

# Exploring The Five Stages of Group Formation Using Adventure-Based Activities

Dr. Jim Cain  
Teamwork & Teamplay  
468 Salmon Creek Road Brockport, NY 14420 USA  
Phone (585) 637-0328 Email: jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com

Forming

Storming

Norming

Performing

Transforming

During a summer long experience of working and playing together at camp, your summer camp staff often works through most, if not all, of the stages of group formation, commonly referred to as forming, storming, norming, performing and finally, transforming. While entire graduate dissertations, college and management classes and seminars, and numerous journal articles have been written on this subject, this brief article ‘opens the door’ to explaining and experiencing these stages of group formation for your upcoming camping season. This brief introduction to the stages of group formation is suitable for a session during your camp staff training. Additional resources and references are provided at the end of the article for those interested in a more detailed explanation of these stages, and techniques for exploring them with your summer camp staff.

The stages of group development come from research by Tuckman and Jenson.

For more information about this work, review the following articles:

*Tuckman, B., 1965, “Developmental sequence of small groups,” Psychological Bulletin, Number 63, p384-399.*

*Tuckman, B. & Jenson, M., 1977, “Stages of small group development revisited,” Group and Organizational Studies, Number 2, p419-427.*

You can find additional information related to the stages of group formation and group learning, in the Johnson & Johnson book, *Joining Together*, on page 469. See references at the end of this article.

Consider the five stages of group formation shown above, and let’s consider how a typical summer staff might progress through these stages.

## The Forming Stage

This is the polite, opening, get acquainted, ice breaking stage of group formation. This process begins as the first staff members arrive at camp and begin moving in. The opening dinner, the general welcome comments from the director, the camp orientation session, and even the first evening discussions and conversations prior to turning out the lights, are all part of the forming stage. At this point, members of the group are just trying to identify who’s who, and possibly where they fit into that plan. This stage includes forming an atmosphere of safety and acceptance, avoid controversy, and is filled with guidance and direction from the director or camp leader.

### Activities for the Forming Stage

Get acquainted activities and ice breakers, again to form the atmosphere of safety and acceptance. There are a few more activities in this stage, because it is important to build a strong foundation, if the rest of the stages are to be successfully encountered.

#### Believe it or Knot

Thanks to Mike Anderson of Learning Works for this excellent get acquainted activity that is a variation of Two Truths and a Lie. With the entire group holding a Raccoon Circle (a 15 foot long section of tubular climbing webbing tied with a knot), the knot is used as a pointer to identify the person talking. Begin by passing the knot to the right around the group. Someone says “right there!” the knot stops, and the person nearest it has the opportunity to disclose some interesting fact about themselves, such as, “I have seen three movies this week!” It is now the discussion and responsibility of the rest of the participants to decide whether they believe that this information is true or false. After some discussion, the group gives their opinion of the validity or falseness of the disclosure, and the person providing the comment can tell the real story. This single comment version of Two Truths and a Lie, proceeds a bit more quickly for each person than the full blown version. Use either, as time permits.

After a person has revealed the true nature of their comments (true or false), they say “left” or “right” and then “right there!”, and a new person has the opportunity to disclose something to the group.

The level of disclosure to the group is often a measure of the closeness, unity and respect within the group. For example, a disclosure such as, “I have traveled to another country,” is a lower level of disclosure than “I have some a family member that is in trouble with the law.” Depending on the group setting, and the purpose of this activity for your group, different levels of information or disclosure are appropriate. As the group becomes more unified, this activity can bring out greater disclosure between members of the group, family members, members of a team, etc.

### Commonalities

Begin with partners for this activity. This conversational activity has the goal of identifying unique and sometimes unusual events, activities and life experiences that we have in common with other members of our group. The two partners need to identify three unique items that they have in common. Encourage participants to dig deep for these items. For example, they may discover that they both like dogs, but under closer examination, they may also discover that they like the same breed of dog. Additionally, they may discover that they both enjoy reading, but by digging a bit deeper, they may discover that they have read the same book in the past 6 months or perhaps enjoy the same author.

