

Braiding the Group: Games for Connectivity

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SUMMARY: In this session we will activate our minds, bodies, and relationships through creative games built to balance and foreground social connection in groups of all experience levels. Come practice spreading joy and wonder to one another in pursuit of a balanced group foundation.

GOALS:

Participants will...

- Feel silly, excited, warm, and connected to other participants
- Consider how their own individual values, beliefs, and commitments merge to create the group they are a part of
- Dance, communicate, and play to create a list of values and a list of behaviors to commit to for the summer

AUDIENCE: Any age group, primary activities recommended for camper age participants (ages 7-15), but can be adapted for adults (lighter activity, increased time for discussion and sharing) and young children (boost the silliness and activity time, simplify the discussion and sharing pieces).

TIMING: 60 minutes

MATERIALS:

- A ball / spool of yarn
- A speaker for music
- Favorite musical choices for high energy, dance-like enthusiasm, either via a Spotify playlist or a custom-made one
- 5 Post-It notes per participant
- 1 pen or pencil of any kind per 1 or 2 participants
- Scissors
- [Single Holepunch – *optional*]
- Appendix 1 – Knots and Braids
- Appendix 2 – Bonus Game: Left/Right Cuffs

NOTE: to save time, cut 4-6 ft lengths of yarn for every participant, one 10-12 ft length for the group, and punch holes in 4 Post-Its per participant.

SET-UP: A big open space with room to play, dance, and make noise

SESSION TIMELINE

- 00:00-00:05 – Introductions, Five Finger Contract
- 00:05-00:15 – High Five Game
- 00:15-00:20 – Unravel & Dance
- 00:20-00:30 – A Game All Tied Up
- 00:30-00:40 – How to Braid with Your Whole Body
- 00:40-00:50 – Braiding Together
- 00:50-00:60 – The Shapes Our Braids Can Make

SESSION OUTLINE

00:00-00:05 – Introductions, Five Finger Contract (FFC)

Facilitator introduces themselves and the goals of the session (see above), and invites everyone (for now) to commit to the Five Finger Contract by 'High Fiving' one another after explaining (read/summarize below):

NOTE: If there are already group/session norms in place, this can be skipped or replaced.

The Five Finger Contract:

Thumb: *The thumb stands for our agreement to acknowledge our emotions – whether that is a 'thumbs up' or a 'thumbs down', we are going to be honest about them with ourselves and others.*

Pointer: *The pointer finger stands for our agreement to ourselves, and our own actions, before pointing the 'blame, shame, or judge' finger at others.*

Middle: *The middle finger stands for our agreement to Choose Respect, despite the power available to us to disrespect ourselves and others.*

Ring: *The 'ring' finger stands for our agreement to commit to being here, to being present, and not distracted by events or people who are not here*

Pinkie: *The pinkie finger stands for our agreement to look out for 'the little one', as each of us can be the little one physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, or spiritually at any time in our lives, and it's important that when we are, the rest of the 'hand' works together to support us.*

NOTE: Optional activity for those new to the FFC: have participants try squeezing one another's pointer fingers or arms: 1) with the pinkie finger included, and 2) while holding the pinkie finger from squeezing with the rest of the hand.

The facilitator invites everyone to High Five the participants to the left and to the right of them in the circle, and pronounces the FFC, 'signed'.

00:05-00:15 – High Five Game

The facilitator turns on upbeat music playlist at a low volume, inviting participants to walk freely around the space, and informing them that we are going to practice high-fiving one another, as proper technique will be useful for the rest of the session.

Over the music playing, after participants have walked/danced around a bit, the facilitator invites participants to 'High-Five' the closest person to them, designating them their 'High-Five partner'.

Facilitator invites participants to complete the statement “*I am here because...*” to their High-Five partner.

NOTE: Everyone should get just one high-five partner, and everyone should have a partner. If there is an odd number of participants, the facilitator participates.

Facilitator asks everyone to thank their High-Five partner for sharing, and then invites participants to go back to freely wandering/dancing around the room and repeats the process for finding a ‘High-Five partner’ (above) and sharing with them using the chart below (choose up to 3-4 or make up your own!):

‘High-Fives’	Sharing Statements
‘Secret Handshake’	<i>I believe that...</i>
‘Left/Right Handshake’	<i>I like to...</i>
‘Footshake’	<i>My favorite...is...</i>
‘Bootyshake’	
‘Australian Handshake’ (<i>under the legs</i>)	
‘ Jellyfish ’ (<i>almost high-five, jellyfish away</i>)	
‘ Big Jellyfish ’ (jellyfish with whole body)	
‘ The Waveshake ’ (lace fingers, do the wave)	
‘The Goochygoochygoochygooshake’	
....and so many more!	

