



CANADIAN WILDLIFE
FEDERATION

RACCOON CIRCLES

THE WORLD WIDE WEBBING

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BASIC TRAINING

WHAT IS A RACCOON CIRCLE?

Raccoon Circles are an easy and ideal method for teaching connection between people, teambuilding, ecology and a variety of other activities. They were invented by Dr Tom Smith "The Old Raccoon" and these activities were developed by him and Jim Cain. CWF is using these cards with their permission. To read the full guide that these activities were taken from, please visit www.teamworkandteamplay.com.



An abstract graphic in the bottom-left corner of the page. It consists of several concentric, semi-circular bands and scattered rectangular blocks in various shades of orange and brown, creating a layered, architectural feel.

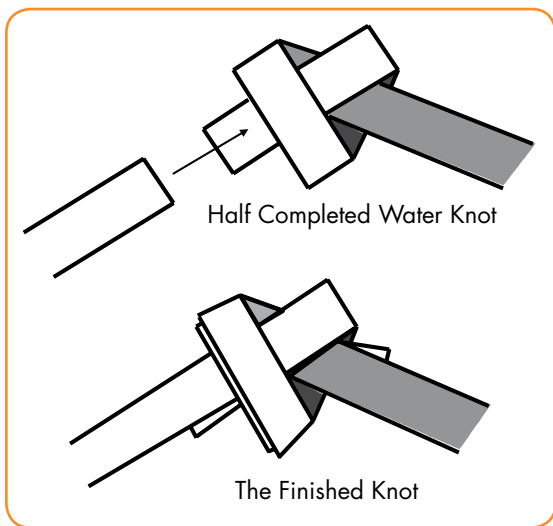
WHAT IS A RACCOON CIRCLE?

BASIC TRAINING

TYING A WATER KNOT

The most convenient way to circle a single Raccoon Circle, or join multiple Raccoon Circles together is with a water knot (named by river rafting guides that used this style of knot to secure loads with webbing on their rafts).

Form an overhand knot with one end of the webbing, then feed the other end of the webbing backwards through this knot to complete the water knot (see illustrations).



The background is a solid orange color. In the bottom-left corner, there is a complex, abstract geometric pattern. This pattern consists of several concentric, semi-circular bands and segments in various shades of orange and brown, creating a sense of depth and movement, reminiscent of a stylized knot or a modern architectural design.

TYING A WATER KNOT

ICEBREAKERS AND OPENING ACTIVITIES

W.A.M.F. (WRAPPED AROUND MY FINGER)

W.A.M.F. stands for Wrapped Around My Finger, and pretty much explains this entire activity. Begin with an unknotted Raccoon Circle. One person in the group begins wrapping the webbing around their index finger, and while doing so, provides the group with some information about themselves (where they were born, family members, school experiences, childhood pets, dreams, goals, favorite foods, etc.) The goal is for this person to continue talking until the webbing is completely wrapped around their finger. When they reach the end, they allow the webbing to unwind and pass it along to the next person in the group.



ICEBREAKERS AND OPENING ACTIVITIES

W.A.M.F. (WRAPPED AROUND MY FINGER)

continued

This particular activity provides a bit more time for folks to talk about themselves, and also provides a kinesthetic activity coupled with a verbal activity for exploring multiple intelligence opportunities and whole brain learning possibilities. There is also a popular theory that for folks that may be a bit shy about speaking to even a small group in public, the action of wrapping the webbing around their finger occupies that portion of the brain that controls nervousness. By wrapping and rapping at the same time, the speech center becomes less inhibited and the person talking is less stressed. It is also surprising what participants discuss during this wrapping and rapping session. The 15-foot length of the Raccoon Circle allows more than a minutes worth of communication, which means you'll learn quite a bit more about a person than just their name and where they live.



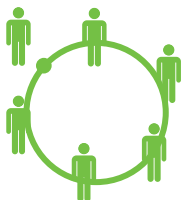
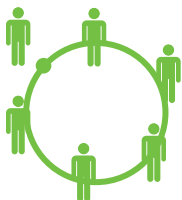
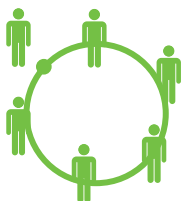
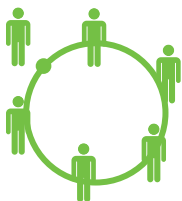
ICEBREAKERS AND OPENING ACTIVITIES

TWICE AROUND THE BLOCK

This newest Raccoon Circle activity is a playful and fun icebreaker. You'll need one knotted Raccoon Circle per group of about 5 or 6 people. The person nearest the knot lets go of the Raccoon Circle and begins introducing themselves to the group. The remaining members of the group are responsible for slowly moving the knot twice around the circle. When the knot reaches the person talking the second time, their turn is over. Group members actually control the time allotted to each person. If they are enjoying the story, they can elect to slow down the movement of the knot, or they can speed up to bring the introduction to a close more quickly.

