Smart Games for Smarter Learning

VERMICELLI TOWERS

Accomplishing Team Goals: Clinical

Building a tipsy tower in a specialized learning activity

As a result of participating in this activity, learners will:

1. Construct a tower as a member of a collaborative team.
2. Evaluate proposed plans from other team members and justify their choices under pressures of time and task.
3. Select and execute a plan with other team members utilizing limited resources and with uncertain outcomes.

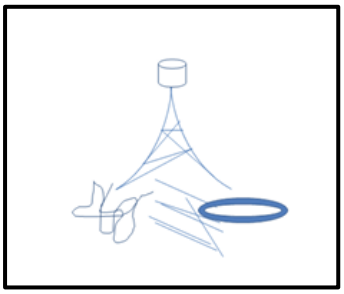


Image: A drawing depicting the vermicelli noodles, tape, yarn and a marshmallow built as a tower

As a team, the task is to use limited resources and quickly adapt them to complete a challenge. Skills involve supporting one another, listening, and advocating for the best plan to successfully complete the task.

Materials:

Masking tape, Yarn, Vermicelli, and Full-sized marshmallows

Instructions

1. Teams of students are given the following supplies: 14” of masking tape, 12” of string or yarn, 15 strands of vermicelli, and one full-size marshmallow.
2. Preferably, this should be set up as an inter-team challenge, where the goal is to use the supplies provided to construct a structure that holds the marshmallow at the top. The tallest tower wins. Towers must be free-standing, although tape may be used to secure the vermicelli to the working surface (such as a table.)
3. The tower must remain standing throughout the debrief in order to qualify.

Smart Games for Smarter Learning © 2025 Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science
Better.Teams@Rosalindfranklin.edu

Smart Games for Smarter Learning

Lesson	Debrief Questions	Clinical Application	Bloom's Taxonomy	TeamSTEPPS™ Domain	IPEC Competencies
Executing a plan as a team: It may be easier to execute a plan or complete a task when answers are clearly delineated for you. A word of "hard rules" may be more easily navigated then one in which there is not much agreement about right and wrong, for instance.	1. In this task, you were asked to function collaboratively as a team member. How comfortable were you with the possibility of multiple correct solutions to this challenge? 2. Do you think everyone else on your team felt the same way? 3. How did you know when to insist and when to surrender when attempting to resolve this challenge? Did the absence of resources influence you?	Patients are complex and no two are exactly the same. 1. Are there hard and soft rules in patient care? If so, what are they? 2. How do healthcare teams adapt these rules to individual patients? 3. What happens when teams cannot agree on a patient care plan? How are issues solved?	Analyze / Apply Evaluate / Create	Leadership Communication	Values & Ethics Communication Teams & Teamwork
Time pressures, limited resources, and getting the job done: In this task you experienced the urgency of other teams performing the same task and the absence of resources. This made experimenting and testing more challenging, meaning you may have had to adopt an untested theory or strategy.	1. Resources in this exercise were intentionally fragile and scarce. How did you assess plans for construction of your tower without having a reasonable amount of time to think them through? 2. Why did you listen to the author of the plan you followed? What did they say or do that caused you to believe it might work? 3. As you think about what you might do differently another time, given that there is no opportunity to test your own theory of right and wrong, how will you decide on a course of action? 4. Were other theories proposed by team members that were not followed, but might have worked?	Patients often present to providers with urgent issues. Additionally, we might not have all the information or resources we need to solve the issue. 1. How can a healthcare team make urgent, potentially lifesaving, decisions in very little time? 2. How can teams solve the issue of limited resources such as a single MRI machine, when multiple people need it simultaneously? How are conflicts resolved? 3. Can we experiment on patients? Do we?	Analyze / Apply Evaluate / Create	Leadership Communication Mutual Support	Values & Ethics Roles & Responsibilities Communication Teams & Teamwork
Knowing when to hold and when to fold: Being on a team means finding the best solution to a challenge out of all the possibilities. It is not always best to compromise, as some solutions require that you adopt them in their entirety if they are going to work at all.	1. What is your understanding of the two terms "compromise" and "collaborate"? Are they the same or different? How? 2. Do you think your team could have been even more successful if it were allotted more time to do this task? How would you have approached it differently? 3. How does a team that cannot reach clear consensus or agreement refocus its energy away from the task and work on the team dynamic? What should a team or individual team members do in that instance?	1. Given the complexity of patients, are there always solutions? What if you have enough time and resources? 2. Do we make compromises in patient care? If so, how? 3. How do patients and providers feel when solutions are exhausted? 4. How do providers decide when to "fold" in terms of patient care? Are there hard and soft rules for this dilemma? If so, what are they?	Analyze / Apply Evaluate / Create	Communication Situation Monitoring	Values & Ethics Roles & Responsibilities Communication Teams & Teamwork

For additional information about Debriefing, please refer to the ***Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science Smart Games for Smarter Learning Debriefing Guide Supplement.***

References:

Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, & Department of Defense. (Year of publication/last update). *TeamSTEPPS: Team Strategies and Tools to Enhance Performance and Patient Safety.* [Description of material, e.g., Curriculum, Toolkit, Webpage]. Retrieved from https://www.ahrq.gov/teamstepps-program/index.html

Interprofessional Education Collaborative. (2023). *IPEC Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaborative Practice: Version 3*. Interprofessional Education Collaborative. https://www.ipecollaborative.org/assets/core-competencies/IPEC_Core_Competencies_Version_3_2023.pdf

Smart Games for Smarter Learning © 2025 Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science
Better.Teams@Rosalindfranklin.edu