

# Levels of Trust (Mousetraps) Embers

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**Theme:** Examining our levels of trust with each other through the medium of mild pain aversion (perceived; there is very, very little actual threat).

**Age of campers:** 11-15

**Time allotted/actual:** 45 minutes

**Location:** Anywhere well lit so that you can see what you are doing with careful precision.

**Props/Materials/Symbols:** Several old fashioned snapping mousetraps (1 per person).

**Prep done:** Spend some time with the traps in advance and get very comfortable with setting and triggering them without getting hurt. This is actually quite easy. Simply watch the snap area carefully as you set and keep all hand parts away from it by securing the metal lever with your thumb as you set. Once set, lay the trap carefully on your FLAT hand. With the opposite hand FLAT and facing it, sandwich the trap in both hands and press firmly. This will trigger the trap but not allow it to spring because of the weight of your hands. On the count of three, release your top hand rapidly up and away from the trap. It will snap instantly and flip off of your hand on to the floor, leaving you uninjured. Do this several times until you get the hang of it and are comfortable teaching someone else.

**Opening/Mood set:** Introduce the topic of the embers and show the campers that you have something for them to experiment with. Ask them what their *perceived* level of pain might be from getting snapped. Ask them how safe they feel using the traps or setting them. Save those answers for discussion at the end.

## Questions/Activities:

**1<sup>st</sup> activity:** Ask the campers if they want to try what you show them. Set, trigger and snap the trap several times with ease and comfort in front of them. Ask them to continue thinking about their perceived level of pain that might come from getting snapped and think about whether they think it is possible to use the trap and completely avoid injury of any kind. For those that do want to try, walk them through the process with you, one at a time, and use their hand as the top of the sandwich when snapping the trap.

**2<sup>nd</sup> activity:** Try these questions:

- Why did you decide to try it/not try it?
- If you tried it, what made you trust or be sure that it was safe or not safe?
- If another person had done this with you, would you have trusted him/her? What about another camper?
- What was it that made you trust me in particular? Is it that I am your counselor/parent/guardian and I “should” be trustworthy? Or is it more the actions I have taken before that made you trust me?
- What other situations are there where you would choose to trust (or not trust) someone else in a potentially dangerous situation? (examples: firefighters, military, your parents)
- Is there someone you know that you trust for other reasons than their position? A person that you would trust with something like this but others who didn't know the person wouldn't? What characteristics does this person have that make him/her trustworthy?
- What happens if someone you trust breaks that trust? For example, what would you have felt if you did exactly as I told you and still the mousetrap snapped your hand?
- What takes longer, to build or to erase trust?

**3<sup>rd</sup> activity:** Try rounds of trust snapping where the campers work with each other, and trigger and snap traps that one another are holding. If they excel at this and want to continue, try offering a blindfold and asking if anyone is willing to trust listening only to verbal instructions guiding them to your hand with the waiting trap.

**Closing:** Process and debrief what kinds of trust this exercise asked for, and where everyone stands with it. What, if any, changes has this prompted to your view of trust and the perception of pain, and how you work to avoid it. How does the metaphor presented by the traps relate to how we use other *seemingly* dangerous things---from power tools to high ropes courses---and use them safely everyday?

**Were other people involved?** It is very helpful with this embers depending on the number of campers to have a second pair of hands present that are comfortable with the traps and how to utilize them with this metaphor in mind.

**Thoughts on pacing?** A lot of time may be taken, depending on the campers, to play with the traps and gain comfort with them. Some campers may opt out entirely and never touch the traps no matter *what* the discussion ensues. Allow both of these things with empathetic understanding; they are both vital points to consider in the ending discussions.

**What would you change next time / what did you learn / how would you enhance it?** Advanced mousetrap games---house of cards stacking, instinct games, etc, are all potential additions to this for groups that get very comfortable, and can present useful metaphors for skill competence when teaching about almost any other skill that has a perceived danger or risk element to it.

**Camper feedback:** The positive nature of feedback is almost always directly correlated with the degree to which a particular camper warmed up to the idea and begin to trust the process and use the traps. That said, it is important to assess your group when selecting this idea.