



## Forming the Group & Initiative Games

Youth often feel isolated and overwhelmed. One of the best ways to encourage and help these individuals is to give each a sense of belonging and importance to the group, the squad and team. One of the best ways to help form this group is through the use of initiative games. Perhaps the best way to define an initiative game is that it is a mentally and/or physically challenging task that a group is required to do. Usually the combined effort of the group is required to complete the task.

Initiative games require teamwork, planning, common sense, and the desire to succeed. Some games require a special location or making some special gear; others can be done almost anywhere. For sample of initiative games, see the Snow Camping, Survival, or Backpacking Varsity/Venture Pamphlets. Other options are participation in a C.O.P.E course or district or council group obstacle courses such as the Escape From the P.O.W. (Prisoner of War) Camp (contact the Varsity Big Event Staff at Great Salt Lake Council #590 at (801) 582-3663).

Once the group is formed, each member should understand the need and be encouraged to work together in reaching out to involve other individuals that are or should be part of the squad or team. Each time an additional member comes into the group, the entire group should be reformed to include the new members. Initiative games should be included regularly to ensure that this happens.

### Equilibrium

Challenge            The entire group must stand in a circle that is 12 inches in diameter.

Location            Anywhere

### Blind Man's Tent

Challenge            Set up a tent while blindfolded and in complete silence. One member of the team is not blindfolded and is the only member who can speak.

Location            Anywhere depending on the type of tent used.

### The Maze

Challenge            The group forms a circle. Each member of the group reaches across with the right hand and takes someone else's right hand. Then each group member does the same with the left hand, but they must take the hand of a different person. Once this is done someone says "Go" and two people let go of their right hands (predetermine who that will be). o one else can let go. These two loose ends attempt to straighten the maze of hands into a straight line.

Location            Anywhere



## The Shelter

- Challenge** Your town is being bombed. There is only one shelter, and it can hold four people. These will be the sole survivors. Your group is the control board. You must decide which members of the group will occupy the shelter. Each group member should select a role to play. The group should comprise a variety of skills and occupations. Each member should have both a positive and a negative story point. For example a surgeon who will not go unless his wife, who is terminally ill, can accompany him.
- Location** Anyplace

## Laser Wall

- Challenge** A laser grid approximately 5 feet high blocks your path, and you can't go around it. You must get the entire group over the laser grid without anyone being vaporized. The group can only use themselves and an 8 foot beam as a tool.
- Location** Any place that has a soft landing area for members of the group.
- Materials** One 8-foot beam, rope.
- Setup** The top of the laser beam can be a length of rope tied off between two trees or posts or held by two people at a height of 5 feet.

## Nitro

- Challenge** Three members of the group join hands. They are “nitro” and must be transported as carefully as possible to a designated spot without touching the ground. The group must move them without breaking or changing the positions of the three people's hands.
- Location** Any open area.

## Foggy Harbor

- Challenge** The group must maneuver an oil tanker (one member of the group) without bumping into the other ships (the remaining group members). The oil tanker must be blindfolded. He is not to touch any of the other ships that are distributed throughout the area. They remain stationary. As the oil tanker approaches on hands and knees, the nearest ship starts giving a warning signal like a foghorn. The oil tanker then approaches slowly and attempts to maneuver through the harbor without colliding.
- Location** Anywhere.

## Chemical Stream

- Challenge** To get the group across a stream of hazardous chemicals using only the materials provided. Members of the group may not touch the ground. The cans and poles are chemical resistant, but the boards are not.



Materials Five #10 cans, three 2" x 6" x 8' planks, two 6-foot poles.  
Location Anyplace.

## Human Ladder

**Purpose** To develop trust, to be responsible for each other's safety, to engage in unselfconscious physical contact with members of your group.

**Materials** Six to 10 smooth hardwood dowels about 3 feet long, 1 1/4" in diameter.

**Challenge** Participants are paired and each pair is given one "rung" of the ladder. Several pairs, each holding a rung, stand close together, forming the ladder. A climber starts at one end of the ladder and proceeds to move from one rung to another. After the climber has passed the pair holding that ladder rung may leave their position and proceed to the end of the ladder, extending the ladder indefinitely.

Note: The direction of the ladder can change at any time (e.g., right angle turn). Obstacles may be added and the height of the rungs can also vary. Do not allow rung holders to position the rungs higher than their shoulders.

**Discussion** How did you feel when you were climbing? When you were holding the rung? Did your feelings change after the first climber passed by your position? Did trusting some people make your climb easier?

## Rabid Nugget Rescue

**Challenge** Partner throws a "rabid nugget" (tennis ball) as far as possible and then verbally guides his or her blindfolded partner to the ball (no physical contact is allowed). Once retrieved, the ball is brought back and placed in a rabid nugget hospital (box). When the task is complete, switch roles.

