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UNIVERSAL RULES FOR PLAYING GAMES

Teachers

1. Be excited about the games; your excitement will spread to the children.
2. Reinforce team spirit as well as individual effort.
3. Call it like you see it, you’re the referee.
4. Be consistent with both rules and discipline.
5. Avoid excluding a child as punishment unless other efforts fail.
6. Explain your decision if needed but don’t be afraid to be firm.
7. Allow a question and answer period after discussing the rules of a game.

Children

1. Listen to the directions or rules of a game before asking questions.
2. Treat everyone the same way you would like to be treated yourself.
3. Be aware of other people’s feelings.
4. Accept the ruling of the referee.
LAP GAME

Kindergarten and up

All the players stand in a circle facing in. The leader then says "Right" or "Left," and every player takes a ninety-degree turn in that direction, to end up facing the next one's back.

At the signal of "On your knees, please," everyone bends knees, making a lap, and sits on the lap of the player in back of him or her. If done properly, the circle will support itself. It might be a bit tough if your players are of varying heights, but falling down is fun, too.

Then the circle stands again, faces in the other direction, and sits this time on the other neighbor's lap.

Also, the entire circle of players could spread their arms and be airplanes each leaning way back on the next player. Be sure that all the players are close together for this game.

(The record, as reported by The New Games Book, is 1,468 cooperative players all in a circle!)

NONELIMINATION SIMON SAYS

Kindergarten and up

As in the traditional game of Simon Says, everyone follows the directions and actions of the leader, who is Simon, but only when he or she says "Simon Says." If these words are not spoken, the players do not follow.

In this new form of the game, two separate games go on at the same time in the play area. When one player is eliminated from a game, he or she joins the other one. This can go on forever and ever.

BACK TO BACK

Ages: 5-10 years

Benefits: Body awareness
Quick thinking and creative problem solving
The game is a good icebreaker or get-acquainted activity.

Directions: The teacher divides the children into pairs and each pair stands back to back. In this game, children (in pairs) must find a way to stand close together, with, for example one child's elbow touching the partner's elbow, and one child's knee touching the partner's knee. There are several ways the problem could be solved.

After children figure a way, the teacher says, "Back to Back." This is the signal to quickly find a new partner and stand back to back with him or her. The teacher gives another problem--such as, "Touch waist to waist and toe to toe." As soon as children solve the problem, the teacher says, "Back to Back"; children change, find another partner, and stand back to back ready to solve a third problem.
ISLANDS

Kindergarten and up

Needed: Frisbee, plate, or similar object

We start with a Frisbee or some other object (or more than one). Put the object on the ground. The players move around the play area. When the leader gives the signal, the players try to touch the Frisbee without touching anyone else. See how many players can touch the same Frisbee without touching the other players.

Variation

Wait a minute! Why should touching be forbidden? Let’s try it now with everybody touching each other. Ah! Now, that’s more like cooperative play!

The leader sets down a piece of cloth or newspaper, and all the players try to crowd onto it. That’s all there is to it. The smaller the cloth in relation to the number of players, the more difficult - and more fun - it is to do.

SMAUG’S JEWELS

First grade and up

Needed: Handkerchief

I first played this game when I took The New Games Training sponsored by The New Games Foundation of San Francisco, where I was inspired to continue along cooperative playful ways forever and ever.

The game comes from Tolkien’s fantasy The Hobbit, where Smaug, the dragon, was the protector of a collection of jewels. In our version one player is Smaug and kneels over a handkerchief representing the jewels.

The other players kneel in a circle around Smaug. The object of this game is for the other players to grab the jewels without being tagged by Smaug; if you are tagged you become frozen. The strategy varies; it is up to the group to work out a way to capture the jewels. The player who is successful in capturing the board becomes the next Smaug.

But isn’t freezing the tagged players a form of elimination? Not if played the following way:

Variation

Have two circles, with two Smaugs and two caches of jewels. When someone is frozen, he or she simply joins the other circle. In this way, the game can go on indefinitely, and no one is ever eliminated.
GUARD THE CHAIR

Indoor or Outdoor

Here is an exciting version of dodgeball with little chance of a player being hurt by a thrown ball. And it will indeed be a nimble player who can successfully guard the chair for any length of time, especially as the team concept develops among the players in the circle. Players should be old enough to handle and throw a ball.

Equipment

A chair and a volleyball (not inflated too hard)

Formation

Players standing in a circle, not too close together, with the chair in the center.

Action

"It" has the job of guarding the chair from being hit by the ball. He cannot use his hands but can use any other part of his body. Players in the circle may pass the ball to each other and whenever they choose, throw the ball at the chair. If the chair is hit, the player throwing the ball becomes "it" and has the privilege of guarding the chair.

