Cup Stacking Team Challenge

Give each player one string tied to a shared rubber band, then work together to lift and place six cups without touching them by hand.

Host guide / Letter / 3–6 adults per team; prepare one identical kit for each team / 25–30 minutes including setup, play, and optional debrief

Read the guide privately first if this activity has hidden answers. Print single-sided at Actual size / 100%. Cut only sheets marked CARDS. Keep answer keys with the host.

What you need

- For each team of 3–6 players: 6 lightweight reusable cups of the same size; do not use glass.

- 1 medium rubber band that can stretch around a cup without being pulled to its limit.

- One non-stretch string per player, about 3 ft (90 cm) each, tied around the rubber band with space between knots. For a 3–6 person team, prepare 3–6 strings.

- 1 stable table with clear space around it; a visible timer; optional spare band and shallow tray.

How to run it

1. Tie one string to the rubber band for each of the 3–6 players, spacing the knots around the band. Check the knots with a gentle tug. Place six cups upright on the table and clear the floor around it.

2. Invite a team of 3–6 and explain the hand rule: each player holds one string, and no one touches or steadies cups directly during play. A person may observe, call time, or help reset instead of pulling.

3. Demonstrate once over an empty space. Pull outward to widen the band, lower it around a cup, ease tension so it grips, lift slowly, and relax to release. Give the team one untimed practice pickup.

4. Start a 10-minute build window. The group uses the tool to arrange three cups in a base row, two centered above, and one at the top. Let players choose whether to have a caller or speak together.

5. If a cup slips or the pyramid falls, pause movement, reset the cups by hand, and continue. The clock is a boundary rather than a race. Stop early if the group is ready.

6. After play, ask whether the team wants to look at the stack or reset. Offer one optional reflection about a signal or adjustment the group chose. Passing is always fine.

Prepare a safe, simple kit

Use light cups on a stable surface and keep the strings from trailing across a walkway. The rubber band is under tension, so use only enough pull to open it around a cup. Do not wrap string around fingers or wrists. Stop if a band frays, snaps, or feels uncomfortable.

James Madison University’s activity reference specifies six cups, one rubber band, one string per participant, a pyramid build, and a no-direct-touch rule during the challenge. This page adds the sample string length, table setup, and non-competitive timing as its own practical choices.

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Explain the target before the timer

Show a three-two-one layout: three stable cups on the bottom, two centered across them, then one at the peak. Point out that cups need to be upright and supported. Players can pause to agree on a count, a caller, or a reset; no particular leadership style is required.

Let people test the tool over an empty area before they move cups. If the band is too loose or the cups are unusually small, change the materials before starting instead of asking people to force a grip.

Seated and no-tool alternatives

Place the table within comfortable reach and adjust string length so it does not drag. A participant may join as timekeeper, caller, or observer. Do not ask anyone to explain a pass. For a no-tool alternative, give the team a printed diagram and six labeled cup tokens, then ask them to plan a placement sequence in words or on paper. That is a separate planning puzzle, not a substitute physical test.

Printable host sheet

Read aloud: “We have six cups and one shared rubber-band tool. Use only the strings to move cups. Build a three-two-one pyramid. You can pause, reset, observe, or pass at any point. This is a game, not a score of anyone’s ability.” Allow a short practice pickup, then up to ten minutes for the build.

Afterward, return the cups and strings to a tray. If there are multiple teams, do not rank them by speed or stack quality. Invite each group to name one adjustment it chose, then transition to the next activity.

Optional variations and debrief

If the group wants a second round, let it choose one change: begin with cups farther apart, use one agreed caller, or attempt one minute in silence before resuming conversation. State the option before play and drop it if it makes the task less comfortable.

Ask only about the activity: “What cue helped you move together?” or “What would you change about the setup?” Do not interpret pauses, frustration, or results as evidence of a person’s workplace skills.

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CARDS / Cup Stacking Team Challenge

R_CUPSTACK-001 / Host checklist

Reset check: Is every cup upright and the table clear before the next attempt?

R_CUPSTACK-002 / Technique cue

Try one slow pickup: widen the band, lower it, ease the pull, then lift.

R_CUPSTACK-003 / Technique cue

Try one careful release: agree on the target position before relaxing the strings.

R_CUPSTACK-004 / Optional variation

Variation: choose one caller, shared calls, or no assigned roles by mutual agreement.

R_CUPSTACK-005 / Optional variation

Pause point: after the first three cups, ask whether the base feels stable enough to continue.

R_CUPSTACK-006 / Reflection

Debrief: what signal helped the group start or stop a movement together?

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CARDS / Cup Stacking Team Challenge

R_CUPSTACK-007 / Reflection Debrief: what did the team do after a cup slipped?	R_CUPSTACK-008 / Reflection Debrief: what one setup change would you choose for another round?
R_CUPSTACK-009 / Host checklist Access check: would a seated role or paper-planning version work better for anyone?	R_CUPSTACK-010 / Host checklist Close: name a shared choice without judging individual performance.

Hosting questions

How many people do you need?

Three to six players can use one string each. Prepare exactly one string for every player; for a larger group, set up another identical kit instead of crowding the table.

How long should it take?

Allow about five minutes for setup and explanation, up to ten minutes for building, and five to ten minutes for cleanup and optional reflection.

Can players touch the cups?

During the challenge they move cups with the tool. Pause the round before anyone resets cups by hand.

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Does the activity prove a team communicates well?

No. It is a short game under artificial constraints. Do not infer job performance or personality from the result.

References

Primary activity reference for materials, no-direct-touch play, pyramid target, and example timing. This draft adds its own string-length suggestion, access options, and non-competitive format.

https://www.jmu.edu/chbs/ipe-ide/toolkit/cup-stacking.shtml

Original AI-assisted resource with AI editorial review. Independent human playtesting and physical printing have not been completed. Answer, listen, or pass.

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