



Spoons

Instructions:

1. Explain to participants that you will be playing a game called, "Spoons". **How you explain the game to participants is very important.** Be very exact with your wording.
2. While holding the spoons and moving them around in your hands, **explain that you will be representing a number between 0 and 10.** In other words the number could be 0, it could be 10, or it could be any number in between.
3. **Notice that you did not say you were going to use the spoons to represent a number, you just said you were going to represent a number.** Participants will assume you are going to do this with the spoons because that is what you and the group are both paying attention to (this is the secret behind this activity).
4. Explain to **participants that they will be asked to guess what number you are representing.** When they think they know the number they should just call it out. You will let them know if they got the number right or wrong. However, if they get it right and they figure out how you are representing the number they should NOT explain how they figured it out.
5. On a table or on the floor arrange the spoons in any interesting pattern or shape you desire. Make sure you act like you really have a plan.
6. **Right before you ask people to start guessing, place your hands in front of you at the back of the table or on the floor.** Select a certain number of fingers to show. Don't fidget with this too much. It should look very natural. For example, you can lay one hand flat on the table, palms down with all fingers showing, while the other hand is on the table as a fist. If you do this you are representing the number 5.
7. Ask participants to guess what number you are representing. People will call out just about every number. When someone gets it right, acknowledge it. Give participants a few minutes to linger and see if they can figure out why that is the right number (remember between 0 and 10) then pick up the spoons and start again.

Title: Spoons

Group Size: Any

Time Needed: 15 to 20 minutes

Goal: To uncover hidden issues and understand challenging behaviors

Audience: Teens, Parents, Children, Couples

Special Considerations: You will need to be very clear on instructions in order for this activity to work.

Materials:

- ✓ At least 10 plastic spoons (other similar sized objects can be substituted)

8. Do **this several times, each time changing the pattern of the spoons but more importantly changing the number of fingers you lay down.** After repeating several times eventually pick up all the spoons and just toss them in front of you, place your fingers in position again and see if anyone else gets the “secret”.
9. Finally, move the spoons away, lay your fingers on the table and repeat the initial instructions (I am going to represent a number between 0 and 10). **Because your fingers are the only things left on the table it should be obvious to participants that the whole time you were representing the number with your fingers.** At this point participants will often challenge you that you tricked them or that you said you were using the spoons. Kindly and gently tell them that you never said you would use the spoons but you can understand why they would think that. Then ask them why they assumed you would use the spoons (the answer is that the whole time you were talking you were focusing on the spoons, so naturally they did the same).
10. Ask participants what this has to do with marriage and/or parenting.

Tip for Discussion and Processing:

This is a great activity to get the brain moving. Participants are usually very engaged during the entire exercise and it will illicit a great deal of discussion. Once again, it is very important that you are extremely precise with your words when explaining the exercise. For example, if you say “I’m going to take these spoons and represent a number,” then the activity is ruined because that is not what you are doing.

The main purpose behind this activity is to show how distracted we often are from what is really going on. For example, a couple may be fighting over and over again household chores, when the real underlying issue may be about appreciation or acceptance. Participants are distracted by the spoons because that is what we are paying attention to. Much in the same way a husband may be focused on his wife demands for more help with chores and may feel that he can never make her happy, when what she really wants is to be appreciated for all that she does.

When teaching parenting classes, this is a great activity to use when talking about the Goals of Misbehavior or Behaviors and payoffs. Below are some questions to get the discussion going.

1. If I said I was going to represent a number between 0 and 10, why did the group assume I was going to use the spoons? (If the group does not come up with it, the idea is that you were focusing so much on the spoons who wouldn’t assume you were going to use the spoons.)
2. Does that ever happen in real life? Do we ever get distracted by the biggest behavior and miss what is really going on?

Cautions:

1. Sometimes participants can get frustrated doing this activity. It is very important to use a great deal of humility when leading this activity. Your goal is really not to “trick” your participants it is to demonstrate a point.
2. Be careful not to get into the “I gotcha mode” and never appear to be in the “one up” position. You also want to be careful that you are not making anyone feel unintelligent or humiliated.