NOTE: For the rest of the activities, it will be important to have at least 2 different partner groupings, and at least one 3-person grouping (**bolded above can easily be 3-person**)

Rinse & Repeat the above until there are at least 2 different partner groupings (e.g., High-Five and Jellyfish) and at least one 3-person grouping (e.g., The Waveshake) and then tell participants to go find their ‘High-Five’ (or other ‘High-Fives’) partner, one at a time, in rapid succession, leaving enough time for the partners to find one another and ‘do the High-Five’ before calling out the next one. Repeat until there is a high amount of energy in the room, then proceed.

00:15-00:20 – Unravel & Dance

NOTE: If what is written below is too complicated, or the age of participants too young, cut 4-6 ft long lengths of yarn ahead of time, then skip down to the ‘Silly String Dance’.

Facilitator will keep the music playing and invite participants to [keep] dancing along as they take out the yarn and begin unravelling it by giving one end to each participant’s left hand, then right, then the next participant’s left hand, then right hand, etc., until the spool of yarn spans the entire group, and each participant is holding on to a full arm’s length of yarn.

By the end of this process, every participant should be holding onto yarn in both their left and right hands, and it should be about the length of their arm/wingspan (not just one arm’s length).

Once all participants are holding onto yarn at the same time, Facilitator will go around the room and cut each length of yarn from the others, so that each participant is holding their own length of yarn.

Facilitator invites participants to do the ‘Silly String Dance’ by trying to get their length of yarn to ‘dance’ as wildly/crazily/funnily/goofily/seriously as possible (fill in any adjective that fits the energy/group).

The facilitator calls out the ‘High-Five’ partners again and invites them to create a ‘Silly String Dance’ together.

00:20-00:30 – A Game All Tied Up

While participants are still with their last 'High-Five' / 'Silly String Dance' partner, the facilitator will turn down the music after handing out a post-it and a writing utensil to each participant, in order to instruct everyone on how to 'knot' their partnership together:

1. Write down something their partner shared on the Post-It during the High-Five Game,
2. Poke a hole through the Post-It with their writing utensil
3. Putting their string through the hole
4. Tie a bowline hitch (see Appendix 1 – Bowline), or any simple square knot to make a loop (large enough for a hand to slide easily in and out of).
5. The goal is to tie a loop on the end of the yarn string with the string itself through the Post-It (like a key on a keyring).

Facilitator invites participants to thank their partner once again, and then calls out another 'High-Five' partner to rinse and repeat the process (above) with the other side of their yarn string, this time writing down their answer to the statement "*I can....*" on the Post-It.

With this second 'Loop' partner, the facilitator invites participants to 'handcuff' themselves together by putting one hand in one loop, and then crisscrossing the yarn strings in between with their partner before putting their other hand in the other loop (see Appendix 1 – Handcuffs).

Facilitator invites partners to figure out how to get free without removing their hands from the loops of their string (see Appendix 1 – Handcuff Solution).

NOTE: For time, you can limit this activity to one partner pairing, and/or skip the handcuff game itself.

00:30-00:40 – How to Braid with Your Whole Body

[If currently beating the clock, or running the program longer than 60 minutes, see Bonus Game in Appendix 2]

After energy has died down from the Handcuff game(s), Facilitator invites participants to find their group of 3 from the High-Five Game, hands out another Post-It to each group, who agrees on what to write on the post that completes the sentence '*We can... [for the summer, week, day, etc.]*'

NOTE: Ideally, the answers to these prompts are group goals for the summer

Facilitator invites groups to find a place in the room to hang their loops from together (in sets of 3 yarn strings with loops at both ends, such as chair/table leg, a stone, a pole, anything you can hang a loop on, including the arm/hand/leg of a participant from another group of 3), and then challenges each group of 3 to braid their yarn strings together (see Appendix 1 – Braids for examples of 3 and 4 strand braiding solutions) without letting go the loops on the other end.

NOTE: This should require the 3 participants in each group to move around one another as they braid.

When they run out of string to braid, participants will tie the end by threading a string through the newest Post-It and tying a knot with the other two hanging ends of the braid and keeping loops on the other end of the braid grouped together (but not tied together).

NOTE: This should result in many 3 (or 4) strand braids around the room, each tied at one end into a simple knot, with Post-It's in each loop and each knot, with the other side's loops loosely hanging, but not tied, together.

00:40-00:50 – Braiding Together

Facilitator invites all the participants to stand in a circle next to their braiding partners and take one final Post-It, writing on it a statement that completes the phrase "*We invite you to commit with us to...*" and punch a hole in the Post-It as before.

