

Lean on Me

Equipment

- One rope (regular rope or several clotheslines tied together) measuring at least 100 feet (30 m) for younger students and at least 130 feet (40 m) for high schoolers
- Enough vinyl bases or poly spots to mark a clearly defined standing space for each group member
- For each student, a card bearing either a character-education focus word or a definition matching one of the words (words and definitions available in the web resource for chapter 3)
- Large open area (perhaps outdoors) in which to conduct the challenge

Description

Lean on Me offers a distinctive challenge in that it can be attempted by a very large group. The group holds onto a rope in the shape of a circle; the ends of the rope should be tied together with a reliable square knot. The group members let go of the rope one pair at a time with the goal of getting down to the smallest number of people possible while still keeping the rope off the ground. Those supporting the rope must not move their feet, take their hands off of the rope, or slide their hands along the rope.

To get set up for the activity, group members space themselves evenly around the rope, then slide backward until the rope is taut. Now each student puts his or her poly spot on the floor and stands on it. Each group member holds onto the rope with two hands and with his or her elbows straight. In addition, each member has memorized a card with either a character-education word or a matching definition for one of the words.

To engage in the activity, group members decide which two students will let go of the rope at any given time. In order to let go, the students must match a focus word and its definition. In other words, a student who has memorized a character-education word may not let go until the group discusses (collaborates) and correctly identifies that word's correct definition. Once a match has been made, the student with the word and the student with its definition may both let go. The group continues to release matching pairs until they have successfully solved the challenge—that is, until only four group members are left holding the rope off the ground.

Rules

1. A group member may not step off of a base until he or she has released the rope. If you do this challenge outside, you will not use poly spots (they are not designed for asphalt or grass); however, students are still not allowed to shuffle their feet or take a step.
2. Once the task has started, group members may not remove their hands from the rope unless they have been selected to let go.
3. Group members may not slide their hands while holding the rope.
4. A pair of team members must match a character-education word with its definition before stepping off of the base. In addition, the entire team must be notified that the two students have matched and are going to let go. Only one pair of matching students may step off at a time.
5. Once a pair of team members has let go of the rope, those two students may not touch the rope again. They may assist or touch their teammates who are still holding the rope, but they may not touch the rope itself.
6. No one may call another team member by his or her last name or use a put-down.
7. If a rule is broken, or if the rope hits the floor, the challenge attempt must stop and the group must start over.

Variations

- Do not require that students match a word and definition before letting go. Instead, allow team members to let go of the rope one at a time and see if the group can get down to three members left holding the rope off the ground.
- Time the activity. How quickly can the group get down to three members left holding the rope?