After identifying three attributes that they have in common, these two partners raise their hands, and find another group of two ready to form a group of four. Now the challenge is to identify 2 items that they have in common. Again, look deep, and no fair using any of the attributes already identified.

Finally, after this group of four finds out what they have in common, they raise their hands and join another group of four, for a total of eight, now standing inside one of the Raccoon Circles spread around on the floor. The goal for these eight is to find ONE event, interest or activity that they have in common. Have each of these groups of eight tell the other groups what they have in common. Again, the more unique and unusual, the better (or at least the more interesting!)

### The Bus

Possibly one of the greatest needs within a group is to identify the commonalities of the members. Chris Cavert says (with regard to some of the tough middle school students that he often encounters) that, “the more I know about you, the less likely I am to hurt you.” Which typically means that the more students have in common with each other, the more they recognize the commonalities rather than the differences, the more likely they are to include those other people, the more likely they are to be nice to them, to protect them, and the less likely they are to steal, hurt or be mean to them. To this end, our goal is to find out some of those commonalities that we have with each other. The more unusual and unique, the better.

The Bus requires two Raccoon Circle Lines, stretched parallel to each other. Have participants “get on the bus” by standing between these two lines. At the first stop, have folks get off the bus, according to what is there for them on the left or right sides of the bus. First stop, chocolate ice cream on the left side, vanilla ice cream on the right. Now look around you, you have something in common with those folks on your same side of the bus. Now back on the bus, next stop:

Cats		Dogs
Loud		Quiet
Running	the	Walking
Save Money	BUS	Spend Money
Bus Driver		Bus Rider
Sky Diving		Deep Sea Diving
Problem Solver		Problem Maker
Hamburgers or Hotdogs		Chicken or Salad

The object here is to find interests, activities and events that folks have in common. Be careful to choose topics appropriately for the audience that you are serving. This activity can be used with even large audiences, provided that the folks on the bus can hear the bus driver! Thanks to Tom Heck for sharing this activity.

## First Impressions

Raccoon Circles bring people together in a variety of ways, and this activity illustrates that point. First Impressions brings participants into a closer physical proximity to each, discovers commonalities between participants, allows participants to become acquainted at a deeper level, and provides the opportunity for participants to discuss how their instinctive guesses about others, especially those that they do not know very well, may or may not be accurate.

Begin by forming groups of three participants, seated within a Raccoon Circle. Also provide a copy of this page, and a pencil or pen for each participant.

## First Impressions

Form a group of three, preferably with two other participants that you do not know very well, and have a seat. Within this group, you are to guess the following traits and characteristics about your partners. This is not a conversation, just make your best guess about each of the following traits, for both of your partners, and write your answers in the outer spaces. When you and each of your partners are finished guessing the following eight traits, begin sharing your guesses with each other, writing in the true information when given. Keep track of how often you were able to guess correctly.

Person on Your Left Side		Person on Your Right Side		
Your Guess	The True Story	The Traits	The True Story	Your Guess
		Where were they raised? (Farm, city, suburbs, other country...)		
		Their favorite food?		
		What type of music do they listen to? (Rock, country, hiphop, folk, classical, etc.)		
		What would they consider a hot time on a Saturday night?		
		What would their ideal job be?		
		What would their ideal car be?		
		What hobbies do they have?		
		What do you have in common with this person?		

## The Storming Stage

This second stage of group formation introduces conflict and competition into the formerly pleasant work environment. At summer camp, this stage typically is encountered around week three. Why week three? Because that is when most staff members are at their peak ‘loss of sleep.’ Suddenly those things which didn’t seem to matter, begin to matter, and conflicts arise. Staff behavior ranges from silence to domination in this environment, and a director or camp leader needs to demonstrate coaching to move past this stage.

### Activities for the Storming Stage

While some staff members would rather avoid the conflict of this stage, it is important to build skills and show them how to cope and deal with the storming stage. The activities in this section, therefore, contain just a bit of stress (so that the door may be ‘opened’ to discuss what is really going on). The following activities are very challenging, and need to have a suitable amount of time after each one for discussion within the group.

