

# Broken Squares Exercise

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## **Puzzle Activity**

- *No talking*
- *Goal: Make squares for me and for all. Meet both goals.*
- *Play: Decide whether to give away, what, to whom*

## **Activity Debriefing**

1. *How are you feeling now?*
2. *How did you/others influence process? Any pivotal events?*
3. *What helped and prevented success?*
4. *How did the team attempt to meet both individual and group goals? What was your personal goal?*
4. *What conclusions can you draw? What does it take to meet team and individual goals?*

## **General Instructions**

In front of each person there should be a paper clip set of shapes for forming squares. Since this is a timed activity, please don't handle them until the signal is given to begin. The pieces in your set of cardboard shapes may or may not be the pieces you need.

## **The Goal**

The task of each person is to form a square in front of themselves as quickly as possible and the task of the team is to form one square in front of each of its members as quickly as possible. Each person wins and the team wins when all team members have completed a square in front of them before time runs out.

## **How to Play**

You may keep any or all pieces in your possession as you wish. You may give away any piece or pieces of your puzzle to any member or members of your team at any time.

## **Rules**

1. A square has sides at 90 degree angles to each other and all sides are of equal length.
2. If you decide to give puzzle pieces to any other member, it must be very clear to all who you are giving pieces away to. As you pass the pieces, they are no longer yours. Don't place them in some particular arrangement for the person you are passing to. Don't show how to arrange them.
3. This is a silent task. You can not tell others what to do or how to arrange their pieces. You may not talk, point or engage in any kind of verbal or nonverbal communication. You must not discuss strategy before or during the exercise. You may not ask another member for a piece of puzzle or in any way signal that another person is to give you a puzzle piece. This is to constrain the normal ways we tend to influence each other, equal the playing field, and show the dynamics clearly.
4. You may not take pieces from another member.
5. You may not throw your pieces into the center for others to take; you must pass your pieces to specific individuals of your choice.
6. All pieces must be used. They must be used in their original form. They cannot be bent or cut.
7. The letters on the pieces are not relevant.
8. Any observers will help the team abide by these rules. At the end, observers will lead the group in a discussion of the debriefing questions.

# ***Influencing a Win-win Relationship***

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## **Tips**

- Tip!* Hold the belief: We will get there collaboratively even if we can't see a way forward at the start. Hold a positive vision for the relationship and work towards that. (Although the squares solution is not obvious, stay in the game to eventually create a win-win solution. What is your vision: Is it a square for you or squares for us?)
- Tip!* Set the example for being open. Be willing to give up or modify your initial idea first. (Even if you think you have the right square, it should be held lightly. Your square may not be the only square that is possible.)
- Tip!* Listen for partial or little ideas that could form the basis for a win-win solution. (Look for the little pieces, as many small ones may add to a common solution.)
- Tip!* Make suggestions tentatively so other's can collaboratively build on them and at the same time, build commitment and responsibility for implementing the decision. (Give them a piece to work with, allow them to create the right fit.)
- Tip!* For a collaborative relationship, you must have an exchange. Frustration or holding tightly to a favorite solution suggests a time to pause, silently observe and find a way back into the two-way conversation. (Only by exchanging pieces, can you create a win-win.)

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## **Traps**

- Trap!* Holding strongly to your position/solution you walked in with. It may appear to be a solution, but not necessarily the one that can create a win-win relationship. (It may not be the best square, even if it appears so at first.)
- Trap!* Opting out of the conversation(s) too early. (Once you move away from the table, the team may never be able to win.)
- Trap!* Doing all the work to craft a solution. You do get to an answer, yet the commitment from other person may wane during implementation. (Making their puzzle for them solves the puzzle, but may not create the same feeling of accomplishment or long lasting commitment in them.)

## Directions for Making Squares for Broken Squares Exercise

From Johnson, D and Johnson, F. Joining Together, 1975.

You need a set of five envelopes containing pieces of cardboard that have been cut in different patterns and that when properly arranged with pieces from some of the other four envelopes will form five squares of equal size. One set should be provided for each five member group. The whole set, that is every square should be made from the same color cardstock.

1. Cut the five squares of equal size, six by six inches. Mark and cut them into the pieces shown. **Pencil** in the letters so they can be erased later.
2. The lines and cuts should be made so that all the pieces marked "a", will be exactly the same size, all the pieces marked "c", will be exactly the same size, and all the pieces marked "f", will be exactly the same size.
3. After marking the lines, and labeling and cutting the pieces, separate them into their initial configurations:

Envelope A has pieces i, h and e.

Envelope B has pieces a, a, a and c.

Envelope C has pieces a, j.

Envelope D has pieces d, f.

Envelope E has pieces g, b, f and c.

4. Erase the penciled lowercase letter from each piece and write on it, instead, **it's envelope letter**. This relabeling will make it easier to return the pieces to the proper envelope for later use.

