

Jumping Your Hurdles

15. Unfair Tower

Spatial Requirements: Classroom with moderate space required

Activity Type: Movement/group

Grades: 3-12

Group Size: 6 or more

Time: 15-20 minutes

Introduction: Life isn't always fair. It places hurdles in our way that cause us to feel pain, to stumble, and to sometimes fall. When life hands us these unfair challenges, however, it is important to get back up and keep trying. We can do this by using the steps in "Jumping Your Hurdles." This challenge will help students better understand these important principles.

Materials:

- 1 paper bag containing between 16 and 48 straws per team
- ½ inch of masking tape per straw
- 1 ruler per team
- 1 slip of paper for each team, for use later in the game, each containing a message (See below, or print a copy from www.whytry.org/activities.)

For this activity, materials will be distributed differently between the teams.

After dividing the class into teams of three, explain that the goal is to build the tallest freestanding tower, using the materials they have been given in their paper bags. When they begin to notice the inequality between the materials, tell them to do the best they can with what they have been given.

Allow the teams ten minutes of actual building time, but interrupt halfway through to distribute the slips of paper. Have a representative from each team come collect these papers, wait until all have received one, and allow them to open their messages at the same time. The teams then continue the building process following the changes in their message. At the end of the building time, have everyone stop and take all hands off for fifteen seconds before measuring the height. The tallest tower wins.

Messages on the slips of paper might include:

Your team is doing a good job. Keep it up!

Your tower has experienced an earthquake and was completely destroyed. Go to the teacher, get a new set of building materials, and start over.

During construction, strong winds blew away half of the straws that you have left. Take half of your remaining straws and turn them into the teacher.

You have been given a business award by the city. You can go take two straws from any team you want. (The straws must not be already part of their tower.)

You have been given a grant by the city. You may go to the teacher and receive four extra straws.

The worker's union has declared a silence strike against your company. Your team members may no longer talk for the rest of the building time.

A shipping error has been made. You can go to the teacher and receive an extra six inches of masking tape.

All of your workers have been injured in a freak accident. From now on you may only use your left hands.

Processing the Activity:

- Was this activity fair? Why or why not?
- How was your building plan developed? How successful was your plan?
- How did the surprise challenge help or hurt your team?
- How did you feel when you noticed some teams had more or less materials than you did?
- How would you have felt if your grade depended on how tall your tower was? Would it be fair to grade you based on that?
- Do we always have control over our circumstances or resources? Why or why not?
- How should we respond when life gives us unfair hurdles?
- When hurdles are placed in our way, do we always get to choose what those hurdles are? What do we have control over when it comes to jumping the hurdle?
- Is it possible to have success in life even when we have more unfair disadvantages?
- How can positive self-talk give us success in an unfair world?