#### Photo Finish

Thanks to Sam Sikes for this seemingly simple but yet complex activity. You can find this and other activities in his book, Executive Marbles (1-888-622-4203).

Photo Finish (or the Finish Line) uses one or more Raccoon Circles as a straight line. The task is for the members of a group to ALL cross the line at exactly the same time. You can additionally “stress” the group by minimizing the available space that they have to plan prior to crossing the finish line.

Tell the group that they have 15 minutes to make 5 attempts to cross the finish line at exactly the same time. This is a great opportunity to use a digital camera for instant feedback. Every time someone breaks the plane of the finish line, the facilitator yells, “Click!” even for the occasionally careless mistake.

This activity involves planning, communication, timing and occasionally the ability to deal with frustration.

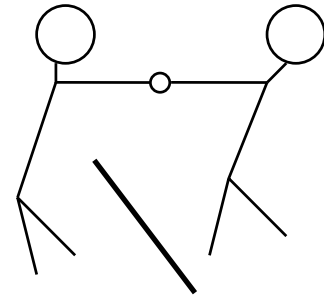
#### Cross the Line

This activity requires a single untied Raccoon Circle, stretched into a straight line. With half of the group on one side of the line and standing about 6 feet (2 meters) behind the line, and the other half of the team on the other side, the scene is set for a moment of conflict (of “us” vs. “them”). Make no mistake, this Raccoon Circle activity is a bit higher level than most, but it is excellent for setting the stage to talk about conflict, negotiation and win/win, win/lose, and lose/lose scenarios.

Tom Heck calls this activity, “Their Ain’t No Flies On Me!”, and begins this activity by having one side say, “There ain’t no flies on me, there ain’t no flies on me, there might be flies on you (point to folks on the other side), but there ain’t no flies on me!”, and then boldly take a step towards the line (with just the right amount of attitude). The other side now replies, “there ain’t no flies on me, there ain’t no flies on me, there might be flies on you, but there ain’t no flies on me!”, and takes a step towards the line. The first side now repeats, and moves to the line, followed by the second side repeating their lines, and stepping face to face with the other side.

Now the facilitator says, “you have 10 seconds to get the person across the line from you onto your side of the line!”

Typically, this phrasing results in a rather quick tug of war between partners, and usually a physical solution (for one person at least) to the challenge. Leaving open a major opportunity to discuss conflict, challenge, attitude, negotiation, and how to resolve differences between people.



#### Blind Square

Blindfold the entire group, and allow them to search and find a nearby piece of rope (about 100 feet long). After finding the rope, instruct the group that their goal, while still blindfolded, is to create a perfect square with the rope. Participants are allowed to slide along the length of the rope, but cannot let go or skip over or move around another participant.

## The Norming Stage

This third stage of group formation is typically a welcome breath of fresh air after the storming stage. Although the group is not yet at the high performing stage, some of the bugs are beginning to be worked out within the group, and good things are beginning to happen. This stage of group formation includes cohesion, sharing and trust building, creativity and skill acquisition. The director or camp leader demonstrates support during this stage.

### Activities for the Norming Stage

Sharing, trust building, and skill building activities are used in the Norming stage.

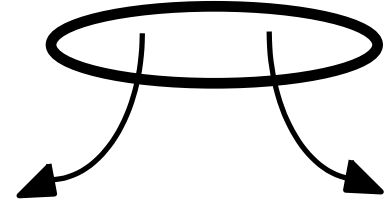
#### Inside Out

This is a great initial problem solving activity. Begin with a Raccoon Circle on the floor. Have the entire group step inside the circle. The task is now for the entire group to go from the inside of the circle to the outside, by going underneath the Raccoon Circle, without anyone in the group using their hands, arms or shoulders.

What is important in this activity is to stress the group problem solving process. In order for other members of the group to assist in the completion of the task, they need to know the plan, and what their part is in the solution.

To this end, encourage the group to “plan their work” and then “work their plan.” This means that prior to ANY action, the group will need to plan their approach to solving this problem, and making sure that everyone in the group knows their part of the plan.

