

LESSON: IMPACTS OF PLASTIC ON ECOSYSTEMS



Activity 2: Oh no, I'm Entangled!

OVERVIEW

This activity will take participants through a demonstration to learn, first-hand, about the impacts of entanglement on wildlife.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this activity, participants will be able to:

- Understand how entanglement by plastic can impact living organisms.

SETUP AND MATERIALS

- Hair elastics (one per participant)

INSTRUCTIONS

This activity takes approximately 10 minutes.

- Give each participant one hair elastic.
- Ask the participant to pick one of their favourite animals and to share what ecosystem they are part of (refer back to Activity 1 for ecosystem examples).
 - **Suggested prompts:** *“Now that you’ve visited all these cool ecosystems, think about an animal that you wish you could be and what ecosystem you would live in. For example, I want to be a sea turtle and I would be a part of an open ocean ecosystem.”*
- Ask participants to demonstrate, with one hand, how that animal moves and eats.
- Now ask participants to imagine that one day you are enjoying your day but suddenly become wrapped and tangled up in plastic. Explain that this is a type of wildlife impact called **entanglement**. Entanglement is when wildlife has plastic or another litter item wrapped up somewhere on their body.
- Explain we’re now going to demonstrate what that might feel like by using a hair elastic.
- Show participants how to wrap hair elastic around the back of their dominant hand (the one they normally draw with).
 - You will stick thumb through one side then extend the hair elastic around the back of hand and stick pinky finger into other side.
- Now ask participants to try and show you how their animal moves and eats, but this time using their entangled hand. Ask them if it’s more difficult now to do this (i.e., is it now more challenging to eat? Swim? Walk? Crawl?).
- Next, have participants place their free hand behind their back and try to remove the hair elastic WITHOUT using their other hand (this should be challenging).
- Explain this is how it might feel to be an animal that is entangled in plastic, then explain that unlike wildlife, it’s easy for us as humans to remove the elastics.
- Ask if it was challenging – *“How might it feel to be an entangled animal? Do you think it’s bad for animals to become entangled in plastic?”*



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Trash Team

FINAL REFLECTION

Now that you have completed all parts of the activity, it's time to reflect back on what participants have learned.

- Ask participants if it was difficult to remove the elastic and how it felt when they were entangled (i.e., could they remove it right away? Did it feel uncomfortable? Was it frustrating?)
- Ask them to think about why it's bad for animals to become entangled in plastics.
- Share some ideas about how we can reduce the chance of wildlife becoming entangled (e.g., cut up plastic rings, don't litter).

Note: If participant suggests approaching wildlife to help free them, remind them that if they ever see wildlife in distress, they should call a local wildlife control and support number and never approach wildlife themselves. While you are trying to help, wildlife don't know this and may hurt you by accident.

[Coming up next: We'll learn even more about what happens when wildlife become entangled in plastics by writing and testing our own hypotheses in Activity 3: Entangled Flight.](#)