One, you withhold eye contact for a while. Experiment with different strategies.

*(2-3 minutes.)*

Now take some time to talk with your partner about your experience.

**COMMENT** Group discussion following this experiment can be especially valuable to clarify effective, appropriate channels for giving and receiving attention, and can help to prevent later communication problems from developing. Helping students identify their preferences for being approached can assist them to be clearer in their interactions no matter what the content.

## **SWITCH**

**TO THE LEADER** This experiment explores an active form of mirroring or reflecting movement. It can sharpen participants' perceptual motor skills while they learn more about nonverbal communication. This experiment requires an open space. It involves more spontaneous participation than other group activities, so might best be introduced after students have done some group-process experiments.

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Music with a strong underlying rhythm would be useful here, such as square dance music, a popular rock song, African drumming, and so on.

**INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP** Let's move into a circle. Follow me for a moment and let's stretch our arms up and wide. Does anyone else have a way of stretching?

*(Take turns following 1–3 other stretches.)*

We're going to take turns switching movements. We'll use the center of the circle to move. Two at a time, move into the center of the circle any way you like. Make a movement you *repeat* and do it a few times while you watch your partner. When I say switch, trade movements and leave the center of the circle moving the way your partner did. So you'll go in your way and come out a different way.

*(Orchestrate the action, the timing or pacing of this activity, by picking the two movers and saying switch. Give everyone a chance to play. If there is time, let some students have another turn.)*

**VARIATIONS** Move into the center

- in the silliest way you can imagine
- the way you do when you are "putting your best foot forward"
- shyly and hesitantly
- as your favorite animal would.