After completing the task, debriefing questions include asking the group if they had a plan, and did they change the plan during the completion of the activity, and if so, why? As a second part to this activity, you can also ask the group to go Outside In, again without using their hands, arms or shoulders.... and see if they “plan their work” before “working their plan.” Thanks to Tom Heck for sharing this activity.



#### Not Knots

In this activity, which can be accomplished with only a single piece of webbing (in a straight line, without a water knot), a “doodle” is constructed (see examples below) and the group is given the choice of whether this doodle will create a KNOT or NOT A KNOT, when the ends of the webbing are pulled.

The object here is to provide the group with some tools to use when they cannot easily form a consensus. Typically, upon analysis, about half of the group thinks the doodle will form a knot, and the other half a straight line. If this is the case, ask participants to partner with another person that has a different viewpoint (i.e. one partner from the KNOT side, and one partner from the NOT A KNOT side). By learning how to listen to a person with a different viewpoint, group members learn how to cooperate. After this discussion, ask participants to choose sides, with the KNOT decision folks on one side of the knot doodle, and the NOT A KNOT folks on the other side.

At this point, it is likely that there will still not be a complete consensus within the group. Prior to slowly pulling the ends of the knot doodle, let the members of the group know that you will pull the knot doodle slowly, and that they can change sides at any time during the unraveling of the knot doodle (this illustrates the ability to make an initial decision, but still be flexible as more information becomes available).



#### The Blind Trust Drive

Participants are asked to choose a partner for this activity. One person in front, arms extended like they are holding onto the steering wheel of a car. Their partner behind them, with their hands on the shoulders of the person in front. The ‘blind’ driver now closes their eyes, while the sighted ‘backseat’ driver safely steers them around the playing area. Remember, this is not a demolition derby or bumper cars, and a facilitator may act as the local law enforcement officer if necessary! Halfway through the activity, partners switch roles, and continue. At the completion of the activity, partners can provide feedback to their backseat drivers, and tell them what they liked, or what they would change about their guidance.

## The Performing Stage

The fourth stage of group formation includes a feeling of unity, group identity, interdependence and independence. It is a highly productive stage. Leadership from the camp director or leader comes in the form of delegation.

### Activities for the Performing Stage

Challenging activities that may be difficult, but which are successfully accomplished by the group. Activities that build enthusiasm. Large group projects, such as tower building (using Tinkertoys©, uncooked spaghetti and marshmallows, or newspaper and masking tape), and challenge courses (low and high ropes activities) are useful.

#### Grand Prix Racing

Turn the Raccoon Circle into a complete circle or loop using a water knot, and you are ready for the ultimate in sport racing. Thanks to Tom Heck for not only the idea for this activity, but also the enthusiasm to lead it effectively. This activity will boost the enthusiasm of your audience, and provide some moderate competition in the process.

Begin by spreading several Raccoon Circles around the available space, in close proximity to each other. Ask participants to join one of the “racing teams”, picking their favorite color team in the process. Approximately 5 to 10 participants per Raccoon Circle. Have participants hold the Raccoon Circle with both hands in front of them.

“Ladies and Gentlemen! It is summertime, and that means one thing in this part of the world - Grand Prix Racing ! Now I know that you are such die-hard race fans that just the thought of a race makes your heart beat faster. So this race comes in three parts. First, when I say that “we’re going to have a race”, your response is loud, “Yahoo!!!!” Next I’ll say, “start your engines!” and I want to hear your best race car sounds (audience practices making race car revving engine, shifting gears and braking sounds).

Finally, with so many cars on the track today, it will be difficult to see just which group finishes their race first, so we’ll need a sign indicating when your group is finished. That sign is to raise your hands (and the Raccoon Circle) above your heads and yell “Yesssssssss!”

Logistically, Grand Prix involves having the group transfer the knot around the group as quickly as possible, using only their hands. This activity can even be performed for a seated audience. To begin, you’ll need a “start / finish” line, which can be the person that was born the farthest distance away from the present location. The race begins at this location, and ends when the knot is passed around the circle, and returns to this same location (Yessssssss!)