15-20 players

LAST DETAIL

With most New Games, we don’t have to concern ourselves with the precise rules. We can adapt this detective game to different situations too, but it’s definitely one in which we have to be sticklers for detail.

We start by facing each other (one to one or team to team) and remaining still for two or three minutes. But we should not let the time pass idly; instead, we should be doing our best to observe and remember as much as we can about the person facing us.

We then turn our backs to each other and change six details about the way we look—details that can be seen without the need to touch or move anything. Once rearranged, we turn back to face each other and see whether we can spot all the changes in our partners.

That sneaky fellow in the photos has changed his appearance in six ways. Can you spot every last detail?
MIRROR, MIRROR

Skill: large-motor movement

Materials: none

Directions:

1. Divide the class into pairs.
2. One child in each pair is the leader, while the other child is the "mirror" and must do just what the leader does.
3. After several minutes, change roles.

Adaptations:

* Put on some music and let the children mimic each other's dances and motions.
* You can also play this game with the whole group. One person is selected to be "it" and stand in front of the room while the others try to mirror what "it" does.

KNOTS

Kindergarten and up

Here is an activity that really ties people together

At least five players stand in a small circle and place their right hands out in front of them, thumbs up. With the left hand, each grabs someone else's thumb, but not that of anyone next to him or her. The object of this activity is to untangle this knot by stepping over, crawling under, or turning around, anything is permitted except letting go. If the players really get into a dead-end situation, they can always apply "knot aid" - allowing one player to let go and untangle, after which they all join hands again. But don't let them give up too easily; most knots can be untangled with a little patience and plenty of togetherness.

HUMAN MACHINE COMPANY

Directions

1. Have players from into groups of eight or ten. Each group agrees on a single machine to portray, such as a washing machine, blender, helicopter, lawn mower -- anything with moving parts. The object of the activity is to give an impression of a machine and how all the parts work together.

2. One by one, each player pretends to be a machine part and joins the machine. For example, if everyone decides to make a care, then one chugs and shakes to become the engine, another bends over to become the trunk, another stretches arms to become a windshield, and yet another moves arms as windshield wipers.

3. After the machine has been completed, see how well the parts work together. Have each part add a sound; see what different sounds there are when the machine is running at top speed and then at a very slow speed.

4. After each group creates an impression of a specific machine, have the groups reassemble into a totally nonfunctional invention.
STEAL THE BACON

Skill: large-motor movement

Materials: * eraser, stick, or other small objects

Directions:
1. Divide the class into two teams and have them stand behind two lines about 40 feet apart.
2. Have the children number off on each team.
3. Place the "bacon" (eraser or stick) between the two teams, then call out a number. The two children with that number try to "steal the bacon" and run with it back to their line without being tagged by the other player. The child who successfully does this gets a point for their team, but if they are tagged in the process, the other player earns a point for his or her team.
4. The team with more points after all the numbers are called wins the game.

SCAVENGER HUNT

Formation

Divide the group into teams. The number of teams and their size depends upon the number playing and the amount of space. Teams are dispersed so that each one is distinct and approximately equidistant from the leader.

Action

Each team sends one player to the leader. The leader names an item of clothing, something that a person might be carrying or have in a pocket or purse, or some other article that might be somewhere in the room (such as a shoelace, a ring, a shirt, a comb, a book, a nickel). As soon as the players know what item they are to get, they simultaneously race back to their teams and ask for the article. The player reporting to the leader cannot offer an item of her own if she has it. She and her teammates can get the item anywhere. They are not limited to possessions of members of their team.

Once the article is produced or found by any member of the team, the player who had gone out originally takes it and runs back to the leader. The first person back to the leader with the article scores a point for her team.
ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS

1. Divide the group into two teams. Designate a free zone at each end of the playground.

2. Gather the two teams in the center of the field and explain the rules. Players must remember three symbols -- a fist is Rock, a flat hand is Paper, two fingers (held open to resemble the blades) are Scissors. Depending on the combination, one will be the winner. Paper covers Rock, Rock breaks Scissors, and Scissors cut Paper. For example, if one team has Rock and the other has Paper, Paper wins.

3. Each team forms a huddle in its free zone and agrees upon a symbol. This is chancy because nobody knows what the other team will pick. Teams meet back in the center with symbols in mind.

4. Both teams chant together, "Rock, Paper, Scissors..." and then all players of each team show their symbol. In a split second, teams decide who's the winner and who's the loser. Losers run back to their free zone with the winners in pursuit. Those tagged by the winners become members of their team. If both teams show the same symbol, teams rehuddle and play again.

