

IV.12. ESCAPING ALCATRAZ

This exercise is a combination of several activities to perform as a team together and is embedded into a storyline.

THEMES	Social Inclusion, Discrimination, Conflict Resolution
Group Size	15-25
Complexity	3
Age Range	16+
Time	90/120 minutes

OVERVIEW

“Escaping Alcatraz” combines several activities the group has to perform as a team and the degree of difficulty is increasing with every activity.

OBJECTIVES

- To foster teamwork.
- To establish and develop communication rules and deal with inner-group conflicts.
- To support all team members and include them into the activity.

MATERIALS

- Regular gym
- 3 long benches, two poles or anything else to hold a rope
- big mat (a soft one)
- 2 really long ropes (e.g. 10 metre climbing rope)
- a key or another object (bean bag) to put into the centre of a circle to fetch
- vaulting horse
- 3-6 tyres or hula hoops (depending on size of the group)
- swinging rope (coming down from the ceiling)

PREPARATION

The gym needs to be prepared in advance. All the “stations” along the story of “Escape from Alcatraz” can be laid out and prepared before the exercise starts. It does not matter if the participants will see them when they enter the gym.

- Crack the code: Put three benches in a triangle. If you want to make it more difficult you can turn them upside down.
- Hot wire: Put a rope between two poles at chest height.
- Acid lake: Place a rope in a circle and put a key on something in the centre. The other rope is on the side.
- The wall: Place the big mat wherever you want this activity to be performed.
- The gorge: Place the vaulting horse at approximately 5-6 metres (depending on the group) from the tyres you lay down on the ground. The rope (coming down from the ceiling) has to be in between these two.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Prepare the gym and meet the group at another place. You start to tell the story of Alcatraz by explaining that they are all prisoners and want to escape the place. But it is really hard and they have to overcome several obstacles. It is up to you how detailed your story is.
- Blindfold all the participants except one. This one has to lead the whole group to the gym.
- As soon as the participants arrive at the entrance of the gym they can take off their blindfold and are introduced to the first task.
- The first task is “Crack the code”: They have to stand on the bench all together and they have to position themselves according to their postal code or birthday or any other criteria connected to numbers you choose. It is not allowed to leave or fall off the bench. This activity can also be done in silence in order to increase the difficulty.

INSTRUCTIONS

- The second task is “Hot wire”: They have to overcome the chest high rope without touching it. It is not allowed to jump (health and safety) or use any other supporting material. The participants must go over the rope using only each other. The mat should be used for safety in case anyone falls.
- The “acid lake” contains the task to get the key from the centre of the “lake” (rope placed in a circle). The only supporting material is the other rope, nothing else. It is not allowed to touch the lake, of course.
- You place the big mat vertically on the floor and tell the participants to overcome this wall, without leaving anybody behind or going around it.
- The gorge entails the following task: All the participants have to get to the tyres/hula hoops (the hoops or tyres should be small to avoid any injuries) and land in them by using only the rope (coming down from the ceiling) as supporting/swinging material. The place between the vaulting horse and the tyres is the gorge. It is not allowed to jump and if anybody touches the ground all participants have to go back to their original place. That rule applies to all the other stations as well, but you can adapt it if necessary.
- After the escape has been successful you debrief it together with the group.

DEBRIEF AND EVALUATION

First you ask the participants to sit down in a circle and congratulate them on their successful escape. Then you may start with two general questions: What went well? What was not working at all? By asking participants to elaborate their observations and feelings you will naturally get to the topics of teamwork, fair play, conflict resolution and inclusion. It is up to you how far you want to reflect on the specific topics and what focus you want to put within the group.

TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

This exercise offers flexibility regarding the rules. You can always give the participants some “extra lives” (touching the ground won’t put all participants back, but the group continues where it was) to make it easier, especially when you observe the frustration with one task grows stronger within the group. But you can also make it harder/stricter if you blindfold participants or give them any other restriction (e.g. no speaking allowed) they have to deal with. As a facilitator you have to observe the atmosphere very closely in order to adapt the task to the group and the situation to make it a success at the end. It is also possible to make them fail, but this is only recommended if you think the group can deal with the frustration afterwards and you have to reflect on it, of course.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

You can take out one or two activities and put them into a smaller exercise. The story usually makes participants more competitive and they want to finish what they started. The feeling of success can be a very strong at the end, because it is a big challenge and shows them how they can perform as a team. This can help you to tackle the more delicate topics afterwards.