



1-2-3-CLAP: A SCHOOL TEAM-BUILDING ACTIVITY

"If you can laugh together, you can work together."

—Robert Orben

OVERVIEW

Partners engage in a counting and clapping activity that welcomes mistakes, and reflect on the experience after.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To build group cohesion quickly in preparation for collaboration, especially if innovation is required
- To communicate to a group that making mistakes is expected and welcome
- Anytime to build group cohesion or to relieve stress

TIME REQUIRED

- 5-10 minutes

LEVEL

- Adult

MATERIALS

- None

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Participants will:

- Engage in a counting and clapping activity
- Reflect with each other on group norms for making mistakes

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Heal-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Management
- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to reflect on your experience with making mistakes in a group.

- Have you ever worked in a team where mistakes were both accepted and expected? Did that change the dynamics of the team? If so, how?
- Did you notice if creativity and/or efficiency increased?
- What other benefits did you experience from feeling safe to make mistakes?

INSTRUCTIONS

This activity demonstrates how making mistakes together is a fast track to building a cohesive group.

ROUND 1

- Ask participants to find a partner (or partner them up in a way that is appropriate for your group). Note: The same partners face each other during each of the three rounds.
- Explain that pairs will count to three over and over again, with partners alternating saying the next number in the sequence.
- Model slowly with a partner.
- Once everyone has had a minute or two to play, use your attention signal to bring that round to a close.
- Ask:
 - *How many of you made a mistake? What did you do when you made a mistake?* (Typical answers are, "Laughed," or said, "Sorry," or pulled back).
- Explain that these are all ways that people give cues to the group that say, "I've got this. I'll laugh at myself or apologize so you won't push me out."
- Tell the group that during the next round, when someone makes a mistake, they should raise their hands in the air and say, "Ta-da!"

ROUND 2

- Explain that for this round, pairs should replace the number "1" with a clap and then continue the number sequence "2 - 3" counted out loud (Clap-2-3, Clap-2-3, etc.).
- Model slowly with a partner. During the modeling, purposefully make a mistake such as saying "1" instead of clapping after "3." Raise your hands in the air and say, "Ta-da!"
- Once everyone has had a minute or two to play, call the round to a close. Ask:
 - *Was anyone glad that they weren't the only one making a mistake?*
- Tell the group that in the next round when one person makes a mistake, both partners will raise their hands in the air, give each other a double high-five, and both say, "Ta-da!"

ROUND 3

- Explain that in this round, pairs should clap for "1," replace the number "2" with a foot stomp, and say "3." (Clap, stomp, 3, Clap, stomp, 3, etc.).
- Model this with a partner and purposefully make a mistake, such as saying "2" instead of stomping. You and your partner now give each other double high-fives and shout, "Ta-da!" together, and start over again.
- Once everyone has had a minute or two to play, call the round to a close.
- Ask participants to notice how they were taking care of each other and were learning to sync with each other—finding the right pace for everyone to succeed.
- Ask participants to notice the positive energy that was created with each mistake in the group. Explain that they will now be working together for the next few days and should try to keep that same energy when mistakes are made. Ta-da!

CLOSURE

- Ask the group to reflect on their own, with a partner, or in a small group on making mistakes.
 - What has been their experience with group norms around mistakes in the past?
 - How might making mistakes as an expected and welcomed experience change a group's dynamic?
 - How did this activity affect this group's dynamics?

MODIFICATIONS AND VARIATIONS

- Add another round with a clap, stomp, and snap. Notice the joy that is in the room even when the task becomes more difficult.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice a shift in group dynamics after this practice? If so, how?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A [study of reform efforts](#) in 12 Chicago schools found that enabling positive, trusting relationships among staff members, including the leadership, were at the heart of school improvement.

Underlying trust is [psychological safety](#), or the feeling that it's safe to make mistakes, admit ignorance, or voice concerns and opinions, without the fear of being silenced or humiliated by co-workers or leadership. Numerous studies show that when employees feel psychologically safe, their ability to learn from mistakes improves, resulting in better job performance.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

When staff members trust one another and feel psychologically safe, creating school environments in which [ongoing improvement](#) is the norm becomes much easier. However, one study found that workplace leaders cannot assume that [psychological safety exists](#) in every department, so it's important to intentionally cultivate this safety through activities such as this one.

SOURCE

Adapted from an activity created by [Oakland Unified School District's Department of Social-Emotional Learning and Leadership](#).