

ADVENTURE BASED COUNSELING: A MODEL FOR ENCOURAGEMENT

• **History of ABC**

- Rooted in Project Adventure, which began in 1971
 - Jerry Pieh, principal of Hamilton-Wenham (Massachusetts) High School, and his staff wanted to bring the benefits of wilderness immersion courses to the traditional classroom setting
- Project Adventure recreated many of the experiences associated with Outward Bound
 - Began by Dr. Kurt Hahn, an educator in classical private schools of Britain and Germany prior to World War II
 - Dr. Hahn felt that the school curriculum did not address the developmental needs of a child
- Adventure Based Counseling existed in its primitive form in the 1970s
 - It was used in school curriculum and in an outpatient hospital program
 - By 1982, there were over 500 educational institutions that had adopted a portion of the model

• **Theoretical Perspectives & Rationale**

- Counselors and clinicians from various perspectives (i.e., Adlerian, behaviorist, psychoanalytic, humanistic, & religious) have been able to use and interpret the program through their theoretical lens.
- Well researched from a multitude of perspectives
- Generally, outcome findings for adventure based recreation programs fall into six major categories:
 - Leadership, self-concept, academic, personality, interpersonal, and adventuresomeness
- Antecedent variables that have found to have an impact:
 - Age: Younger participants show the greatest development
 - Sex: Mixed findings; some indicate no difference; others indicate that females experience a greater amount of development
 - Prior experience: Not widely studied, but preliminary results indicate that it plays a role

- **Foundations of ABC**
 - Main components of an ABC session:
 - Briefing
 - Leading
 - Debriefing
 - Repeating
- **Briefing**
 - Leaders give instructions to the group
 - Emphasize the non-negotiable safety procedures
 - Share information in a give-and-take manner
 - What is said is directly related to the experience/adventure that is about to occur
- **Leading**
 - ABC sessions take students/patients on a journey that includes, but is not limited to:
 - Trust exercises
 - Games that foster a sense of fun and cooperation
 - Problem-solving exercises that encourage individual and group initiative
 - Humor/fun
 - Rope course experiences
 - Expeditions
 - All exercises serve to encourage the improvement of self-concept
- **Debriefing**
 - The experience that just occurred is evaluated by the group
 - Everyone typically gets a chance to talk
 - Some debriefings are directive and involve the instructor talking and the students listening
 - Generally operate within a group process and ask questions such as:
 - What did we do?
 - What does it mean?
 - What are we going to do about it in our own lives?

- **Applications of ABC**

- Education
- Mental Health
- Business
- Athletics
- Families
- Intimate Partners/Relationships

- **References**

- Hattie, J., Marsh, H., Neill, J. T., & bound: Out-of class experiences that make a. *Review of Educational Research*, 67(1), 43–48.
- Portrie-Bethke, T. L., Hill, N. R., & Bethke, J. G. (2009). Strength-based mental health counseling for children with ADHD: An integrative model of adventure-based counseling and Adlerian play therapy. *Journal of mental Health Counseling*, 31(4), 323-329.
- Schoel, J., Prouty, D., & Radcliffe, P. (1988). Islands of healing: A guide to adventure based counseling. United States of America: Project Adventure Inc.

ADVENTURE-BASED COUNSELING EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITIES

COOPERATION AND TRUST

- **Three Circles**

Create three circles, one inside of the other (like a target). This can be done with the use of chairs, people, ropes, or whatever you have at your disposal. These circles represent the different challenge zones. Explain that the inner circle is the safety zone. This consists of things that we are not at all challenged by. Learning does not occur in this zone. The middle circle is the challenge zone. This is where learning occurs. People will feel somewhat challenged in this area, meaning they will have their comfort tested, but they will continue to feel safe. The outer circle is the danger zone. This is where people experience panic. Here too we are unable to learn because our immediate safety is all we are concerned about. Have people call out different activities and encourage each member to stand in the appropriate zone for where this activity is for them.

- **Full Value Contract (Five Finger Contract)**

The five-finger contract serves as the ground rules. The facilitator must use his or her unique style to convey this contract, but the items consist of: (1) Pinky = safety, (2) Ring finger = commitment, (3) Middle finger = respect, (4) Index finger = accountability, and (5) Thumb = fun. I always do them in this order so that safety is first and foremost. Personally, I try to be very animated and use this as a way to get peoples' energy going. I jump back and forth continually revisit each finger and lead each finger with a catching saying. For example, "The middle finger is something that means what? *laughter* Now we might not want to say what it means, but here I think it is only appropriate to turn a negative into a positive. For us, the middle finger is going to be representative of respect." Finally, you ask group members who agree to the contract to shake hands with the person on their right and the person on the left and tell them, "I will follow the five finger contract." Those who do not agree are encouraged to consider agreeing, but it is their choice and they are not forced to agree or participate.

- **Moomba**

This is the first icebreaker and it can serve to help people “loosen” up (in more ways than one). Have the group get in a circle and stand up. Tell them, “We will be stretching and yelling out ‘moomba’ five times, getting louder each time. Let’s start reaching for our toes (whisper ‘moomba’). Now let’s reach forward at waist level (say ‘moomba’ at speaking level), arms out at chest level (say ‘moomba’ even louder), and reach for the sky (say ‘moomba’ even louder), and finally arms open for a fun time (yell ‘moomba’). Once complete, ask the group what they think it means. Let them guess, but eventually give the first clue: it is a word from an Australian Aboriginal language. Let the group take a few more guesses and if there is still no answer, let them know it means, “Let’s get together and have some fun.”