This exercise is particularly intense if there are a lot of trees or ground clips on the search route.

## Spider Web

**Challenge** This initiative game is inexpensive, fits almost anywhere, is portable, and has the right mix of challenge and fantasy.

The object is to move your entire group through a fabricated web without touching the web material (nylon cord). Four or five small bells can be tied anywhere on the web so that movement of the cords is transferred to the bells. A sounding of a bell indicated that the participant has been felt by the spider and he/she must begin again to keep from being eaten or wrapped in silken cords to be eaten later. Try to find one of those horrible looking rubber spiders at the dime store and dangle it threateningly from one of the nylon threads

To make the event more challenging, establish a rule that a body can pass through a web opening only once. This obviously adds to the group



commitment and the need to work together. Count your group so you can make at least as many web openings as there are bodies to pass through.

**Materials** Nylon cord and six eye screws or large (3/8" x 5") galvanized staples.

**Web Construction** 1. The stretch that is characteristic of nylon cord allows the web to remain taut, even under tension. Parachute cord seems to work best.—it's strong, elastic, and has a "web-like diameter. Or, try using waxed nylon cord for the actual web strands. It's thinner than the parachute cord and has a more web-like look. The waxed cord also holds a knot well.

2. Place six anchor points in the two vertical posts or trees. These anchors can be tied with a clove hitch around a tree. The anchor points are placed at about 7 feet, 4 feet, and 1 foot from the ground.

3. Tie one end of the nylon cord to any one of the anchor points and begin stringing the free end through the other anchors in sequence, to make a rectangular outline with the cord. While doing this, take a turn around each anchor and pull the cord tight (play-a-tune-on-it tight). Read step 4 before beginning this step.

4. If you didn't read this and have been enthusiastically cutting and stringing cord, STOP! There are backup instructions. The loops (figure 8 or butterfly knots) must be tied while stringing the cord to ensure proper placement of the loops (symmetry). The loops serve as anchor points for the "web" strands, and allow practically an unlimited variety of web patterns.

5. Using the loops and anchors, tie a unique web arrangement, remembering that people of all sizes must be able to fit through the web gaps. If you haven't tried this initiative game before, you will be surprised at how small an opening a person can get through (with help).

### Safety

- Considerations**
1. Do not allow people to dive through the web. There is the distinct possibility of neck injury, cord burn, and web destruction.
  2. Allow participants to go under the web, but not over.
  3. A web made with short shock cords at the anchor points could be taken down quickly, in case of emergency



## Inchworm

**Challenge** Sit on the ground facing your partner. Inch toward one another until you are close enough to sit on each other's feet. Big feet offer an advantage, or at least a certain comfort factor. Grasp your partner's elbows or upper arms with each hand.

Now decide which direction you two would like to travel. Lateral movement is out, so it's forward for one and backward for the other. After deciding, the partner in whose direction you're headed lifts her or his bottom off the ground and moves 12 inches or so toward whatever goal you have in mind; be reasonable. The second partner now lifts off the ground and in a cooperative, bug-like movement duplicates the step above and moves toward the first partner.

## Prouty's Landing

**Challenge** The object of this popular initiative problem is to see how many people you can swing onto a 3' x 3' platform from a starting point approximately 20 feet away from the platform. To determine where to place the platform, position it about 10 feet away from the plumb line of your swing rope (the rope can be part of a *Nitro* game setup or a gymnasium climbing rope), and try a few swings to see where the starting line should realistically be located. A few trial swings before the participants arrive will give you a workable and challenging problem. To add to the challenge, put a stick (ideally, a length of bamboo) on top of two tennis ball cans directly in front of the take-off spot. If someone inadvertently knocks the stick (trip wire) over, the entire group must begin again. Basically, follow the rules for the *Nitro* initiative problem.

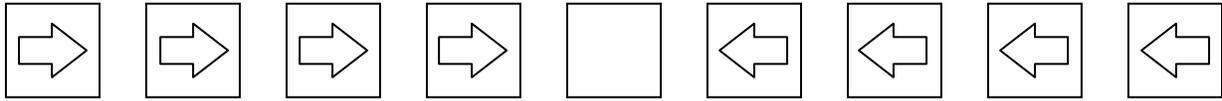
If you have ever played or watched the game skittleball, you can appreciate what happens after a number of people are perched precariously on the platform and a substantial swinger comes zinging in to the group.

## Traffic Jam

This can be a difficult problem, and is not recommended for younger Scouts. This is one of the few problems in which a group will eventually decide to have one person take charge and for the others to be quiet and follow directions. This is worth talking about in comparison to other initiative tests, and to life situations. It can lead to a useful discussion of leadership styles, how to select a leader, the experience of being a follower, etc.