Once everyone has written something, Facilitator takes a long length (10-20 ft) of remaining yarn and holds the bulk of it while passing one end of it to the first braid group to their left, inviting each braid group in turn to say their statement out loud as they thread the yarn through the untied loops of each braid in the group and their final Post-It.

Once all participants have threaded the yarn through their braid and said their statement out loud, the facilitator ties a knot into the yarn, creating a closed loop (like a keyring) with all of the braids hanging from it (like the keys on the keyring).

NOTE: Ideally, the “*We invite you...*” statements are commitments similar to *Brit Kehillah*, or Full Value Contract, that specifies the behaviors that will keep the group strong [for the summer, week, session, etc.]

NOTE: The “*We invite you...*” statements can be opened for discussion, adaptation, or acknowledgment practices (e.g., “Amen”) to whole group feedback as time allows

00:50-00:60 – The Shapes Our Braids Can Make

With any time left, the facilitator challenges the group to see what 2D or 3D shapes can be made with the thread in the middle by each braid group taking charge of its braid for the group. Some suggestions for 2D and 3D shapes can be found below.

NOTE: Feel free to get creative here! How can the participants themselves become a part of the shape? How can the shape be living? How can the shape be functional? Feel free to pick one shape to agree on as the group’s “Ready Circle”, where the group can decide at any moment to get into that shape if they ever don’t feel ready for a challenge and talk about how to get ready for that challenge!

2D Shape Suggestions	3D Shape Suggestions
Triangle	Cube
Square	Pyramid
Circle	Upside-down Parachute
Infinity symbol	Camp Logo
Snowman	Cloud [in the shape of...]

Once there are about 5 minutes left, the facilitator gathers the braids hanging from the long length of yarn at one end (like all the keys at one point on the keyring) and invites participants to braid these together as well, by either:

- a) choosing a representative braider for each braid group; or
- b) all holding on to their original loops to braid the braids.

NOTE: This is best done while the facilitator is holding the braids from above or in front of the group.

Once the braids are braided all together, the facilitator gathers up the long length of yarn and ties a knot to secure the ‘keyring’ end and may use the rest of the long length to hang the group’s braid somewhere visible for the period of time the group will be together.

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) How do we, as individuals, contribute to the groups we are a part of?
- 2) What things do we depend on the group for?
- 3) What can the group do that we as individuals cannot?
- 4) How can we have the best [summer, week, session] with the help of this group?
- 5) How can we make this group stronger?

BRINGING IT TO YOUR CAMP

Every camp is different, and so is every group at every camp! Some suggestions for typical groups are below, but feel free to modify as needed! The important pieces of the activity are the High-Five Game for getting multiple partners, statements for intentionality about the summer, and finishing with some object the group is proud of to represent those intentions!

For younger groups, try:

- Less writing and more speaking out loud
- Tying some knots ahead of time or spending more time on learning how to tie the knots
- Providing smaller strings to practice the braiding skills involved

For older groups, try:

- Less silly dancing and more discussion about the summer/week/session.
- Preparing some participants ahead of time to take leadership roles by teaching knots to others
- Providing visual examples of the end goals at each stage (handcuffs, braids, keyring, etc.) to make it clear what's going on.

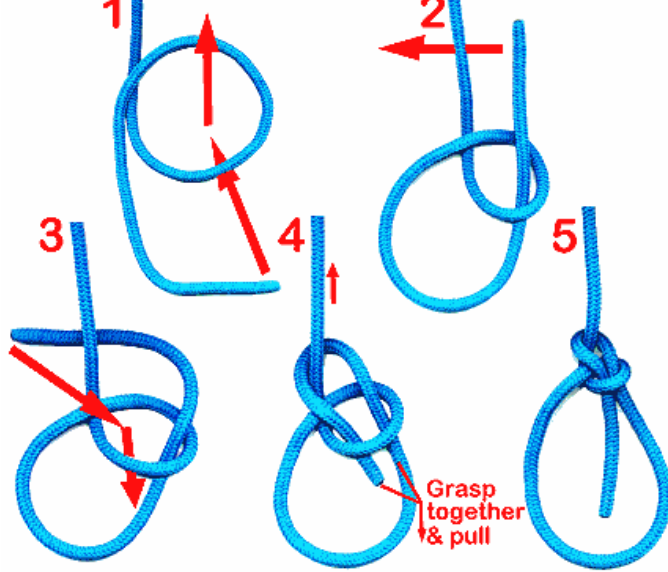
For your camp, try:

- Aligning the statements with more typical *Brit Kehillah* creation practices at your camp! Is there a classic that can be reformulated as active, and connection based between individuals?
- Are there particular values or commitments that everyone agrees should be there? Feel free to preplant them by writing them on their own Post-Its from the beginning, and then asking participants about what those phrases mean to them! An example from one camp are the values of *Hineini*, *Reut*, *Kevod*, and *Am Yisrael*, and each of these could be used as a value to deepen our understanding through discussion at each "Post-It" moment!

