

# **Adventure-Based Counseling**

(Sample)

This Adventure-Based Counseling (ABC) workshop was my second from Project Adventure. The first was Adventure Programming (AP). Although I really enjoyed the new things I learned from the AP workshop, in terms of bringing my understanding of adventure education together, I think the ABC workshop did this.

ABC was a little more of the mental side of adventure education. There was more processing (framing/debriefing). For the first day/day and half, I was comparing the two workshops, based on the amount of fun I was having. We were doing a lot more sitting and discussing in the ABC workshop and I kept thinking how disappointed I was going to be if we stayed at that pace. I wanted to get outside and play games. I knew there was suppose to be a little processing in adventure education, but bring on the high elements!!!

As the workshop continued into the second day, I guess I had an “ah-ha” moment; ABC is the backbone and structure of what adventure education is all about. This workshop was not necessarily all about the fun. The workshop was for the participants to really get an understanding for how games can be more than just games if properly processed with a group. I really think that I get that now. After the workshop, I couldn't wait to get back and practice the processing piece with an after school group I started.

This group is at the high school. There are about six to eight boys that usually show up. We meet once a week and the purpose of the group is to give them something positive to do after school. In my recruitment, I targeted boys that were disconnected from school, home, peers, etc. As the Service-Learning Coordinator for my school district, I wanted to involve them in service. Before jumping into any sort of service

project, we, as a group, needed to gain each others trust and all work from the same set of rules. I introduced the concept of the Full Value Contract (FVC) to them. For us, this is a living document and it is revisited frequently. Everyone in the group has contributed something to the FVC, either something they like to see or don't like to see while in a group setting. For the most part, the group follows the FVC. It can be a difficult group at times, but they are all good kids. They come from some seriously bad backgrounds, so behavior is always talked about as part of whether or not we are following our FVC.

With the group, I have been able to practice framing/debriefing. One of the things that we recently had to address was the attendance of the group. This group is completely voluntary. I explained that life gets in the way and that they may have to miss a meeting for whatever reason. Missing a meeting is completely acceptable. What we were, and still are running into, is the boys getting kicked out and getting detentions for not making the best of choices (lighting matches in the café, destroying school property, sleeping in the bathroom, etc.). I explained that moving forward, it would be hard to accomplish our goals of performing service projects as a group, if the group can't rely on each other to show up when we meet.

As a way to show this to them, how groups need to rely on each other to perform tasks, we played few rounds of Popcorn (tossing balls into a basket). There were eight boys there that day. We set up the perimeter with a rope and I told them that they had three minutes to get as many of the balls into the basket as possible (I also went over the rules). As a team, they had two minutes to come up with a strategy. After the first round, as the boys were setting up for the next round I pulled one of them off to the side and told him whenever a ball came to him, to roll it away from everyone else. Tempers

flared. He stopped getting balls from group members. The next round, I grabbed another group member and told him when he got a ball to try and hit the other balls out of the air. He stopped getting balls from group members. The second and third rounds, the balls in the basket were far less than the first round. I had them play one more round. I gave them a couple of minutes to prep and the conversations revolved around, first, if anyone was going to sabotage their mission (not be present) and second, what is the best plan of attack (working together). They got the most in that last round.

Debriefing the exercise, I asked if it was harder or easier not having everyone present. Time was wasted on the second and third rounds because it took a minute or so to figure out that one of the group members was “not present”. I asked how this affected the group mission. Could they accomplish their mission if someone was not with the team? For that moment, I think they “got it”. This activity was done recently, so I am not sure of the carry over. We will see. I will address it as needed.

In addition to the processing skills I learned at the ABC workshop, I also realized that there are many different approaches to delivering adventure education. The facilitator we had for ABC was great. I really enjoyed being a part of his group. There was a lot of self discovery. It was interesting how he spun questions we would ask. We joked about how “Zen-like” it was.

When I first started this adventure education quest, I had seen only a couple of people work in a group setting and I thought that they were, and still are, amazing in how they would run a group. Since then, I have seen a lot more people facilitate and they all bring their own style to the group. I was told early on that it would be important to create my own approach. Since then, I not only observe what types of games and initiatives

group facilitators use, but also how they deliver them. I consider myself a student of adventure education and I understand that I have a lot of learning ahead of me.

One of the conversations that my roommate and I had about every night at the ABC workshop, was about self-discovery within a group. When do we as facilitators step back and let self-discovery within a group take over? What we came up with was basically that experience tells you when. I have tried with my after school group. I make a conscience effort to do it. It is coming a little easier. In fact, one day with my group, as the boys were talking through an initiative, working together, I noticed I was allowing for self-discovery. After the experience, I realized they probably learned more from themselves/about themselves than if I had interjected what I thought they should do. It was pretty empowering for me to know that in some cases, less is more.

I think what the ABC workshop taught me was that it really comes down to getting the group into a situation where they can work through a problem without the facilitator's help. I am beginning to understand that it is getting groups into the situations so they can work together, being the role of the facilitator. It is not about helping them solve the problem.