

## Teamwork – Working Through Difficulties

The following ideas were adapted from a book, *Team Challenges*, by Kris Bordessa.

Teamwork is a crucial part of *Odyssey of the Mind*. It is a skill that students need to have opportunities to practice, evaluate their successes and difficulties, and try to make improvements. Below are some things that make teamwork difficult and some suggestions on ways to try to make improvements.

**Bossy Team Member** – a member who is very aggressive about their ideas being heard/used and often only thinks that their ideas are the good ones. It is crucial that the entire team has the understanding that every team member is equally valuable to the group and the overall effectiveness of the team.

Remind the team that every team member's ideas are valid. No laughing at others' ideas or making negative comments.

Use a non-verbal, hands-on spontaneous problem to solve. Add the extra rule that the bossy team member(s) must remain mute during the task. You can ask them if they want to tape their mouth to remind them of this rule (make the taping of the mouth a choice, not a requirement).

Change the seating arrangement. This is especially useful if two or more team members are sitting together and dominating the discussion.

After completing a task, discuss how the team felt things went. What went well? What went wrong? How can the team improve, if they were to do this task again? (This is a useful strategy, whether you have bossy team members or not.)

**Hesitant Team Members** – members of the team that are more comfortable watching what the others do, than sharing their ideas.

Make sure everyone is asked for their input. Address members of the team by name, especially when discussing how can the team improve.

Use verbal spontaneous problems where the team must respond one at a time, without passing when it is their turn. If one team member gets stuck, the whole team is stuck. Coach the team to use the example given in the problem description as a last resort when they can't think of a response.

Choose a hands-on task and add the rule that only the hesitant team member(s) can speak and give the team verbal directions.

Grabby Team Members – members who immediately start touching and playing with supplies when they are set on the table.

Discuss how immediately grabbing and playing with the materials interferes with solving the task, or listening/understanding the problem.

Remind the team that arguing over who gets to use the materials wastes time and the team has a limited amount of time to complete the task.

Add the rule of one hand behind their back, or linking arms at the elbows to a hands-on task.

Challenge grabby team member(s) to only give verbal directions to the team during a hands-on task.

Negativity – During a task, spontaneous problem, NO should NEVER be an answer.

Get the team to practice starting their response to another team member's idea with YES.

Yes, we can use that idea (this way) and then do this.

Yes, we can figure out a way to do this task, but we have to work together.

Mix Things Up – Don't allow the team to only play the same role in each situation/ spontaneous problem. Nor should they only use materials in one way (a piece of paper can be rolled into a tube, ripped into strips, crumpled into a ball).

Videotape them doing a task – Sometimes team members don't realize what they do in these situations, until they see it from an outsiders perspective.

Team members first write down/share what went well, what they would change if they could do the task again.

Make the rule: for every negative comment (item that needs changing), they must also make a positive comment (something that went well).