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Exploring space

When we move, we occupy and define the space around us. Our use of space signifies our interest in our environment. Some people charge through space, going after what they want. Others shrink away from space, asking permission with their bodies to be present. This chapter explores some of our attitudes about space and what communication has to do with the way we form our bodies in interactions. We each have preferences for closeness and distance from others, and habits we've developed in shaping our living space.

Our primary living space is the area within arm's reach around our bodies, known sometimes as one's personal space or kinesphere. Personal space is like a rainbow stretching out from our internal experience of space, from the freedom or restriction of breath, feelings, and muscles.

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This rainbow reflects the hues and tones of our insides as it communicates our sense of belonging in the world. The ability to understand and manipulate spatial relationships is a recognized aspect of intelligence. The more we interact with space, the more our learning matrix expands.

Interactional space relationships have been the focus of many research studies, and much is known about the role of spatial relationships in communication patterns. Issues of control, dominance, privacy, courtship, effective communication, and so on are familiar to anyone who has ridden in an elevator, attended a committee meeting, or walked a busy street. Our attitudes about space are powerful factors in our daily experiences and can be explored and clarified in movement experiments.

These activities touch on some fundamental aspects of spatial exploration. They can be used individually or in combination with activities from other chapters. Spatial awareness also appears in many of the experiments in other chapters (see the *Index*).

SPACE CAPSULE

TO THE LEADER This experiment focuses on what we call personal space. Sensing and claiming our individual space can develop greater self-assurance and confidence in interactions, as well as circumvent the cause of many discipline problems.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP How many of you have seen the space capsules the astronauts used?

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(Conduct a brief discussion.)

You live in a capsule all the time, and you take it with you wherever you go. You and I can't *see* it, but we do see what you do in your capsule, whether you like it, whether you use all of it or only some dusty, dark corners. That capsule is your space capsule, and it's all yours. You decide how big it is and how it feels. And you can remodel any time.

Find a place to stand in this room with no furniture close by and no other students within arm's reach. Let your feet be the launching pad of your capsule. They won't move around. Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Notice where the breath travels in your body. Let your eyes remain closed throughout this experiment. Use your arms and hands, your knees, the back of your head, different parts of you to reach out around you and explore your space capsule. How high is it . . . how wide? Where is the place you most like to be? Do you feel any closets with closed doors . . . any places that seem colder or smaller? Does your capsule have colors? What kind of surface does your capsule have, smooth or bumpy, thin or thick? Can you see through it with your inner eye? Get to know your own space capsule.

Slowly open your eyes and begin to walk about this room. Does your space bubble come with you? Does it change shape? How? What happens when you sit down?

COMMENT Having the students draw or paint their space capsules can be valuable after this experiment.

SPACE TAG

TO THE LEADER This experiment encourages development of spatial awareness, both personal and interpersonal. You'll need a large open space in which to explore, possibly outdoors or in the gym.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Find your own open place. Take a moment to reach all around you in as many directions as you can without moving your feet. This is your own space bubble. Feel how large it is! And get acquainted with parts of it you haven't visited in a while. This game is done in slow motion, as though your space bubble were floating on a light breeze. Your aim is to tag other people's bubbles without letting yours be touched. Okay, float. If you get tagged, let all the air out of your space bubble the way air leaves a balloon with a leak. Let it take you zigzagging through space. If you get deflated, take a moment to remake your space bubble and rejoin the game.

COMMENT You may want an umpire to confirm tagging when you first play this game. Later, students will probably discover that getting tagged is just as much fun as tagging.

SAFE SPACE

TO THE LEADER Recent social psychology research indicates a strong connection between a sense of safety and the level of exploration attempted. We know that we need to

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move in order to perceive and learn, but we often forget that curiosity and wonder grow most freely from a firm base of comfort. In this activity, participants re-create the necessary aspects of their individual safety needs. A rich musical background can add to the quality of this activity. As this experiment is more unstructured and student-generated, you may wish to introduce it in conjunction with another activity or after students experience more structured activities.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Your well-being is important, that sense of feeling at home in your body, welcome as you are. Let's take some time to actually look at and explore what we need to feel comfortable and safe as we move through the day.

Let your feet take you slowly through the room, no place to go, just sending out your antennae to sense how different parts of the room feel to you. How much space do you like around you? Where does your body like to be in the room? Let your body tell you whether you'd like to be standing, sitting, or lying down. Use anything in the room that adds to your sense of ease and comfort. If you want to be under something, great; if you like to be curled up, great.

(Wait for 2-3 minutes until students seem settled in a place in the room.)

Now let your internal motor slow *way* down until you can almost hear your heart beating. Be aware of whether you like to have your eyes open or closed. Take all the time you need to spread out inside yourself and find the way of

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moving that feels most delicious to you. Let your body be held by the space all around you. Try on different things . . . swaying, rocking, stretching . . . until you click into your own most comfortable way of moving.

(2–5 minutes.)

Wonderful . . . almost like taking a long nap. Now let your body begin to stretch and wake up and come back to the room. You can bring as much of your sense of comfort with you as you like.

COMMENT When this activity is more familiar, it can be condensed as a stretch break and reminder to value ourselves.

SOUNDING

TO THE LEADER This partner activity focuses on the interplay between internal space and what we perceive. Participants are usually amazed to find the consistency between hearing, seeing, and moving.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE GROUP Stand facing a partner and decide who'll be Partner One and Partner Two. Partner One, you'll be the first sounder. Partner Two, you'll listen with all of you, and you'll have your eyes closed at first.

Here's the game. Partner One, you take a full, deep breath, and make a sound and a movement together, a sound and movement that fit each other, big or small, your

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choice. Partner Two's eyes will be closed while you do this. Then Partner Two, open your eyes and see if you can repeat your partner's movement as you make the same sound.

Then switch parts. Partner Two, you be the sounder, and Partner One, you be the listener. Switch back and forth, taking turns with different sounds and movements. You might notice that it gets easier as you let your whole body be a big eardrum.

Any questions? Okay, let's sound.

(Continue for 3–5 minutes.)