**Challenge** The object of this largely cerebral problem is to have two groups of people exchange places on a line of squares that has one more place than the number of people in both groups.

**Location** The physical setup can be arranged almost anywhere. The boxes, indicated in the illustration, can be marked with chalk or masking tape, scratched in the dirt, or be paper plates, scrap paper, etc. The marks or markers should be placed an easy step from one another.



**Rules** To begin, one group stands on the places to the left of the middle square and the other group stands to the right. Both groups face the middle, unoccupied square.

Using only the legal moves, people on the left side must end up in the places on the right side, and vice versa.

Legal moves:

1. A person may move into an empty space in front of him or her.
2. A person may move around a person who is facing him, into an empty space.

Illegal moves:

1. Any move backward.
2. Any move around someone facing the same way the mover is facing.
3. Any move that involves two persons moving at once.

## Moonball

**Challenge** Moonball is an excellent one-prop game that develops cooperation and fast reactions. Play becomes intensely competitive, as a group competes against its last best effort.

Scatter your group (any number, but use two or more balls as the group size demands) on a basketball court or a field. Use a well-inflated beach ball as the object of play. The group's objective is to hit the ball in the air as many times as possible before the ball strikes the ground.

**Rules** A player cannot hit that ball twice in succession. Count one point for each hit.

Not too complicated, eh?

The tension and expectation builds as each "world record" is approached. Moonball is popular with all ages because it's simple to understand, requires little skill and involves everyone. Do not use a volleyball, basketball, or other firm ball for this game. A beach ball is a non-intimidating, fun-related object of play and its flight characteristics fit in well with the low-key emphasis.

**Location** Basketball court or field.

**Materials** Beach ball.



## Medley Relay

Challenge	<p>This is a relay where the group competes against itself or, more specifically, against a time or distance that it has previously established. In this case, total distance achieved by the group is the criterion.</p> <p>Each member of the relay team must give his or her best effort toward increasing the team's distance from a starting line. The method of locomotion is determined in advance. The performances are done in sequence; i.e., one after another, with each attempt being carefully marked and measured.</p> <p>The events to choose from are listed below, but the sequence is up to you. Finishing with the headstand walk provides an exciting finale. All of these events are measured from an initial starting line.</p>
Events	<p>Types of movement can include standing broad (long) jump; standing backward jump; running long jump; cartwheel; dove and roll; one-legged hop (right and left leg); front forward flip from a stand; and handstand walk. Add whatever type of forward movement seems to make sense, or more appropriately, is well received by the group. This is an activity that becomes more enjoyable through repetition.</p>
Location	<p>Anyplace</p>

## Tree Soccer

For the goals, use two large trees, about 40 yards apart on an otherwise open field. The object is simply to hit the trunk (below 6 feet) with the soccer ball; all other soccer rules remain the same, with the following three exceptions: (1) There are no goalies; (2) There are not out of bounds; (3) After a goal is scored, the opposite team is allowed to make first contact with the ball from whatever it bounces after hitting the tree. Considering this, it's apparent that there are no time-outs or stopped play—a very aerobic game.

## A-Frame

	<p>This is a problem that requires six people and a unique solution.</p>
Challenge	<p>The object is to move the A-frame apparatus, with one person aboard, from point A to point B (30 feet), using the five available 18 foot sling ropes.</p>
Location	<p>This problem works well on grass or asphalt.</p>
Rules	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The A-frame must maintain at least one point of contact with the ground at all times, but never more than two points.</li><li>2. Only the person on the A-frame may make body contact with A-frame apparatus, and he or she must avoid contact with the ground.</li><li>3. The ropes may not touch the ground at any time during the passage over the restricted area.</li><li>4. No one can be closer than 5 feet to the A-frame while the frame is being moved. Tie a knot in the rope at 5 feet to help the crew maintain this distance.</li></ol>



Solution	One solution is to tie the five sling ropes to the apex of the A-frame using a series of bowlines, clove hitches, or whatever knots you feel comfortable with. Stand the frame vertically (two points of contact at the base) and ask one of the six participants to stand on the horizontal crossbar. As this individual rocks from side to side (each left/right rocking is coupled with a thrust forward), the other five participants support the A-frame with previously attached sling ropes. There is scant chance of the frame and rider falling over if the rope holders remain alert.
Materials	The A-frame can be built from lashed saplings, or more uniformly from sections of 2" x 3" lumber, bolted together with three 3/8" x 3 1/2" carriage bolts.