Typically in Raccoon Circle Grand Prix racing, there are three qualifying rounds or races. The first race is a single lap race to the right, with the knot traveling once around the inside of the circle to the right (counterclockwise). The second race is a multi-lap race (two or three laps) to the left (clockwise) around the circle. And the final race of the series is a “winner take all” championship race, with one lap to the right (counterclockwise) followed by one lap to the left (clockwise).

Incidentally, after this activity, the group will not only be energized, but perhaps in a slightly competitive mood. From a sequencing standpoint, you can either continue this atmosphere (with more competitive challenges - such as into a summer camp competition) or introduce a bit of counterpoint, by following this activity with one that requires the group working together in a collaborative manner.

## **The Transforming Stage**

The final stage of group formation is the other bookend to the initial forming stage. The Transforming stage allows the group to regroup, thank the participants and move on at the completion of the summer. This stage is marked by recognition by the leader, conclusion and disengagement of the participants.

### **Activities for the Transforming Stage**

Allow for the completion and conclusion of the group process. Feelings of celebration and affirmation are suitable. Two activities follow for exploring this stage, A Circle of Kindness and the Virtual Slideshow.

#### **A Circle of Kindness**

Form a double circle with all group members, with one partner facing the center of the circle, and their partner behind them (also facing the center, with their hands on the shoulders of the inner circle person). The inner circle is asked to close their eyes, and only reply 'thank you' or keep silent. The outer circle is asked to quietly talk into the ear of the inner circle participants, mentioning something important that they learned from them during the summer, or a pleasant memory, or any other positive comment. The out group then moves one person to the right, and continues. When the outer group has completed the circle, they are asked to become the center group, and the process begins again.

#### **Virtual Slideshow (Transforming Stage)**

With all participants seated in a circle, an imaginary slide projector 'clicker' is passed around the group. Group members are asked to 'show' an imaginary slide or photograph from the summer, illustrating a perfect moment, or perhaps a moment from the future, that will be different because that person had the opportunity to work at camp.

# Teamwork & Teamplay

The Adventure-Based Training Company

## Workshops and Training Events

Here is a collection of some of my favorite workshops, conference presentations and training events. You can request any of these prepared programs for your event, or a custom designed program.

**Teamwork & Teamplay** - An active workshop based on the title of the award winning book.

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**Wings, Strings and Flying Things** - This workshop utilizes a variety of flying, floating and soaring devices to encourage an interest in science, physics and just for fun.

**Traveling Light** - This workshop utilizes the lightweight props found in Teamwork & Teamplay (like Raccoon Circles), and is ideal for those that lead adventure activities and wish to travel light.

**Play with a Purpose** - This hands-on workshop uses a variety of simply games and activities that can be used with a variety of groups. From get acquainted activities to thought provoking activities.

**Dancing in Lines, Squares and Circles** - Jim is a third generation square dance caller, musician and dancer, and this workshop shares some of that heritage in a fun and community building session.

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**The Challenge Course in the 21st Century** - As the former Executive Director of the Association for Challenge Course Technology (ACCT), Dr. Cain presents a variety of topics related to ropes courses and adventure-based education in North America and around the world.

**Staff Training and Train the Trainer Programs** - Train your staff with Teamwork & Teamplay activities, equipment and resource materials. Half day to 3 day programs available.

Jim Cain, Ph.D. Teamwork & Teamplay  
468 Salmon Creek Road Brockport, New York 14420  
Phone (585) 637-0328 Fax (585) 637-5277

Email: [jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com](mailto:jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com) Website: [www.teamworkandteamplay.com](http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com)

*Teamwork & Teamplay, by Jim Cain, was awarded the Karl Rohnke Creativity Award by the Association for Experiential Education. You can obtain a copy of this award winning adventure-based book directly from the publisher, Kendall/Hunt, at 1-800-228-0810 or at [www.kendallhunt.com](http://www.kendallhunt.com)*



*The Book of Raccoon Circles, all 272 pages, is available from Learning Unlimited at 1-888-622-4203 or [www.learningunlimited.com](http://www.learningunlimited.com) ISBN 0-9646541-6-4*

*You can also find exciting adventure-based activities and teambuilding equipment at ADVENTURE HARDWARE, featuring many of the Teamwork & Teamplay props. Visit [www.adventurehardware.com](http://www.adventurehardware.com) or call 1-800-706-0064*



## References and Resources

**Teamwork & Teamplay**, by Jim Cain and Barry Jolliff, 1998, Kendall Hunt Publishers, Dubuque, IA Phone (800) 228-0810 ISBN 0-7872-4532-1 417 pages of activities, like those shown in this article.