Groups often laugh as they speed up the movement of the knot, but then typically allow the person talking to respectfully finish their introduction. Fun for everyone, and especially for the group to feel in control of the length of time each person talks.





TWICE AROUND THE BLOCK

ICEBREAKERS AND OPENING ACTIVITIES

OVER HERE!

If your goal is to build an atmosphere of acceptance and inclusion within your group, this is the perfect activity for you. Begin by spreading several knotted Raccoon Circles around on the floor or ground (one for every four to six participants). The object here is to discuss some things that participants have in common and then to decide which person has the most (or least, or best, etc.) of these. For example, in each group, find out who has the most brothers and sisters. The facilitator should allow the group a few seconds for discussion, and then says loudly, "one, two three," and the rest of the group replies, "See Ya!" as they bid farewell to the person with the most brothers and sisters. This person then leaves this group.



Each circle has now lost a member of their group. Encourage them to attract anew member by yelling, "over here, over here, over here!" Once everyone has found a new group, a new question is given to the group, such as, "who is wearing the most jewelry?" After a few minutes, "one, two, three..... See Ya!"

ICEBREAKERS AND OPENING ACTIVITIES

OVER HERE! *continued*

For additional time or to learn a bit more about the other folks in the group, the facilitator can have two questions for each encounter. The first should be a topic for discussion that the whole group can discuss and for which they are likely to have something in common. For example, what is the best deserts you have ever had? Then the second question can be a brief one, followed by “one, two, three..... See Ya!”



Here are some additional questions for “Over Here!”

- » Who has the most books in their person library collection?
- » Who has watched the most videos or movies this month?
- » Who has traveled the farthest distance from here?
- » Who traveled the farthest distance today?
- » Who has the most living family members?
- » Who has the most unusual middle name?
- » Who is wearing the cleanest shoes?
- » Who has the coolest watch?
- » Who has the longest hair?
- » Who is the tallest?

ICEBREAKERS AND OPENING ACTIVITIES

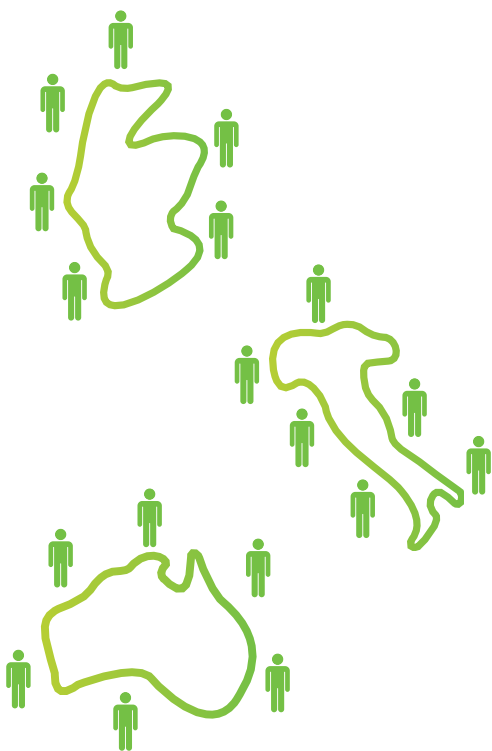
WHERE YA FROM, WHERE YA BEEN?



During one Raccoon Circle activity session, a member of our group mentioned that they were born in Scotland. Another member of the group was unfamiliar with this location, and so we formed the geographical outline of Scotland with our Raccoon Circle (like a giant map). Next, several group members told stories about their travels to Scotland, which led to the creation of the following activity.

Where Ya From? Where Ya Been? has become a great way for each person in the group to share 'their story.' One at a time, they create the outline of where they are from, or similarly someplace they have recently visited, and then tell stories about these important places in their lives.

At a leadership conference I attended, one keynote speaker mentioned that there are three things that we each uniquely own: our name, our reputation and our story. Where Ya From? Where Ya Been? gives each member of the group a chance to tell their story.



