Overview:
This lesson plan will challenge participants to practice communicating with individuals who have different styles from them. In this activity, participants will be provided with toothpicks as well as a card with a communication rule that they must follow. Then, they will wander around the room and talk to other participants. Whenever another participant violates their rule, they will give that participant a toothpick. At the end, they will see who has the most toothpicks and the facilitator will debrief.

Background and Information:
This activity was created by Donna M. Stringer and Patricia A. Cassiday and was originally published in *52 Activities for Improving Cross-Cultural Communication* (see citation below). An alternative version from YFU Intercultural Exchange is also available online. Please see the following page for links and more information.

Objectives:
As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:
1. “Explore how nonverbal communication impacts the message received.”
2. “Recognize the importance of learning the nonverbal rules of another culture.”
3. “Observe how nonverbal messages can be cultural and/or gender specific.”
4. “Experience silence as it impacts communication.”
5. “Experience the feeling of behaving inappropriately when the rules are unspoken” (Stringer & Cassiday, 2009, p. 47).

Time:
1 hour

Group Size:
Entire group

Materials:
Flip chart or Powerpoint slide listing rules, toothpicks (10 per participant), index cards with a "nonverbal rule" on each card, and eight different colored dots to code the cards that have the same nonverbal rule.

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Minimization

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Verbal and Nonverbal Communication:

- To articulate a complex understanding of cultural differences in verbal and nonverbal communication (e.g., demonstrates understanding of the degree to which people use physical contact while communicating in different cultures or use direct/indirect and explicit/implicit meanings).
- To skillfully negotiate a shared understanding based on these differences.

Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks:

- To demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs & practices.

Other Skills:

Friendship

Links to Activity Instructions and Supplemental Materials:

- A version of this activity from the YFU Intercultural Exchange program.
- Facilitators may also consider consulting a video demonstration of the Toothpicks activity.

Related Tools:

Similar tools:

- Cocktail Party, The
- Culture Shock
- Mingle
- Mockingbird, The
- Owl, The
- Simulation: Rockets and Sparklers
- What is the Message?