

# PLAY IDEAS BANK

Practical Ideas for Creative Play - A comprehensive collection for Playworkers & Playschemes everywhere

No.15

# CO-OPERATIVE GAMES



Co-operative games offer an alternative to traditional competitive games. They help children learn to work together and show how co-operating with others can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. They allow everyone to join in as equals and help to overcome differences of strength, skill or ability.

Introducing co-operative games successfully in a highly competitive society presents a real challenge for the playworker. This leaflet can be a starting point.

We live in a very competitive society. Competitiveness and the will to win are highly valued in many walks of life, and particularly in the education of children. Many people think that competition is both inevitable, and even beneficial. It may have benefits for the winners, but what about the hurt, disappointment and loss of self-respect for the loser? What about the stress, anger, aggression and even violence that grow from unchecked competitiveness?

Co-operation, on the other hand, is certainly beneficial; in fact it is essential for our survival. So why are so many of the games we play on our playschemes highly competitive? There are several answers:

- \* We are all more familiar with competitive games. We stick with what we know.
- \* The children we work with take it for granted that games mean competition. There's resistance to change.
- \* The competitive spirit makes it easy to generate excitement, involvement and challenge in a group. To be honest, you have to work harder at first to make co-operative games appear as exciting and attractive.

There is a place for competitive games in a child's life, but school and sports activities provide them with all they need. So don't feel children will miss out if you don't keep organising competitions. There is also a place for co-operative games, but hardly any opportunity outside the playscheme or playcentre.

How do you meet the challenge?

1. You need good games; that's where this leaflet comes in.
2. You need to practise and develop your skills in leading a games session, in particular communicating with your group and being sensitive to their needs.
3. You need a sense of fun and enthusiasm. Join in and enjoy yourself.
4. Don't be too ambitious. Maybe mix in some familiar games, even if they have a competitive element. It may take time to show that co-operative games can be just as much fun, but gradually the group should take to them.
5. If a game isn't working, drop it and go on to another. If it is popular, don't flog it to death; use it again next time.

## Equipment

Most of these games just need people, but for any that require a ball use a soft foam one (try your local Play Resource Centre). There are lots of great co-operative games you can play with an old parachute and these will be found in the Ideas Bank leaflet "Parachute Games"

**TOUCH:** A lot of co-operative games encourage close physical contact between players. For some this feels warm and friendly, but for others it can be quite oppressive, particularly in older or mixed-age groups. As a games leader, please be sensitive to everyone's needs.



# Name Games

Learning and remembering people's names is important to build caring, trust and respect in a group. These games may help:

## BALL NAMES

All in a circle. A throws the ball to B saying "From A (i.e. her name) to B". B catches it saying, "Thank you, A", then throws it to C, saying, "From B to C", and so on. Once it gets going substitute an imaginary ball, then different kinds, e.g. heavy medicine ball, sticky ball, raw egg, balloon. Bring in everyone in the circle.

## COLLECTING NAMES

All in a circle. A says her name. B says A's name then his own. C says A's and B's names then her own, and so on round the circle back to A who ends up reciting all the names round the circle. (If anyone makes a mistake, help or give clues).

## CLAPPING NAMES

All in a circle, practise clapping a rhythm, but with a gap in it (Clap, clap-clap, clap, rest). In turn round the circle call out your name in the gap. Next time round, call out the name of the person next to you.

Another variation: Call out your own name and then the name of anyone in the circle. It now becomes their turn and they have to do the same thing in the next gap.

## NAME TRAIN

All in a circle. Leader goes up to another player and asks, "Hallo, what's your name?". The other replies and the leader shouts it out three times in rhythm, accompanied by waving and cheering. That player holds the leader's waist and as a train they go to find someone else and repeat the procedure. When there are four in the train, split in two and carry on with two trains till everyone has joined up.

# Circle Games

## AARDVARK

All in a circle. Leader hands an object (any object, even an imaginary one) to the person on his right (B) and says, "This is an Aardvark" (it could be anything). B says, "A what?". A repeats, "An Aardvark". B then passes it to C on her right and says, "This is an Aardvark". C to B, "A what?"

