

What Can We Do?

Criteria for evaluating the suitability of activities for real-world, in-person gatherings.

Dr. Jim Cain, Teamwork & Teamplay

“What we want are low risk, high connection activities.”

Throughout the recent pandemic, I’ve been inspired by the conversations I’ve had with camp professionals around the world, struggling to meet the needs of their camping communities. Eventually in each of these conversations about operating a camp in the middle of a global pandemic, they ask the now-familiar question, *“what can we do?”*

Like many of you, I’ve been pondering that question as well. At the start of the pandemic, I quickly realized that I would need to convert many of my real-world, in-person activities to the virtual world, if I wanted to maintain my relevance. More recently, I’ve been filtering through my extensive list of camp-friendly activities, hoping to identify those activities suitable for camp, while maintaining physical distancing and other best practices and Covid protocols.

Some of my favorite activities however, have been rendered unusable during the global pandemic, including such activities as: Nose Jousting, The Fifty-Yard Scream, Group Juggling, Human Knot, square dancing and unfortunately dozens and dozens of others.

In order to comprehend why some familiar camp activities need to be temporarily sidelined requires an understanding of the risk factors associated with these various games. In general, games and activities that incorporate singing, shouting, close physical proximity or contact with other participants, large audiences, sharing of community property or that take place indoors with limited ventilation are likely candidates for elimination under the present pandemic guidelines. The important phrase in this cautionary tale is the word temporarily. Not forever. Not permanently, but just for the immediate future.

Weeding out those activities that cannot be adapted or modified to meet existing guidelines is no simple task. Until now, there was no unified filter for identifying activities in this category. So, I created my own. Consider the following nine criteria a filter for group activities. If you answer yes to two or more of the following criteria for any particular activity, then it is in your interest and the health and safety of your campers and staff to either eliminate that activity or modify it to lower the potential for risk.

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Created by Dr. Jim Cain, Spring 2021

Does the activity:

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Place participants in close proximity with each other? | Yes | No |
| 2. Involve singing, shouting, chanting or cheering? | Yes | No |
| 3. Create physical contact between players? | Yes | No |
| 4. Involve a shared resource, touched by many? | Yes | No |
| 5. Take place indoors? | Yes | No |
| 6. Take place in a space with poor ventilation? | Yes | No |
| 7. Require more people than a standard cohort group? | Yes | No |
| 8. Require equipment that cannot be sanitized between groups? | Yes | No |
| 9. Require hand-washing before and after the activity? | Yes | No |

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Some of my favorite activities fall into the category of super-spreader events. As an example, consider the activity *Group Juggling*. In this activity a circle of participants tosses a collection of soft throwable objects in a fixed pattern to every member of the group. Using the filtering criteria, participants are in close proximity with each other and a shared resource is touched by all members of the group. Two strikes in this case and you're out. Even with physical distancing, sanitizing props between groups, PPE including gloves and hand-washing before and after the activity, *Group Juggling* is still at a higher risk level than many other viable activities. For me, the risk/benefit ratio is just not acceptable.

And the *Group Juggling* activity is far from the only group activity that should be temporarily eliminated from your repertoire. Many other camp-friendly, group activities unfortunately fall into this category, including: Human Knot, Icebreaker Handshakes, the 50 Yard Scream, Nose Jousting, Electric Tangerine, challenge course elements that require spotting, Tag games, Mrs. Right, Pass the Deck, dice games, Interference, Pass the Orange, 123 Scream and unfortunately many, many others.

Some of these activities require personal props, such as blindfolds or gloves, or shared resources, such as balls and ropes. Some require resources that cannot be easily sanitized.

I realize that eliminating some of your favorite group activities is a difficult but necessary precaution in the wake of a global pandemic, but think of it as an opportunity to create new activities that are every bit as exciting as the ones you are replacing. The possibilities are limited only by your imagination.

*"In our post-pandemic future, there will be no recovery without reconnection.
And the process of reconnection should begin at the lowest possible level of risk."*

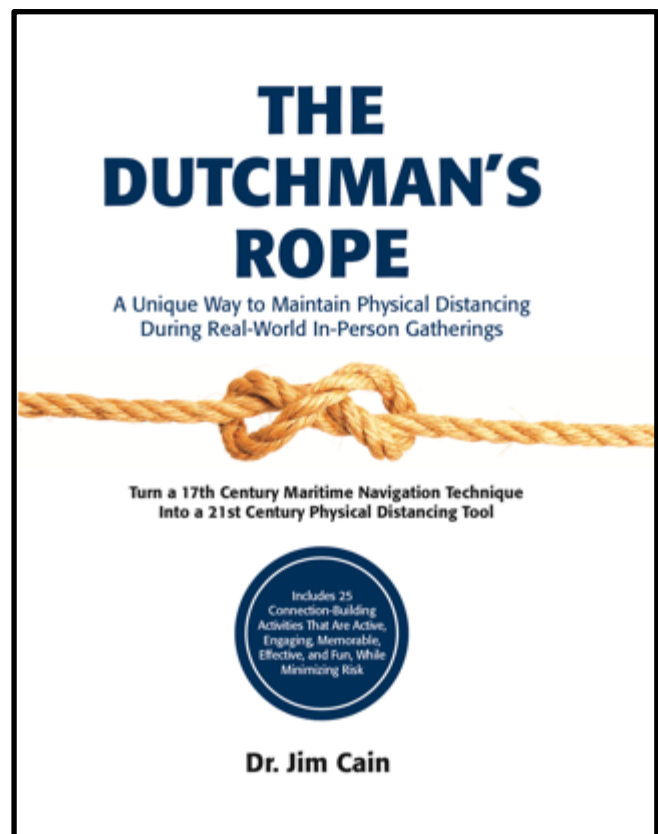
So, before your campers arrive, now is the perfect time to scrutinize your planned camp activities using the criteria mentioned in this article. For activities that do not meet these criteria, your choice is to temporarily suspend that particular activity or modify it in such a way as to meet these guidelines. Consider, for example, the two familiar teambuilding activities shown on the next page, and the creative ways in which staff have modified each of these activities to meet physical distancing guidelines.

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For more information about creative ideas for physical distancing at camp, including the criteria presented in this article, fifty camp-friendly physically-distanced activities and an assortment of best practices and common-sense advice, see the new book: ***Connection Without Contact*** by Dr. Jim Cain. Available now at: ACABookstore.org.

For more information about physical distancing activities, virtual and real-world staff development and teambuilding in general, visit: www.teamworkandteamplay.com.



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