

PROCESSING INITIATIVES AND CHALLENGE COURSE ACTIVITIES

Importance of Debriefing/Processing

Debriefing and reflection can be the most crucial part of learning from a group experience. Always leave time to debrief right after the experience with everyone present. Debriefing allows persons to work through their feelings and draw out their learning.

Careful Observation

The facilitator should carefully observe what is going on as the campers work at each activity, keeping some basic questions in mind:

1. How well is the group functioning as a unit? Are group decisions made, or are things happening in a random manner? Does this change, in either direction as time goes on?
2. What leadership patterns are emerging? Is someone taking over the group without really knowing what they are doing? On the other hand, is someone with a really good idea not being given the opportunity to express it?
3. Are the group members showing sensitivity to each other? Almost every group will have an individual or two who hold the group back because of lack of coordination, attitude, etc. The successful completion of some of the group components will require the “stronger” members assisting the “weaker” ones. How is the group dealing with this?
4. Are the participants having fun? These components are serious and often difficult work. Yet, they are also play.
5. What was the goal of the group? Was it accomplished? How does each individual feel about the task?

Processing Techniques

1. In the activity area, sit down in a circle so that everyone can see, hear, and be comfortable. Sitting allows them time to focus and relax with what just happened.
2. An individual may choose to “pass” and make no comments. The facilitator should not be coercive, but should try to involve everyone in the discussion. The facilitator may need to ask everyone in the group to respond to a question using a pattern to include everyone (a “talking stick” or going around the circle).
3. No put-downs or negative comments should be allowed. Resolve any that do arise.
4. The facilitator should use open-ended questions that stimulate discussion. Avoid questions that necessitate a yes/no response.
5. Appreciation should be expressed following each comment. Use names.

6. During the discussion, the facilitator should find ways to determine whether group members remember what others have said. Are they listening?
7. A spirit of empathy and patience within the group should be encouraged.
8. The facilitator should not finish the thoughts and sentences of participants.

Notes on Debriefing

Use the EIAG approach:

Experience: the actual involvement in the group experience, making decisions, etc. Ask each camper to share one word describing how the experience felt.

Identification: “What happened?” What can be identified that happened in the experience? To whom did it happen? When? How did it feel? What did you do as a result of what happened? Look at the facts, explain the symbolism, surface feelings, etc.

Generate data: What made you feel good or bad?

What did you feel was the most significant thing that happened?

How did you feel when...?

What were your reactions when...?

What were other people’s reactions when...?

Analysis: “What really happened?” Can I analyze the experience to see what made things happen the way they did? What seemed to be the behavioral patterns? What blocked or aided the process? What were the results of the strategies used? Think about outcomes, cause and effect relationships. Explore the results of alternative actions. What problems did you face and how did you attempt to meet these problems? How were you affected when this happened? Did the group meet its goals?

Generalization: “What can I learn that is applicable in other situations?” What correlation can be made between this experience and other life situations? What did I learn? What conclusions can be reached? Can I apply this to other experiences in my life? The experience is over, but participants’ lives after the experience are just beginning. How will they be different because of this experience?

Follow Up

Discuss feelings from different points in the activity, both physical and emotional.

1. How do you feel now that the activity is over? How did you feel during?
2. Did people listen to you? Did you listen to others? Were all suggestions heard, followed?
3. Who assumed leadership roles? Did it shift among people? Was it difficult for a leader to emerge and lead?

4. Who assumed the role of follower? Was it always the same people? Were there times when you were definitely a leader and definitely a follower? Did you feel more comfortable in one role versus the other? What can you do to improve your role as either a leader or follower? Why are both roles needed?
5. How were group decisions made? Were you satisfied with the decisions? Did the whole group have part in the decision-making? Did everyone get to express his/her feelings? How did you feel about this process?
6. What is an example of cooperation from your group experience? Do you tend to cooperate or be independent? What are the rewards of cooperation? Are there problems with cooperating? Was there anything blocking the cooperation within the group?
7. What is an example of when you trusted someone during the activity? When did someone trust you? How would you rate your group's overall trust?
8. What did you learn about yourself? About others?
9. Was your behavior typical of the way you usually act in groups? What skill can you work on to improve?
10. Is there anything you would like to say to the group members?