Helium Pole

Session : Intro (1) or Communication (2)

Possible applications: Peer pressure, or effective communication skills

Materials needed: 1 tent pole (length might need to vary depending on group size)

Instructions: Lay the tent pole on the floor and have participants line up along either side of it, facing the pole. Participants should be fairly close together, more or less shoulder to shoulder, with about an arms length between the two lines.
Participants should then put both of their index fingers out in front of them (like a gun). The instructor then picks up the tent pole and places in upon all the outstretched fingers. Now, as a group, the participants must lower the tent pole to the ground.
Important notes - If ANY participant's finger leaves the pole, the group must start over. They are also not allowed to grasp or hook the pole in any way, it must only rest on top of their outstretched fingers. This is surprisingly difficult for most groups, and most of them will find that it 'floats up' by itself.
Give them a few tries, be encouraging, but try not to intervene too much in the process of figuring it out.

Key points to process:
If there's not actually helium in the pole, why is this so hard?? Because just a LITTLE bit of pressure from a lot of people can lead us in a direction we don't want to go. Many times peer pressure is much more about us trying to live up to some standard (be they real or imagined) rather than someone directly MAKING us do something. (for example, I assume that I need to dress or act a certain way to fit in. Nobody ever actually tells me they won't be my friend if I don't… and they assume the same thing, so here we go off in a certain direction…)
This is one reason why people can sometimes make bad decisions in groups—even if no single person is 'pushing the bar'!

Communication applications can also be made if it's used in that unit. This game is very hard if you don't know and use the other participants names, make good eye contact, be respectful, and be clear about what you're trying to say.