Now, in this game, only the leader (A), who starts it off, can remember what the things are, so B must turn back to A and ask, "A what?". A replies, "An Aardvark", B now passes the message on to C, who can now turn to D on his right and pass it on saying, "This is an Aardvark". The Aardvark continues to be passed on round the circle, but each time, the question, "A what?", must be passed all the way back to A, and the answer, "An Aardvark", passed back to the last player.

After a bit of practice it should flow quickly and smoothly. Now start another object, perhaps a Wombat, going round the other way. The fun builds up as the two objects meet at the far side of the circle. Usually the game breaks down in fits of giggles as confusion reigns. It's a good laugh the first time, and it doesn't matter if the game stops there, but it can also be a game of concentration as you try to get both objects right round the circle.

## CIRCLE MIME

All in a circle. First person thinks of any object and imagines they are holding it in their hands. Mime to show what it is and others guess. Then pass it on to the next person, in whose hands it suddenly becomes something different. Try to guess and pass it on, right round the circle.

## LAP SITS

All in a circle, all turn right to face the back of the next person. All slowly move left (inwards) to make the circle as small as possible. Then all sit down, slowly and carefully and all at the same time, on the lap of the person behind. The aim is to get the whole circle sitting comfortably all the way round. Can be done with hundreds, or even thousands of people at large out-door events.

## ZOOM-EEEEK

All in a circle. Practise "Zoom" as the sound of a racing car and "Eeeek" as the screech of its brakes. First person says "Zoom", turning to left or right. This is the direction the imaginary car is travelling, so next player picks it up and turns the same way and so on round the circle: "Zoom..zoom..zoom..zoom.." etc. Now each person has the choice of either saying "Zoom" or "Eek". If they say "Eek" the car has screeched to a halt and immediately goes back the way it came, "Zoom..zoom..zoom" the other way round. Should be played fast and furiously.



# Pair Games

## MIRRORS

In pairs, start facing each other. One person leads, doing any kind of action and the other pretends to be the image in a mirror, following as closely as possible. Then change over. Practise till an onlooker can't tell who is the mirror.

## TRUST WALK

In pairs, one is blindfolded. The other leads them on a journey around the building or playground. Then try guiding them with instructions. Then swap over. As well as building responsibility and trust, this can help sensitise children to the needs of people with visual disabilities.

## Prui

Quite a demanding game, best for trusting groups. Best explained with a story (make the most of this as you introduce the game):

In the magical land of the Prui, the people are happy and friendly, but none of them can see. They wander around, bumping into each other, greeting and passing the time of day. The Prui, a magical creature, is also very sociable and friendly and is the only one in the land that can see, but it cannot make a sound. Everyone wants to find the Prui, because if you find it, you can yourself become part of the Prui and then you too will be able to see (but never again talk).

So, whenever the people of this land meet one another they **always** ask each other, "Are you the Prui?" Usually the other will say, "No, I'm not. Are you?" "No, not me", and they part in search of someone else.

But, being a friendly sociable creature, the Prui is always around and sooner or later you will meet it. You ask, "Are you the Prui?", and the Prui says ... **NOTHING AT ALL.**

So you know that you've found the authentic Prui. Now you can join hands with the Prui. Your eyes open as you become part of the Prui, but you must remain totally silent.

So now we all close our eyes and imagine we are the people of the magical world, wandering around and meeting and greeting. (Have a couple of volunteers to make sure no-one walks into the walls). When this is going well select someone (by a tap on the shoulder or other agreed sign) to be the Prui. Gradually as people meet the Prui, it grows into a long silent line. As the game ends, everyone is the Prui "and they all lived happily ever after".

## SHARKS AND ISLANDS

A number of gym mats (or large sheets of card or even circles of rope) scattered around as islands. All players swim in the "sea" till the leader calls, or the music stops. Then all must get on to an "island" as quick as they can. **No one is "out"**. The aim is to make sure everyone gets on safely.