**WHERE YA FROM,
WHERE YA BEEN?**



ICEBREAKERS AND OPENING ACTIVITIES

MY LIFE LINE

Begin this activity by placing an unknotted Raccoon Circle line on the ground or floor for each group of four to six participants. One person in each group begins sharing some of the highlights of their life, beginning with where they were born, as they walk along the length of the Raccoon Circle line. When they reach the present day, there will still be some portion of the line left untraveled. Here they can discuss what some of their goals and plans are for the future. Other members of the group walk along with the person sharing their life line. When one person completes their story, another member of the group can begin the story of their life line.



MY LIFE LINE

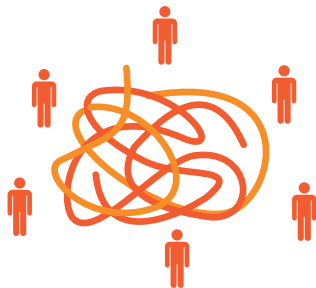
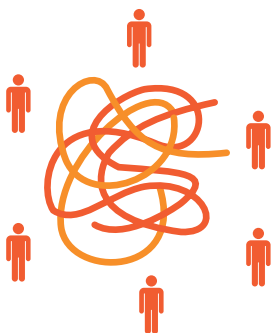
TEAMBUILDING CHALLENGES

THE MISSING LINK

The Missing Link is a perfect activity for teaching consensus building within a group. Begin with two Raccoon Circles of different colors, tied individually with water knots. These two circles can either be linked together (like links of chain) or unlinked but lying near each other.

Place both loops on the ground, in such a manner so it is difficult to tell whether the two loops are in fact linked or unlinked. Now assign the group the task of achieving a consensus as to whether the two loops are linked or unlinked, without touching the Raccoon Circles. Invite those who believe the circles are linked to stand together on the right side, and those who believe they are unlinked, on the left side. Next invite partnerships between the members of each side (so that a 'linked' believer is paired with an 'unlinked' believer). The discussion that takes place between partners is a great lesson in learning to understand other people, and listen to their viewpoints.





THE MISSING LINK

TEAMBUILDING CHALLENGES

INSIDE / OUT

This is one of my favorite activities. It is not only a great initial problem solving activity, but also one that allows a group to discuss a very serious cultural issues, namely, ethical behavior.

Begin with a Raccoon Circle on the floor. Have a group of five to seven participants step inside the circle. The task is now for this group to go from the inside of the circle to the outside, by going underneath the Raccoon Circle, without anyone in the group using their hands, arms or shoulders.

It is important to stress the group problem solving process in this activity. In order for other members of the group to assist in the completion of the task, they need to know the plan, and what their part is in the solution. To this end, encourage the group to “plan their work” and then “work their plan.” This means that prior to ANY action, the group will need to plan their approach to solving this problem, and making sure that everyone in the group knows their part of the plan.

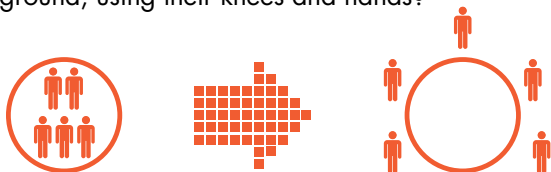
It is typical that participants do in fact use their arms, shoulders and hands during this activity. Not that they grasp the webbing with their hands, but often they will use hands to balance each other, to hold up their leg while completing the task, or to crawl on their hands and knees.



TEAMBUILDING CHALLENGES

INSIDE / OUT *continued*

After completing the task, debriefing questions include asking the group if they had a plan, and did they change the plan during the completion of the activity, and if so, why? As a second part to this activity, you can also ask the group to go Outside In, again without using their hands, arms or shoulders.... and see if they "plan their work" before "working their plan." Debriefing questions for this second version can include, "how long did you spend planning Inside Out compared to Outside In?" Why was there a difference? And finally, to introduce ethical issues, "how do you feel about following the guidelines of not using your arms, shoulders or hands? For example, did anyone crawl on the ground, using their knees and hands?"



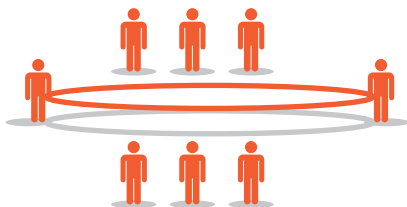
The ethical dilemma of group members using their arms, shoulders or hands, when specifically instructed not to, does not need to turn into a discussion about rules, but more about interpretation of such rules. For example, rather than asking why group members did not follow the rules, ask how the rules could have been better presented so that no interpretation errors would occur.

