

Tennis Balls and Slippery Eggs Activity

Introduction:

The outcome of this activity is to give the participants a conceptual view and affective understanding of the need to establish relationships with families and colleagues and practice reciprocal conversations as preparation for discussing difficult topics.

“Tennis ball” and “Slippery Egg” conversations is a concept presented in *Tools for Teaching Developmentally Appropriate Practice: The Leading Edge in Early Childhood Education* videotape series. “Tennis Ball” conversations are pleasant, give and take, conversations on everyday non-controversial topics. Like playing catch with a tennis ball, the conversation is easily “tossed” and “caught” back and forth. These types of conversations help foster the foundation of relationships and help to learn one another’s communication style and preferences.

In contrast, difficult messages can be called “slippery egg” messages. They are more emotionally sensitive conversations that are more difficult to toss and catch. The more you practice tossing and catching the tennis ball the more prepared you will be to handle a slippery egg.

In this activity students will literally play catch with a tennis ball, move to an egg and then to a slippery egg while reflecting on the level of difficulty then debrief by comparing the experience to conversation.

Materials needed for Activity:

Tennis Ball 2 Eggs (one might get broken before the activity is over) Vegetable oil

Activity Guidelines:

Step 1: Recruit two volunteers and they stand about three feet apart.

Say, “I need two volunteers for a quick activity. You don’t need to talk or do anything embarrassing.”

Step 2: Start the tennis ball toss.

Say, “I’m going to have you toss a tennis ball back and forth. Does this seem pretty simple? There really isn’t a problem if you drop it- you can just pick it up and start again. You can even speed up the toss as you get more comfortable.”

Note to the audience that they seem comfortable and it does not seem difficult or stressful.

Step 3: Exchange the tennis ball with an egg.

After a few tosses say, “Now I’m going to change the activity a little. I want you to do the same activity but I want you to toss an egg. This is a little more stressful isn’t it?”

Note to the audience how the activity seems to be more awkward and the participants aren’t as comfortable.

Step 4: Add a little oil to the egg.

Say, “ Okay, to finish up I have one more thing for you to toss. Now I would like you to toss a slippery egg.”

Note volunteers’ reactions to audience – how they may have moved more closely together and indicators that their comfort level is reduced.

Step 4: Debrief

We can liken this activity to the various types of communication we engage in. Day to day conversation about the weather and what you had for dinner last night is like tossing a tennis ball – it is relatively easy and comfortable – you can almost do it without thinking.

Tossing an egg is a bit more complex-there is more at stake if you drop it. This can be likened to the kind of communication that occurs when we need to gain consensus, when we are trying to communicate our needs to others, etc., where we need to practice good listening communication skills.

Finally, we have the slippery egg – the conversations we need to have with a parent about problems their child is having; a staff person who is not doing their job appropriately etc. To be successful in keeping these slippery egg conversations going we need to have lots of practice using good communication skills. If we do this, when the “slippery eggs” appear, we will be more confident in handling them.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998). Tools for Teaching Developmentally Appropriate Practice: The Leading Edge in Early Childhood Education. [Videotape Series]. Washington, DC.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

I:\Train\PAPI\Enhancements\Core Content Area 1\Tennis Balls and Slippery Eggs Activity.docx