

Metro North Health CULTURE & ENGAGEMENT



River crossing team activity

Time: Approximately 1 hour.

Materials needed: One wooden plank (“magic stone”) per participant (approximately 20x10cm, 2-3cm thick), two ropes (6-8 metres each) to mark riverbanks, a tennis ball, roll of tape, or similar object to act as an “oxygen mask”.

Participants: Team or department.

Values in Action: Teamwork, Integrity, Respect, High Performance.

Outcomes: Builds communication, problem-solving, trust, and collaboration under pressure.

Purpose

This fun and physical team challenge simulates a high-stakes scenario that requires participants to work closely together. Using only limited resources, the group must navigate their way across a crocodile-infested river — building communication, trust, creativity, and resilience along the way.

How to run the activity

Step 1: Prepare the space (10 mins)

- Set up two ropes about 6–8 meters apart to represent the riverbanks.
- Place the planks on one side of the river.
- Adjust the river size based on the number of participants (allow approx. 1 meter per person).
- For large groups (20+), consider two teams crossing from opposite directions.

Step 2: Introduction and instructions (5 – 10 mins)

Gather the group at one riverbank and build the story:

“You’re a team of explorers trapped in a jungle. Behind you, a wildfire. In front of you, a crocodile-infested river. Your only way across is using these ‘magic stones’ — but they only float when someone touches them.”

Explain:

- Planks = magic stones.
- If contact is lost, the plank sinks.
- If someone touches the ground (“river”), they’re bitten by a crocodile and lose a limb (must finish with one arm, leg, etc.)
- If anyone fully falls into the river, the team can reset (once).

Optional: Add sound effects or dramatic tone for fun!

Step 3: Explain the rules (10 mins)

- Demonstrate what “losing contact” looks like (e.g., hand off the plank → it’s removed).
- Show the crocodile “bite” by mimicking the use of one arm/leg.
- No throwing or sliding planks.
- Only planks may touch the river floor.
- Team must strategise and cross **together** — no racing ahead.

Facilitator tip: Stay active – monitor compliance and gently enforce consequences with humour and consistency.

Step 4: Begin the challenge (10 mins)

- Allow teams to plan for a few minutes.
- Then start the crossing.
- If a participant breaks a rule, respond immediately:
 - Remove a plank if contact is lost
 - Assign limb loss if they touch the river
 - If someone falls in, allow a one-time reset

Goal: Get the full team across without losing anyone to the river!

Step 5: Add the “Oxygen Mask” challenge (Optional, 10 minutes)

If the team is progressing too easily, raise the stakes:

“Smoke is filling the air — you must pass this ‘oxygen mask’ every minute, or the team can’t continue.”

- Use a small object (tennis ball/tape roll)
- Must be passed hand-to-hand — no tossing

This optional addition to the activity adds pressure and forces inclusive coordination.

Step 6: Completion and debrief (10 minutes)

After the challenge (or reset), gather the group for reflection.

Suggested questions:

- What worked well in our strategy?
- What challenged us the most?
- How did it feel when we made a mistake — and how did we respond?
- What individual strengths emerged during the activity?
- How does this relate to how we work together in real life?

Optional: Record team insights on a flipchart.

Key Takeaways

- Collaboration beats individual effort in complex tasks.
- Trust, patience, and communication are vital under pressure.
- Mistakes are part of learning — how we respond matters.
- Physical movement + problem-solving = fun, impactful learning.

Optional Variations

- **Silent mode:** For part of the challenge, no one can speak.
- **Blindfolded teammate:** One participant must cross, blindfolded, with guidance.
- **Timed race:** Compete against the clock or another team.
- **Story twist:** Add a “missing teammate” to be rescued midway through the race.