**The Book on Raccoon Circles**, by Jim Cain and Tom Smith, 2002, Learning Unlimited, Tulsa, OK, USA Phone (888) 622-4203 [www.learningunlimited.com](http://www.learningunlimited.com) ISBN 0-9646541-6-4 Hundreds of activities for creating community, that you can present with minimal props. 272 pages of ideas.

**Developmental Sequence of Small Groups**, by B. Tuckman, 1965, Psychological Bulletin, Number 63, pages 384-399. The 'original' article on the stages of group formation.

**Stages of Small Group Development Revisited**, B. Tuckman and M. Jensen, 1977, Group and Organizational Studies, Number 2, pages 419-427. The revised and updated article.

**Adventure Education and Outward Bound: Out-of-Class Experiences That Make a Lasting Difference**, John Hattie, H. W. Marsh, James T. Neill, and Garry E. Richards, *Review of Educational Research*, Spring 1997, Volume 67, Number 1, pages 43-87. Regarded as "the" article on Adventure-Based Education.

**Exploring the Five Stages of Group Formation Using Adventure-Based Activities**, by Jim Cain, 2003, from the Teamwork & Teamplay website at: [www.teamworkandteamplay.com](http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com)

**Adventure Programming**, by John C. Miles and Simon Priest, 1999, Venture Publishing, Inc. State College, PA Fax (814) 234-1651 ISBN 1-892132-09-5.

**Joining Together - Group Theory and Group Skills** by David W. Johnson and Frank P. Johnson, 1994, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, MA ISBN 0-205-15846-3. Although set in the business world, this book is applicable to academic fields, social organizations and camping programs as well. Newer editions are available.

Organizations	Website	Telephone
Teamwork & Teamplay	<a href="http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com">www.teamworkandteamplay.com</a>	(585) 637-0328
The Adventure Group	<a href="http://www.theadventuregroup.com">www.theadventuregroup.com</a>	(800) 706-0064
Adventure Hardware	<a href="http://www.adventurehardware.com">www.adventurehardware.com</a>	(800) 706-0064
Learning Unlimited	<a href="http://www.learningunlimited.com">www.learningunlimited.com</a>	(888) 622-4203
Kendall Hunt Publishers	<a href="http://www.kendallhunt.com">www.kendallhunt.com</a>	(800) 228-0810

### Some Information about the Author

Dr. Jim Cain is the author of the award winning adventure-based text *Teamwork & Teamplay*, which received the Karl Rohnke Creativity Award presented by the Association for Experiential Education, and co-author with Tom Smith of *The Book on Raccoon Circles*. He is a former Executive Director of the Association for Challenge Course Technology, Senior Consultant to the Cornell University Corporate Teambuilding Program and the Director of the adventure-based training company, *Teamwork & Teamplay*. Dr. Cain makes his home in Brockport, New York and frequently serves as a visiting professor and staff development specialist on subjects ranging from experiential education to challenge and adventure-based activities, and from recreational dancing and games leadership, to structural engineering, chaos and powder mechanics. Dr. Cain has presented teambuilding and active learning sessions in 36 states and 9 countries in the past 5 years, and generally has more toys and adventure-based books in his library than many developing nations.

Jim Cain, Ph.D.

Teamwork & Teamplay

468 Salmon Creek Road Brockport, NY 14420

Phone (585) 637-0328 Fax (585) 637-5277

[jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com](mailto:jimcain@teamworkandteamplay.com)

[www.teamworkandteamplay.com](http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com)

You can download a collection of adventure-based team building activities using simple props at:

[www.teamworkandteamplay.com/raccooncircles.html](http://www.teamworkandteamplay.com/raccooncircles.html)