TEAMBUILDING CHALLENGES

OVER THE FENCE

Here is a simpler and improved version of the classic adventure activity, the Electric Fence. Begin with two participants holding a Raccoon Circle, approximately 6 inches above ground level, with the long parallel sides of the Raccoon Circle about 12 inches apart. Place half of the group on each side of the Raccoon Circle "fence." The first two persons (one from each side, one at a time) to cross the "fence" have the fence at 6 inches from the ground. The next two persons have the height increased to 12 inches, and so on. The maximum height, even for large groups is 4 feet (about 1.3 meters).

This version of the Electric Fence places spotters on both sides of the fence at all times. It also provides a changing level of challenge to the group. Even at the lowest levels, it is required that all participants crossing the fence, be in contact with at least 2 other participants at ALL times during the crossing. Allowing two participants to hold the Raccoon Circle also leaves an opportunity for a participant that may wish not to be passed over the fence. Or, if the holders do wish to pass over, they can rotate into and out of the holding positions with other team members during the event.



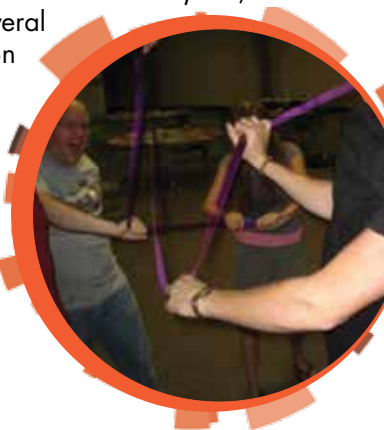
OVER THE FENCE

TEAMBUILDING CHALLENGES

SHAPE UP!

Using a knotted Raccoon Circle, with all member of the group holding on, form the following letters, numbers and shapes as quickly as possible. Three-dimensional shapes are also possible, such as cubes, trees, pyramids, igloos, planes, and other basic 3-D shapes.

For a campfire skit (or a performance art piece) let different groups with appropriate color Raccoon Circles create the different shapes or objects in the story (such as green trees, a yellow sun, people, animals and other objects of various colors). Or, combine forces to have several groups each make a portion of a larger object (such as the tracks, engine, wheels, smoke, coal car and caboose of a small train).



A B C D E F
G H I J K L M
N O P Q R S T
U V W X Y Z
? @ &



SHAPE UP!

TEAMBUILDING CHALLENGES

TOSSING PIZZA

This activity definitely fits into the “harder than it looks” category. Begin with a group of 5-8 participants holding onto a knotted Raccoon Circle, hands upward, elbows straight, with no slack in the circle. The challenge is for the group to toss this Raccoon Circle pizza into the air, at least to the height of their heads, and then for everyone in the group to catch the circle as it drops back down, without anyone moving their feet.

After a few unsuccessful attempts, encourage the group to plan their task, brainstorm new ideas and try them. A good pizza flipping team can toss their Raccoon Circle pizza in the air three times without anyone in the group dropping it or moving their feet.

For a higher level of challenge, the ultimate pizza chefs can spin their pizza dough in the air. For the Raccoon Circle pizza, this means tossing the pizza into the air and having the knot come back down at least one person to the right or left of where it was when it was launched. A little ‘spin action’ can actually improve the team’s performance. This simple problem solving activity is a fun way to begin the ‘working as a team’ portion of your program.



TOSSING PIZZA

TEAMBUILDING CHALLENGES

THE CHAIN GANG

Here is a simple challenge for moving a group from one location to another. Begin with the entire team standing in a line, one person standing just behind the next. Starting with the leading participant, place a continuous piece of webbing (or several Raccoon Circles tied together) on the right shoulder of each person. The goal of the group is to see how far they can walk, without allowing the webbing to touch the ground or slide off of their shoulders, or to be touched with their arms or hands. As they walk, the webbing typically sways, slides and (eventually) will fall off. After the first failure, invite the team to brainstorm ideas for improvement (such as standing on opposite sides of the rope). For safety reasons, only place the rope upon participants' shoulders, NEVER around their necks or attached to their clothing.



