

## Broken Squares

**Introduction:** Through the "Broken Squares" activity and discussion, participants learn the importance of effective interpersonal skills and discover ways they can develop their own interpersonal abilities. As a result of the activity, participants should be able to identify at least one reason why interpersonal skills are important and at least one way that they can improve their own interpersonal abilities.

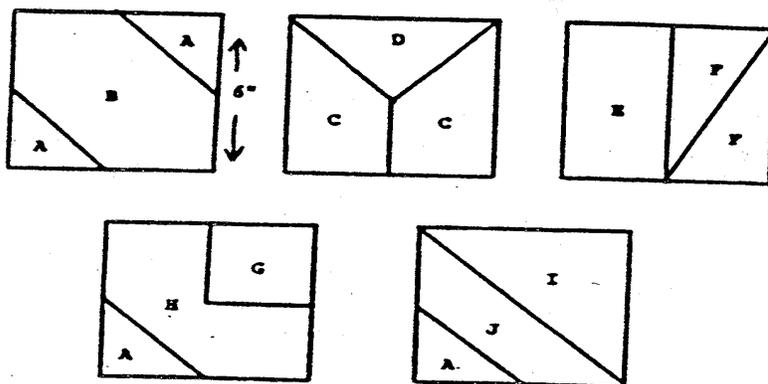
**Material:**

- Enough sets of "broken square" pieces for each participant to make a square.
- Enough floor space for participants to sit in circles of five participants each with room to make the squares in the center of the circle.

### Directions for Making a Set of Squares

A set consists of five envelopes containing pieces of cardboard which have been cut into different patterns and which, when properly arranged, will form five squares of equal size. One set should be provided for each group of five persons.

To prepare a set, cut out five cardboard squares of equal size, approximately six-by-six inches. Place the squares in a row and mark them as below, penciling the letters, a, b, c, etc., lightly so that they can be erased later.



The lines should be so drawn that when cut out, all pieces marked "a" will be of exactly the same size, all pieces marked "c" of the same size, etc. By using multiples of three inches, several combinations will be possible that will enable participants to form one or two squares, but only one combination is possible that will form five squares six-by-six inches.

After drawing the lines on the six-by-six inch squares and labeling them with lower case letters, cut each square as marked into smaller pieces to make the parts of the puzzle.

Mark the five envelopes A, B, C, D, and E. Distribute the cardboard pieces in the five envelopes as follows:

Envelope A.	has pieces i,h,e
B	a, a, a, c
C	a, j
D	d, f
E	g, b, f, c

Erase the penciled letter from each piece and write, instead the appropriate envelope letter. This will make it easy to return the pieces to the proper envelope for subsequent use when a group has completed the task.

**Time Required:** 30 minutes

**Procedure:** Divide participants into groups of five by "numbering off" or playing a creative grouping game to separate "best friends" into different groups to encourage "mixing" and interpersonal relationships with additional people.

Depending on the maturity level of the group, "extra participants" left after the groups of five are formed can 1) be observers for the group (give them a copy of the observer instructions), 2) form a smaller group of three or four (you will have to remove the pieces from their packets for the unneeded squares), or 3) divide among the other groups to make a few groups of six (you will have to give those groups pieces for additional squares and have them mix up and re-allocate 3 pieces per person).

Direct the group not to begin until after you have finished reading the instructions.

Read the following instructions to the group...

"In this packet there are five envelopes, each of which contains the pieces of cardboard for forming squares. When the facilitator gives the signal to begin, the task of your group is to form five squares of equal size. The task will not be completed until each individual has before him or her, a perfect square of the same size as that held by others.

Specific limitations are imposed upon your group during this exercise:

- No talking, pointing, or any other kind of communicating among the five people in your group.
- Participants may give pieces to other participants but may not take pieces from other members.
- Participants may not simply throw their pieces into the center for others to take; they have to give the pieces directly to one individual.
- It is permissible for a member to give away all the pieces to his puzzle, even if he has already formed a square.

Are the instructions clear?" (Questions are answered)

Give the signal to "begin working."

With the help of any observers make sure that the rules are observed throughout the activity. As groups complete the task they may applaud to signal that they are finished, but should then sit quietly and observe other groups who are still working until everyone has finished.

When everyone has completed the task, ask the following questions to summarize what happened. If observers were present, direct the questions first to them and then get additional ideas from the rest of the group.

- Who was willing to give away pieces of the puzzle?
- Did anyone finish his/her puzzle then somewhat divorce himself/herself from the struggles of the rest of the group?
- Was there anyone who continually struggled with his or her pieces, but yet was unwilling to give any or all of them away?
- How many people were actively engaged in mentally putting the pieces together?
- Did anyone seem especially frustrated?
- Was there any critical turning point at which time the group began to cooperate?
- Did anyone try to violate the rules by talking or pointing as a means of helping fellow members solve their puzzle?

**Processing:**

For this activity to be meaningful to participants in developing interpersonal skills, it's important for them to think about what really happened in the group, what they learned from the experience, and how they can apply it in other interpersonal situations. This can be accomplished by having each participant write on a sheet of paper his or her own answers to these questions.

Read the questions to the group and ask participants to jot down their responses as you go. After this has been done, discuss the questions one-by-one with the total group. Make sure that each participant takes part in the discussion, and do not allow anyone to completely dominate the discussion. Encourage participants to make additional notes on their written answers as the discussion proceeds.

1. What part of the experience did you find most enjoyable?
2. What part of the experience did you find most frustrating?
3. What kinds of things could other members in your group have done differently to make the experience more satisfying and successful?
4. What kinds of things could you personally have done to make the experience more satisfying and successful?
5. What did you learn from this experience that could be helpful when you work with other people in other situations?
6. What do you wish other people would do differently or better when they're with you?
7. What would you most like to improve about yourself in relating to other people?

**Closing:**

- Summarize the purposes of the "Broken Squares" activity.
- Review major points brought out from the processing questions.
- Challenge participants to strengthen their interpersonal skills in everyday life by acting on their personal written answers and notes related to the processing questions.

## Instructions to the Observer/Judge

Your job is part observer and part judge. Make sure each participant observes the rules:

1. No talking, pointing, or any other kind of communicating among the five people in your group.
2. Participants may give pieces to other participants but may not take pieces from other members.
3. Participants may not simply throw their pieces into the center for others to take; they have to give the pieces directly to one individual.
4. It is permissible for a member to give away all the pieces to his puzzle, even if he has already formed a square.

Do your best to strictly enforce the rules.

As an observer, you may want to look for some of the following:

1. Who was willing to give away pieces of the puzzle?
2. Did anyone finish his/her puzzle then somewhat divorce himself/herself from the struggles of the rest of the group?
3. Was there anyone who continually struggled with his or her pieces, but yet was unwilling to give any or all of them away?
4. How many people were actively engaged in mentally putting the pieces together?
5. Did anyone seem especially frustrated?
6. Was there any critical turning point at which time the group began to cooperate?
7. Did anyone try to violate the rules by talking or pointing as a means of helping fellow members solve their puzzle?

Reference: Martin, R.R.; Weber, P.L.; Henderson, W. E.; Lafontaine, K. R.; Sachs, R. E.; Roth, J.; Cox, K. J.; Schaffner, D. (1987). Broken squares (Section 5 p.3). [Laser d.i.s.k.](#) Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Extension.