## The Diminishing Load Problem

Challenge	To move all members of a group across an open field as quickly as possible; all but the last person must be carried across. The distance can vary according to the estimated strength of the group. The width of a football field will provide quite a physical distance.
Rules	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To cross the open area, a person must be carried.</li><li>2. The carrier must return and be carried himself.</li><li>3. The only person allowed to walk or run across the open area (except those carrying a person or returning) is the last person.</li><li>4. If the person being carried touches the ground while being transported, both members must return to the start.</li><li>5. The number of people being carried and carrying can vary with the strength and imagination of the group; one-to-one is not the only way.</li></ol>
Variations	The object can be to move the entire group across the distance in as few trips as possible (this changes the emphasis from speed to efficiency). To increase the trust factor, require that everyone wear blindfolds. Have at least three people available to act as spotters.

## The Amazon

Challenge	Using a plank, a pole, a length of rope, and a stick, the group must retrieve a container placed in the "river" some distance from a simulated riverbank.
Rules	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. The participants can use only the props and themselves.</li><li>2. If a participant touches the ground (water) between the bank and the container, he or she must go back to the bank and begin again.</li><li>3. Time penalties may be assigned every time the plank, the stick, or an individual touches the ground (water).</li></ol>
Materials	A 3/8" diameter multi-line rope or sash line.  A pole at least 1½" in diameter. The pole does not have to be perfectly straight; a tree limb will suffice.



A plank that is at least 6" wide, 2" thick, and preferably of hardwood.

A reaching stick can be constructed of any available material.

The container can be a #10 can with a wire handle attached.

## Log Cabin Push-up

This cooperative activity can be used as a simple four person stunt, or you can continue to add people for a useful large group initiative problem.

**Challenge** Four people lie prone in a square; each person's feet are on the lower back of another. On signal, everyone does a push-up. If done simultaneously, there will be four raised bodies with only eight hands touching the ground; simple but impressive.

**Setup** To set up the initial four-person attempt, ask for four volunteers who can do at least one push-up. Ask one person to lie face down on the ground, as if preparing to do a push-up. The second person lies face down at a right angle to the first person, so that the tops of his or her feet are on top of the first person's lower back. The third person repeats the procedure, using the second person as a footrest. The fourth person completes the square. All four should be face down with their instep on someone's back.

If one of the participants has trouble getting up (foot pressure on their back might cause a problem), tell him/her that you will give a 1-2 GO count, and that the "permanently prone" individual should attempt a push-up on the count of two, offering the advantage of a head start.

After your groups of four have had some fun with this quarter push-up, ask the group to continue to add people to one of the quad arrangements in an attempt to include the whole group (from four to infinity) in a mass log cabin push-up. There is more than one solution.

**Discussion** This problem is time consuming—not from the standpoint of discovering a workable solution, but because it takes a long time for a group to decide on a technique and implement it. This group attempt needs a leader.

**Note** People who cannot do a push-up or who have back problems can be official photographers or referees for this world's record attempt.



## Bottoms Up

This one-on-one warm up exercise combines strength, balance, and a very odd position. The group should pair off for this exercise.

**Challenge** Sit on the ground facing your partner, and place the bottom of your feet against the bottom of your partner's feet. Legs should be bent, feet held high, and posteriors fairly close to one another. Then attempt to push against your partner's feet (while putting all your weight on your arms), until both of your bottoms come off the ground. You will notice a tightening of the triceps muscles in your arms, considerable laughter, and not much movement on the first couple of tries.

If your bottom remains permanently welded to the ground, blame it on your partner and find someone more to your size to bland the next time.

## Criss Cross

**Challenge** Cross from one end of the crossed cables to the other without touching the ground.

**Variation** Start two persons at opposite ends of the cables so they must pass each other.

**Safety**

1. Spotters need to be on all sides.
2. Be alert for forward and backward falls.
3. Spot to prevent falls into trees or poles.
4. Spot each person until he is on the ground with both feet.

## The Monster

**Challenge** The entire group of 8 to 12 persons forms a monster that must move a prescribed distance of 15 to 20 feet.

**Rules**

1. No more than half of the legs of the group and half of the arms of the group, plus one, may touch the ground.
2. All group members must be connected to form the monster.



## **Frantic**

**Challenge** Keep several tennis balls in constant motion for as long as possible.

Everyone in the group is given a worn-out tennis ball or two. On a smooth surface that is bounded by walls, the group attempts to keep every tennis ball in motion. The activity starts upon a given command. Referees are used to spot balls that have stopped moving.

**Variations**

1. During the activity, additional tennis balls may be added, increasing the difficulty.
2. The activity may be allowed to continue until the referees have spotted three balls that have stopped moving.
3. The activity may be repeated to see if the group can improve by keeping all balls in motion for a longer period of time.

## **Inventor's Machine**

**Challenge** The group is organized into smaller groups of three persons each. Each group of three people is to devise a machine to move them a prescribed distance (15 to 20 feet). The object is to accomplish this as quickly as possible.

**Rules**

1. Only two legs and two arms of the three persons may touch the ground at any time.
2. Once a machine has covered the prescribed course that team has a patent on it and no other group may duplicate it.