← Walk this direction

THE CHAIN GANG

GAMES

GRAND PRIX RACING

Now that you have turned the Raccoon Circle into a complete circle or loop using a water knot, you are ready for the ultimate in sport racing. This activity will boost the enthusiasm of your audience, and provide some moderate competition in the process.

Begin by spreading several Raccoon Circles around the available space, in close proximity to each other. Ask participants to join one of the 'racing teams,' picking their favorite color in the process. This activity works best with approximately 5 to 7 participants per Raccoon Circle. Have participants hold the Raccoon Circle with both hands in front of them.

"Ladies and Gentlemen! It is summertime, and that means one thing in this part of the world - Grand Prix Racing! Now I know that you are such die-hard race fans that just the thought of a race makes your heart beat faster. So this race comes in three parts. First, when I say that "we're going to have a race", your response is a primal grunt. Next I'll say, "start your engines!" and I want to hear your best racecar sounds (audience practices making race car revving engine, shifting gears and braking sounds). Finally, with so many cars on the track today, it will be difficult to see just which group finishes their race first, so we'll need a sign indicating when your group is finished. That sign is to raise your hands (and the Raccoon Circle) above your heads and yell "Yessssssss!"

Logistically, Grand Prix involves having the group transfer the knot around the group as quickly as possible, using only their hands. This activity can even be performed for a seated audience. To begin, you'll need a "start / finish" line, which



GAMES

GRAND PRIX RACING *continued*

can be the person that was born the farthest distance away from the present location. The race begins at this location, and ends when the knot is passed around the circle, and returns to this same location (Yesssssss!)

Typically in Raccoon Circle Grand Prix racing, there are three qualifying rounds or races. The first race is a single lap race to the right, with the knot traveling once around the inside of the circle to the right (counterclockwise). The second race is a multi-lap race (two or three laps) to the left (clockwise) around the circle. And the final race of the series is a 'winner take all' championship race, with one lap to the right (counterclockwise) followed by one lap to the left (clockwise).

Incidentally, after this activity, the group will not only be energized, but perhaps in a slightly competitive mood. From a sequencing standpoint, you can either continue this atmosphere (with more competitive challenges or introduce a bit of counterpoint, by following this activity with one that requires the group working together in a collaborative manner.

As second variation of this activity, rather than a typical oval or circular racetrack, use the Raccoon Circle to construct a Figure-8 racetrack. When you begin the race, "On your mark, get set, go!" some groups will not immediately understand which way to move their hands in order to move the knot clockwise around the group. This is yet another simple but effective problem solving opportunity.

One final variation, and one of our favorites, is the pit stop. For the final long race of the season, spin the webbing two laps to the left, then everyone lets go, places the Raccoon Circle on the ground, spins around 360 degrees on their own, picks up the Raccoon Circle, and finishes by racing two laps back to the right. The energy in your group will be very high by this point.

GAMES

RACCOON CIRCLE JOUSTING

Here is a challenging activity for two participants that requires balance, skill and a certain amount of understanding and anticipation of the other player's moves. It is also an excellent introduction into non-contact forms of martial arts where anticipating your opponents moves are paramount. Use two Raccoon Circles that have been tied together with a single water knot in the middle, to form a 30 foot (9 meters) long line.

Two contenders (participants) now stand with their feet together about 10 feet (3 meters) apart, holding only the very ends of the long Raccoon Circle. The object is to make the other person either let go of the Raccoon Circle, or to take a step by pulling, yanking and controlling the Raccoon Circle.

You can modify the positions in this activity for three people, by using three raccoon circles in a Y formation. You can also accommodate four players by arranging four Raccoon Circles in a square or cross formation. You can even turn this into an activity for the entire group by using one very large circle made by tying several Raccoon Circles together. After experiencing how it feels to be pulled off balance, introduce the group to the concept of the yurt circle, and see if everyone can balance without pulling anyone off their platform.



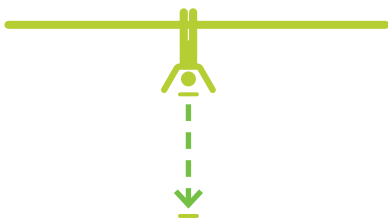
RACCOON CIRCLE JOUSTING

GAMES

PENCIL PUSHERS

Don't be fooled, this simple activity is extremely physically challenging. Stretch an untied Raccoon Circle into a line. This is the starting point. The challenge now is for teams of three to four participants to push a new, unsharpened pencil beyond the line and across the floor, making contact with only their hands on the floor. This challenge typically results in the group forming some type of human bridge, with the first person's feet just behind the line and other team members climbing over them as they extend the bridge. The winners are those that push the pencil the furthest distance and still are able to return behind the line, without touching the floor in front of the line with anything but their hands.

