



Games that Foster Cooperation

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Following Piaget's theory of cognitive development, we know that children under the age of seven look at life through a lens that does not allow for shades of gray. Young children look at life's day-to-day experiences in a very black and white way. For example, a group of first graders playing T-ball knows that one team wins and one team loses. Children of this age do not take into account that their team might have played the game really well, but they lost by only one point. Another example of this pre-operational thinking would be a four-year-old playing "Go Fish" (a card game) with a classmate and his teacher. This four-year-old knows that at the end of the game there will be only one winner, and the other two people will be the losers. If the four-year-old loses, he takes no comfort in the fact that there were two losers. Have you seen first graders who are poor sports when they lose a team game? Have you seen four-year-olds who are poor losers?

Some adults argue that group games provide excellent opportunities for young children to reason about moral issues, and that group games foster both moral and cognitive development. This is certainly true once a child has reached Piaget's concrete operations stage of cognitive development. Before the age of seven, however the competition inherent in group games can damage self-esteem, destroy relationships, or impede the development of trust. Examples of behaviors stemming from envy, aggression, or distrust include hitting another player, throwing the dice, insulting another player, yelling at another player, grabbing game pieces away from another player, and refusing to take turns. The competition experienced by a player of the typical group game can cause the losing child to be left on the sidelines with a sense of failure and incompetence.

What games are developmentally appropriate for the child under the age of seven? Cooperative games where children work together as a team to beat some element in the game are appropriate. When playing a cooperative game, children are on the same team playing against the game. This increases cooperative behaviors in children such as helping other players, handing the dice to another player, taking turns, and offering advice to other players.

Copycat Movement Game

- Have children sit or stand in a circle so that they can see each other.
- Begin with something simple, like crossing and uncrossing your arms.
- The first child watches, turns to his or her neighbor, and performs the same movement.
- Children pass it along until it goes all the way around the circle.
- Repeat until everyone has had a chance to introduce a movement.
- At the end, review all the movements with the children in the order they created them and do them sequentially all together.

Ball Bounce

Materials: parachute or large sheet, and a playground ball

- Children hold and stretch the edges of the parachute.
- Place a ball in the center of the parachute.
- All children gently tug up and down causing the ball to bounce.
- See how long the children can keep the ball going without it bouncing off the parachute.
- More balls can be added for additional challenge and fun.

Hoops

Materials: half as many hoops as the number of children

- Place the hoops on the ground spread out around the play space.
- Children stand outside the hoops.
- On the command, “Move,” the children move around the area without touching anyone or the hoops.
- On the command, “Hoops,” each child must find the nearest hoop to jump inside.
- Vary the actions outside the hoops, e.g., run, gallop, jump, skip.

Wall to Wall

- Find a space to run from wall to wall or wall to fence.
- At the command, “Go,” the children run from one wall and stop at the other.
- Try different ways to move from wall to wall. Here are some ideas:
 - a) Walk backwards
 - b) Jump
 - c) Gallop
 - d) Tiptoe
 - e) Walk with knees high
 - f) Run with arms raised above the head
 - g) Swing arms while walking
 - h) Twirl body in circles
 - i) Crab walk
 - j) Walk on all fours; hands and feet
 - k) Skip
 - l) Slide sideways

Run, Run, Go Home

- Like “Wall to Wall,” the children run from one safe zone to the next.
- In the middle of the play space, have one child stand as the “Catcher.”
- The “Catcher” calls out, “Run, run, go home” to signal the other children to run across the mid space.
- Anyone tagged becomes a part of the catchers for the next run.
- Proceed until all of the children are caught.
- The game begins anew.

Hoop Pass

Material: one hoop

- Children make a straight line holding hands.
- Without letting go at any time, the object is to move a hoop from one end of the line to the other, passing each child through it.
- If someone lets go, the hoop is returned to the beginning.

Duck, Duck, Goose

- The children sit in a circle.
- One child who is “It,” walks around the outside of the circle.
- As “It” walks around the circle, he or she lightly taps each child’s head as the child is passed.
- As each head is passed, “It” says, “Duck.”
- After four or five taps, “It” says “Goose.”
- The child who is tapped “Goose,” chases “It” around the circle.
- “It” tries to get around the circle and back to the empty spot and sit down before being caught by the “Goose.”
- “Goose” then becomes the new “It,” and the play continues.

Cat and Mouse

Materials: two soft balls, one larger than the other

- The children sit in a circle.
- Tell a story about how the cat always chases the mouse, and the mouse is little but quick.
- Name the large ball “Cat,” and the small ball “Mouse.”
- Have the children hand the balls from one child to the next as quickly as possible.
- Start the play with the smaller ball first, and the larger ball a few seconds later.

Catching the Dragon’s Tail

- Gather 10 or more children in a line.
- Each person places hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them.
- The first child in line is the “head” of the dragon.
- The last child in line is the “tail” of the dragon.
- The “head” tries to catch the “tail” by maneuvering the line around so he or she can tag the tail player.
- When the “tail” is tagged, the tail player moves to the front of the line to become the new head. (The old “head” is now second in line.)

Paper Race

Materials: one piece of copy paper per child

- Give each child a piece of paper.
- Show the children how to run with the paper, first by holding it on your chest.
- Then, after picking up speed, let go so the air pressure holds the paper in place.
- Have the children try running with the paper trying to keep it on their chests without dropping it as they run.
- Running in a straight line is much less challenging than running in a circle.