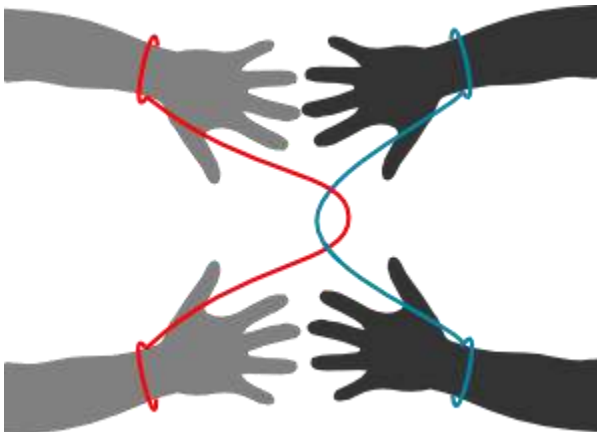
Appendix 1 – Knots and Braids

Bowline

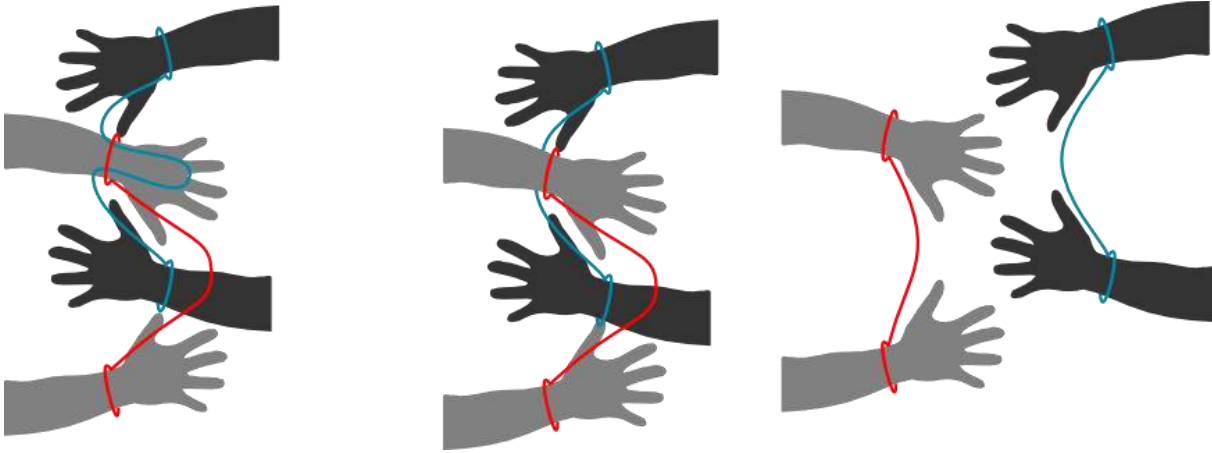
Bowline



Handcuffs



Handcuffs Solution



3-Strand Braid



fig. 1

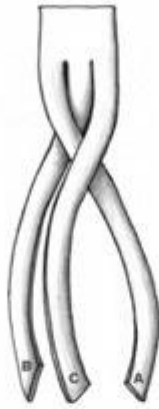


fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 6

4-Strand Braid

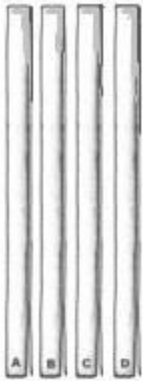


fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 6

Appendix 2 – Bonus Game: Left/Right Cuffs

The facilitator invites all participants to stand in a circle and put one hand in their string's loop and their other hand in another participant's string's loop, forming a closed circle.

Then, the facilitator describes how to move the Left arm in sequence and practices with the group -> 1 = Up; 2 = Side; 3 = Down; 4 = Up; 5 = Side; 6 = Down.

Then, Facilitator describes how to move the Right arm in sequence and practices with the group -> 1 = Up; 2 = Down; 3 = Up; 4 = Down; 5 = Up; 6 = Down.

Then, the facilitator invites everyone to try and do both at the same time on a beat together.

Participants try to accomplish this while making any modifications to the activity that don't involve removing their hands from the loops.