



Balloon Bounce

In an attempt to diversify my own list of community-building protocols, I started an internet search for children's games. I am convinced that meeting facilitators can replicate much of the fun in games with adults, adding a layer of learning in order to increase the adult engagement. I read about Balloon Bounce on a website featuring early childhood games (Preschool Situational Self-Regulation Toolkit, n.d.). The version here offers several options for facilitators to explore as they watch the ensuing fun. I cannot write about this protocol without smiling ear to ear. A group of science specialists in Lewisville, Texas, laughed so hard during this process that we had to take a break before the debrief so they could visit the restroom! Although learning can occur with any group, it is highly effective for existing groups to use this protocol to reflect on their own development as a team. Do not be reticent because of the number of steps in the protocol—the sequence is written precisely so the facilitator doesn't miss anything.

Purpose

Participants aim to consider behaviors in a group when multiple parameters and high stress exist.

Group Size

Generally, groups of four or more are ideal; groups larger than eight could subdivide.

Pre-Protocol Preparation

Blow up balloons of various sizes and spread throughout the room; have at least one balloon per participant.

Sequence

1. Inform participants of the task: *keep the balloon off the ground (in the air)* and use the following parameters.
 - a. All participants must bounce or hit the balloon with the body part indicated by the facilitator.
 - b. A participant may not touch the balloon again until everyone has bounced or touched the balloon.
 - c. Your group must keep count.
2. Answer any clarifying questions about the rules. Note that if the balloon hits the ground, counting starts over.

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3. **Round 1:** Offer thirty seconds for groups to devise a strategy.
 - a. Put sixty seconds on the clock and say, “Touch with your palm—go!”
 - b. Record scores visually, using the highest number a group reached when it was counting.
4. **Round 2:** Offer thirty seconds for groups to reconsider strategy and set a numerical goal.
 - a. Put sixty seconds on the clock and say, “Touch with your palm—go!”
 - b. Record scores visually.
 - c. Offer groups the potential to use more balloons if they wish, but do not change the three parameters.
5. **Round 3:** Offer thirty seconds for groups to debrief and reconsider strategy.
 - a. Put sixty seconds on the clock and say, “Touch with your palm—go!”
 - b. Record scores visually.
6. **Round 4:** Offer thirty seconds for groups to debrief and reconsider strategy.
 - a. Ask groups to set a numerical goal.
 - b. Put sixty seconds on the clock and say, “Touch with your palm—go!”
 - c. Record scores visually.
7. **Round 5:** Say, “The essential parameters have not changed; I am just going to change the body part as you work.”
 - a. Put sixty seconds on the clock and say, “Touch with your palm—go!” Every so often (maybe twenty seconds), change the body parts. Some ideas include fist, elbow, head, foot, shoulder, or hip.
 - b. Record scores visually.
8. **Final round:** Offer the groups a chance to change the second parameter. Whatever the decision, engage in the final round.
 - a. Ask groups to set a numerical goal.
 - b. Put sixty seconds on the clock and say, “Touch with your palm—go!” If you will change body parts, consider using some of the same and throw in some others, too, such as thumb, wrist, nose, back side, or knee.
 - c. Record scores visually.
9. Conduct a whole-group reflection and ask participants the following questions.
 - a. “What did you notice?”
 - b. “How did the beginning differ from the end?”
 - c. “What impact did goal setting have, if any?”

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- d. “What did equity look like in this experience?” (If the group decided to remove parameter B, the last round may not have been equitable.)
 - e. “What implications from this experience might you draw to connect to our work?”
10. Debrief the process. (Five minutes)

Notes

- I find it helpful to take notes during the times when teams are bouncing the balloons. During the final reflection, the anecdotal notes will be helpful fodder to reflect on the experience. For instance, after the second round, I watched a group *not* begin when I gave the signal. They were watching the group who had scored highest the previous two rounds. After less than five seconds, they turned toward each other *without speaking* and mimicked what they had seen. That behavior was worthy of raising during the whole-group processing time after all the balloons were put away.
- Usually step 8 is full of boisterous laughter. Extend past sixty seconds if you find the group enjoying itself. I am not above starting a live Twitter feed at this point!
- Sometimes great physical acts (for example, diving on the floor) can occur in this process. If anyone sees something like that, a whole-group reflection prompt could draw those behaviors out. You might present a prompt by saying, “Turn to someone near you and articulate what personal line you would not cross in this experience. What led you to your choice about this?”
- Some groups may have traded out balloons—either asking permission or just doing it. If that occurred, consider asking, “What might it mean that we only used the bigger balloons?” A possible insight groups might have is that smaller balloons don’t bounce very well. High-functioning groups only bounce the big balloons together. The smaller stuff is better for one person or very small groups to bounce by themselves.

Application Example

- After a stressful spring, Claire wants part of the leadership retreat to be pure stress relief. After experiencing the Balloon Bounce protocol at another learning session, she knows not only will it be great fun, she can frame the final reflection around their work as a leadership team during the spring season.

Reference

Preschool Situational Self-Regulation Toolkit. (n.d.). *Balloon bounce*. Accessed at www.prsist.com.au/balloonbounce.php on December 26, 2020.