Pass the Pillow

Material: one throw pillow

- The children lay down shoulder to shoulder.
- Have them pass a pillow down the line without using their hands.

Get Them Out of Here!

Materials: chalk or tape, one playground ball per child or one piece of paper wadded into a ball per child

- Divide the children into two teams.
- Have each team stand behind a line drawn with chalk or marked with tape.
- The teams should be facing each other with a “neutral” area in between.
- Pass out one ball or paper wad to each child.
- On the signal, “GO!” the children throw their balls over to the other team’s area.
- Children continue to throw balls that land in their area over to the other team.
- Balls that land in the “neutral” area are left there, as the children are not allowed to cross over their line.
- At the signal, “Stop,” the children count the number of balls on each side.
- The object is to have the LEAST number of balls on your side.

Can in a Circle

Material: one empty tennis ball can

- Children sit in a circle.
- Starting with one child, the children pass the can all the way around the circle using their feet.
- If the can falls, the can goes back to the first child and play begins again.

Fruit Basket Upset

Materials: one piece of plastic fruit per child (have duplicates or triplicates of each fruit)

- Children sit or stand in a circle.
- Give each child a plastic fruit.
- For younger children, name each fruit as you hand it to the child.
- The teacher stands in the middle of the circle and calls out the name of a fruit.
- At this time, all of the children holding that fruit must change places with someone else who has the same fruit.
- Play continues as different fruits are called and students have turns changing places.
- Occasionally, the teacher in the middle calls out, “Fruit basket upset!” and all of the children must move to a new place.

- After playing this game on several different days, the teacher can make the game more challenging.
- The teacher stands in the middle of the circle and calls out the name of a fruit.
- At this time, all of the children holding that fruit must change places with someone else who has the same fruit.
- The teacher in the middle quickly moves to the place of one of the students whose fruit was called.
- The displaced child gives his or her fruit to the teacher and is now the one who calls out a fruit name.
- Play continues with different students taking turns being the caller in the middle of the circle.

- Another challenge would be to name two fruits at a time instead of just one.

Freeze

Materials: tape or CD player, and a children's instrumental tape or CD

- Have the children stand in an open space.
- Tell the children that when they hear music, they should dance to the music.
- Tell the children that when the music stops, they should immediately freeze.
- Wait a few minutes to see if they hold their positions, then start the music over.

Monkey See, Monkey Do

Materials: tape or CD player, and a children's instrumental tape or CD

- Have the children stand in an open space facing the teacher.
- When the music begins, the teacher does any movement he or she wants to in time to the music.
- The children must do the same movement in time to the beat.
- The teacher then picks a child to lead a movement and the children and teacher then follow that child's lead.
- Play continues with different children having a turn to lead the class in a movement to the music.

Mirrors

- Children pair off and stand facing each another.
- One partner is designated the leader of each pair.
- The leader makes a simple movement and the follower in each pair must copy the movement.
- Repeat having the followers becoming the leaders.

Un-Musical Chairs

Materials: a chair for each child, tape or CD player, and a children's tape or CD

- Arrange the chairs back-to-back in two lines.
- Have the children form a circle by standing around the chairs.
- Play the music.
- Ask the children to move around the chairs in an orderly circle until the music stops.
- After a minute or so, stop the music and ask the children to sit down in one of the chairs.
- Have the children stand up, and remove one chair.
- Tell the children that if they cannot find a chair, they must sit in someone's lap when the music stops.
- Continue playing the music, stopping the music, and removing chairs until all of the children are piling onto one chair.
- Restart the game by adding the original chairs minus one.

Hiking in the Great Outdoors

Materials: hula hoops or carpet squares (enough for ½ of the children), one cone or empty milk jug per child, parachute or large bed sheet

- Prepare a large open space by placing the parachute in the middle.
- Scatter the cones and hoops around the rest of the open space.
- Cones are named mountains. Hoops are named lakes.
- The teacher calls out directions such as, "Take a hike." (Children walk around the space.)
- For, "Climb a mountain," the children step over the cones.
- For, "Jump in a lake," the children jump into hoops. (For safety, allow no more than two children in a hoop at a time.)
- The activity continues with a command of "Bear scare!" Children immediately go and sit underneath the parachute to "hide."
- Play can resume with the command, "Take a hike."

Weather Walk

- In an open space, the teacher calls out commands that are weather related.
- Ask the children to dramatize various weather conditions by walking as if they were feeling each kind of weather in turn. Here are some ideas:
 - a) Running in windy weather
 - b) Walking in very cold weather
 - c) Wading through puddles after a rain
 - d) Jogging in very hot weather
 - e) Shuffling through autumn leaves
 - f) Standing in rain like in a shower in your bathroom
 - g) Walking in Rain like it is spitting at you
 - h) Walking as snow is falling
 - i) Jumping in mud puddles
 - j) Sliding on an icy sidewalk
 - k) Walking through a fog

Animal Charades

- Have one child come to the front of the group and pantomime the actions of an animal.
- Ask the rest of the children to copy the actions, and guess the name of the animal.
- Children should take turns being the leader.
- A different game can be played by making animal sounds instead of actions.