[aerial view]



PENCIL PUSHERS

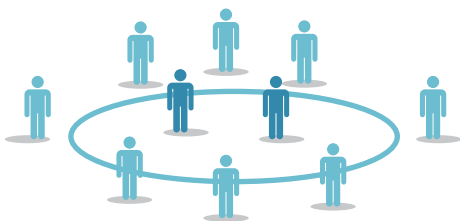


REVIEWING ACTIVITIES

STEP INTO THE CIRCLE

At the completion of an activity, have the group gather around a large circle made from multiple Raccoon Circles that have been knotted together and placed on the ground. After proposing a question to the group, anyone wishing to answer is asked to step into the circle, so that each person might be heard.

Reviewing continues until no one is left standing inside the circle. This technique provides everyone in the group the opportunity to speak, and a visual cue for the facilitator to know how many people would like to contribute.



STEP INTO THE CIRCLE

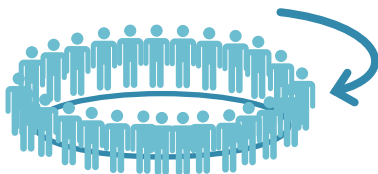
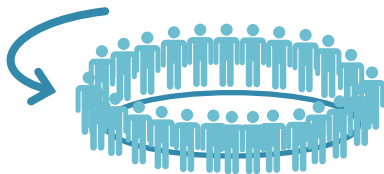
REVIEWING ACTIVITIES

SHUFFLE LEFT / SHUFFLE RIGHT

Here is a reviewing technique that includes kinesthetic movement. If your group prefers activity and doesn't like to sit still for any length of time, this technique is perfect. Begin by inviting the group to stand closely together around a Raccoon Circle that has been placed on the ground. Participants can hold hands, interlocking elbows with their neighbors or place their arms around each other. Begin by saying, "shuffle left" for a short distance until someone that has a comment to make says "STOP!" After they have their say, they remark "shuffle right" and the circle moves to the right until another person says stop and offers their commentary.

Don't be afraid to let the circle move quite a distance - it may take a few moments for some participants to formulate their comments. If you like, you can suggest that anytime the circle completes one full revolution without any stops, reviewing will stop and the group will move on.





SHUFFLE LEFT /
SHUFFLE RIGHT

REVIEWING ACTIVITIES

A KNOT FOR EVERY TEACHABLE MOMENT

Throughout the program, each time a teachable moment is encountered, the group places a single knot onto an initially unknotted Raccoon Circle. Before a new knot is added, the group reviews all previous knots to insure that the learning is not lost. At the end of the day, untie each knot as the group identifies and reflects on each teachable moment.

As an alternative, at the completion of the program, the facilitator can review each of the knots, and then cut them apart, giving one knot to each participant in the group. This process can also be used in corporate settings so that one person takes the responsibility to return to the workplace and take action on the lesson learned.



An abstract graphic in the bottom-left corner of the page. It consists of several concentric, overlapping circular and semi-circular segments in various shades of blue, creating a layered, geometric effect that resembles a stylized knot or a modern architectural element.

**A KNOT FOR EVERY
TEACHABLE MOMENT**

CLOSING ACTIVITIES

A CIRCLE OF CONNECTION

It is helpful for a group to perform this activity on the outside of a knotted Raccoon Circle that has been placed on the ground (to help keep the group in a circle). The facilitator begins by sharing some information about what they have learned during the program. When another participant has also experienced that insight, they link elbows with the previous person and begin to share some of their personal learnings. The activity continues until all members of the group have 'linked together.' The final task is for the last person to continue sharing until the first person can link with them. At this point, there is an opportunity to say, "...and by the way. Those things which link us together, bring us a bit closer together as well!"

As a closing activity, group members can share their thoughts, comments and feelings about the program or goals for the future.

You can find more closing activities by downloading the document "Closing Activities and Songs" at the T&T website **www.teamworkandteamplay.com**.



CANADIAN WILDLIFE
FEDERATION

For more information about
CWF's programs, please visit:

CanadianWildlifeFederation.ca

Thanks to Dr. Jim Cain
and Dr. Tom Smith

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