- **Finger Catch**

Have everyone get into a circle and have them put their left palm up to the sky and their right index finger, pointed down, on top of the person to their right’s palm. Ask the group for a code word. Once you have the code word, inform them that when you say the code word, you must try to catch the other person’s finger while simultaneously trying to pull your finger away so it doesn’t get “caught.” Have them do this a few times and then switch hands (right palm up, left pointer finger pointed down, touching the other person’s palm. Do this a few times as well.

PROCESS!

- **Give Me Five Name Game**

Start in a circle and have each member share his or her name. Ask for a volunteer to go in the middle (if no one volunteers, facilitator can start). Everyone in the circle begins by stretching one arm towards the center with his or her palm faced up. To begin, have someone in the group call out another group member’s name (other than the person in the middle). The person in the middle must try to “five” that person’s palm. The person’s name that is called, must try to call out another group member’s name (other than the person in the middle), before their hand can be “fived.” If your hand gets fived before you call out another name, you go into the middle.

Encourage people not to call out the person’s name who called their name. If the person in the middle has been in for a sufficient amount of time, or if they wish to be done, ask if they can say every group member’s name (with help if needed) and ask for another volunteer. PROCESS!

- **People to People**

This has to be done with an odd amount of people so that there is one “caller” at all times who does not have a partner (facilitator can participate or sit out to allow odd number). Have the members of the group (with the exception of the first “caller) pair up and stand together in a circle. When the “caller” says, “people to people” everyone must try to find a different partner. The new “caller” then selects different body parts to appropriately touch (i.e., elbow to elbow, knee to knee, etc.). After the caller has given three different directions, he or she calls “people to people” and everyone looks for a new partner. A new caller each time is ideal. PROCESS!

- **All My Friend**

This activity requires place markers. These can be chairs, mats, etc. Have one less place marker than people. Have the markers arranged in a circle with the facilitator beginning in the middle (without a marker). He/she will then make a statement that is true about him/herself that begins with the sentence stem, “All my friends...” For example, he/she might start with, “All my friends have an older sister” or “All my friends have on white socks.” For those who the statement is true, they must travel to a different marker across the circle. As members of the circle move across, the person in the middle tries to take one of their seats, resulting in a new person without a marker. This person then repeats the stem filling it in with his or her own unique finish. Do this several times. PROCESS!

TRUST AND PROBLEM SOLVING

- **Finger Trust Walk**

Have everyone in the group pair up with someone who has the same eye color (Any criteria works. The idea is to get them to pair up with someone new, but to do so in a way that results in interaction with different group members.) Ask them who wishes to be challenged first, but remind them that they will be reversing roles soon. Have the pairs connect index fingers (light contact, not hooked). The person who agreed to be challenged first is then asked to close their eyes and keep them closed. The other partner is then asked to lead their “blindfolded” partner around the room. The leader is in charge of leading their partner randomly around the room without letting them contact any objects or people. Remind them that they should be careful and keep their partner safe because the roles will be reversed soon. After a few minutes, have them reverse roles and repeat. PROCESS!

- **Hustle Bustle**

This activity is timed. The facilitator has the group get back into a circle. He or she then assigns a random order to the group. I usually go for a star like pattern with frequent crosses through the middle. The first person is then given some sort of soft object (i.e., a squishy ball or stuffed animal). They are then told that they must say the next person's name in the pattern and toss them the object. The clock begins as soon as they call out the name. This next person continues the pattern and so on. The last person tosses the object back to the first person and the clock is stopped. Tell the group the time. Ask them what they thought and ask them if they think they can do better. Encourage them to set a goal for themselves, but try to keep it realistic. Have them work together to reach their goal or to come up with solutions to do it more effectively (i.e., make the circle closer/smaller). Be very encouraging and if appropriate, be flexible with the time you read off so they meet their goal. Once this has been complete, try it in reverse.

- **Lava Walk**

Designate three areas that are all touching. Designate two sides of land, separated with a lava pit in the middle. Place a line of objects that can serve as stepping-stones for safe travel across the lava. Tell the group that they need to cross the lava pit together. The catch is that one person must be touching each stone at all times. If a stone is not being touched, there lurks a lava troll (facilitator) who will snatch the untouched stone away (increasing the difficulty of the challenge). Before the exercise begins, adjust the space between the stones accordingly (greater space typically results in more of a challenge. PROCESS!

- **Moon Ball**

Use some sort of ball (beach balls are great) that the group can hit back and forth to each other without letting the ball hit the ground. The rules are (1) No one can hit the ball twice in a row, (2) everyone must hit the ball before repeats can occur, and (3) the count starts over if the ball hits the ground. Have them give it a try once and then have them collectively pick a goal to work towards. Allow a few attempts. PROCESS!

FINAL GROUP PROCESSING AND CLOSING COMMENTS

Have everyone get into a circle, seated, and calm. Have a talking object that signifies that only one person (he/she who has the object) can speak at a time. Begin with the facilitator and have him/her give concluding comments a brief highlight of memorable points. The facilitator then passes the object to the next person and they do the same (or chooses to pass). Once everyone has had a chance, the talking object can make its way around again for an additional opportunity for final comments.