Now remove one of the islands and repeat. As there are fewer islands it becomes more challenging to get everyone safely ashore. End up with an attempt to get all players safely on to a single island, which will involve a lot of co-operation and mutual support.

## CO-OPERATIVE MUSICAL CHAIRS

Similar to Sharks and Islands. Put out chairs as for conventional Musical Chairs and remove them one by one as play progresses. In this game no-one is out, but all players have to help each other get on to the chairs that are left.

## CHOCOLATE BISCUIT

Two lines facing each other, hands clasped with the person opposite. This is the conveyor belt of the biscuit machine. Two spare people as helpers at each end.

One person is helped on to the conveyor belt, lying flat, and is moved along by the conveyors till they come out the other end. They form another pair with the next person through as more people are fed in from the other end till everyone has had a go.

Cooked  
Biscuit-  
People out  
here



Uncooked  
Biscuit-  
People in  
here.

## CROSS OVER

Stand in a circle. On a signal everyone cross to the other side without touching anyone else. Then try it with eyes closed (make a noise to help others steer clear).



## BUILD A MACHINE

Each player decides on a simple repetitive action and a suitable noise to go with it. Combine in pairs, working in rhythm to make a simple machine. Then in fours and more till the whole group is one large complex machine. Alternatively start with one person and have others join on one by one.

## MAKE A STORY

Leader starts a story, then stops and another person takes over, and so on till the story is complete. The order can go round the circle, or each person can choose whom to pass it on to, so long as they haven't already had a go. This is one way - and quite a good way - to make collective stories for drama, puppet or video work.

## HUM/YELL

All crouch and huddle together. Start a low quiet hum. Gradually gets louder as group rises, then all leap in the air with an incredibly loud yell.

# Playing Co-operatively

In this leaflet we have tried to focus on games that are genuinely co-operative. But there are many more games that have a limited degree of competition, where players take it in turn to try and beat the team, compete against each other, or teams compete in a fun way. Many of these are included in the Great PLAY-TIMES Games Kit (see below). Here are some principles for controlling competition and increasing involvement and co-operation:

- \* Mix competitive games with truly co-operative activities.
- \* Avoid elimination games; any game where players who fail are "out" and have to sit and watch. These are the worst kind of games as they have only one winner for every fifty "losers", and most players spend most of the time sitting out getting bored. Many of these games can be played perfectly well without elimination, or players can have a different role to play if they are caught out.
- \* For team games, create teams just for the game, or a few games. Players can compete hard against each other while it lasts, but

## FINDER'S CLAP

Volunteer leaves the room. An object is hidden somewhere and the volunteer comes in. The group all start to clap. Clap quietly if the finder is far from the object, louder as they get close, to help them find it as quickly as possible.

## FARMYARD

Groups of four. Each group must choose one member to be a dog, one a cow, one a sheep and one a chicken. When they are ready say "Go" and the aim is for all the animals of the same kind to gather together without talking - animal noises and gestures only. To make it harder do it with eyes closed, locating your group by sound only.

This is a good way to arrange well-mixed groups for a following activity. Eg. with 40 children you will start with ten self-selected groups of four and end with four randomly mixed groups of ten.

are all on the same side really and may be in different teams for the next game. Sometimes they can even change teams in the middle of a game.

- \* Do not offer prizes. If children don't want to play the game for its own sake without the chance of a prize, the game isn't worth playing anyway.
- \* Keep your praise and recognition for good co-operative behaviour and helping others. You needn't bother to tell winners how clever they are, as this automatically gives the opposite message to everyone else.

# Books

- \* The Great PLAY-TIMES Games Kit (NPFA, 1983). A card index system with over 200 games, many of them co-operative. A useful basic tool for all gamesters.
- \* Heseltine, Peter: Games for All Children (Blackwell, 1988)
- \* Orlick, Terry: The Co-operative Sports and Games Book (Writers and Readers, 1979)
- \* Winners All - Co-operative Games for All Ages (Pax Christi, 1980)
- \* Masheder, Mildred: Let's Co-operate (Peace Education Project, 1986)

For more Play Ideas Bank leaflets go to:

[www.grcltd.org](http://www.grcltd.org)