5. Players play for a predetermined number of rounds. The team with the most players is the winner.

CRANES AND CROWS

Cognitive Awareness: distinguishing a and o sounds

Equipment: none

Procedure: This game is best played on a basketball court because of its boundaries. The class is divided into two groups: the Cranes and the Crows.

The Cranes and the Crows line up facing each other about ten feet apart along the midcourt line. A Leader then calls out either "Cranes" or "Crows." If the Leader calls "Crows," then the Crows will turn and run to the goal line behind them. The Cranes will attempt to tag as many of the Crows as they can before they reach the goal line. Any Crow who is tagged becomes a member of the Cranes group and lines up on their line. The game continues as both groups reassemble at the center court area. When the leader calls "Cranes" the Cranes have to run to the goal line behind them. If any of the Cranes are tagged by the Crows, they become members of the Crows group. This game aids in building your students' listening skills, as they have to distinguish the different letter sounds.
THE BIG WIND BLOWS (Winds-A-Blowing)

Indoor

Similar to How Do You Like Your Neighbor? this game affords opportunities for creative thinking and ensures considerable movement through changing of seats. The resulting scramble makes the game a good icebreaker. Mixed-age groups from 7 up can play.

Equipment

Individual chairs without arms. One less chair than players.

Formation

All players except the leader, who has no chair, sit in a large circle--the more space the better.

Action

The leader says, "The big wind blows all those who...," adding an action that some or all in the group may have done or are doing now, for example: brushed their teeth lasts night, dressed this morning, are wearing eyeglasses, aren't wearing socks. All players whom the statement fits rise and find another seat. In the scramble, the leader finds a chair. The player left without a chair becomes the next leader.

Note

Persons sitting next to empty chairs should, to the extent possible, reach out and hold the chairs firm as players scramble to find seats. 15-40 players

FOUR CORNERS

Skill: socialization

Materials: * paper, markers, tape

Directions: 1. Write numerals from 1 through 4 on four sheets of paper. Tape a different numerals in each corner.

2. Choose one person to be "it" and hide his or her eyes. "It" counts slowly to ten as the other children tiptoe to a corner. "It" says "freeze" and calls out the number of one corner. The children who are in that corner are out of the game and must sit in the middle of the room in the "stew pot."

3. "It" begins counting to ten again as the rest of the children tiptoe to a new corner. The game continues until there is one child left who then becomes "it."
The object of the game is to throw the ball and hit someone to get him/her out of the game, avoid being hit by the ball, and be the last person in the game (winner).

A basic game of DODGE BALL begins by placing everyone except for two throwers inside a designated playing area. These children begin to throw the ball and try to hit other children inside the designated area below the waist. If a player inside the area is hit by the ball, then he/she must move out of the area until the last person is left. He/she is then the winner.

Variations

- Players who catch the ball without dropping it remain in the circle.
- Instead of a designated circle, players line up against a wall.
- Players have to hop on one foot, and throwers must roll the ball.

ELBOW TAG

Objective: To provide opportunities for positive attention, physical activity and intimate proximity.

Number of Players: 16 to 40

Place: Gym or field

Equipment: None

Formation

Paired players standing side-by-side with arms bent, hands on hips and elbows hooked together. Pairs are randomly scattered in the playing area. Two players are free, one is the chaser (It), the other the pursued.

Description

A continuous action tag game.

Action

Simple tag is played between the two free players. If the It makes a tag, the roles are immediately reversed. To avoid being tagged, the chased player may run and dodge between the pairs or hook onto the free elbow of any player. At this point, the chased player and the player she hooks onto is safe, but the other half of the pair must now run away from the It or be tagged.

Teacher’s Guide

Tag is as old as human society. It is a universal form of play found to be popular in all cultures. This is a particularly rich version of tag. Elbow tag is one of my personal favorites because of its many interesting interactions and periods of intense enjoyment.
1. Define two lines on either end of the playground about 15 or 20 yards apart. The lines are the "shores" and the "ocean" is the area in between.

2. One person is selected to be the Octopus. The Octopus wanders around the ocean while the rest of the layers are swimmers standing on the shore behind one of the goal lines. The object of the game is for the swimmers to cross to the other shore without getting caught by the Octopus.

BLOB

If you’re addicted to late-night TV monster movies, here’s a sure way to kick the habit and break out into the light of day. We must warn you, however, that you will not avoid being swallowed up by--the Blob.

The Blob begins innocently enough as a mere individual playing a game of tag. As soon as she catches someone, she joins hands with him. Now he’s part of the Blob, too, and they both set out, hand-in-hand, in search of victims. Everyone the Blob catches (only the outside hand on either end of the Blob can snatch a player) joining hands with it and becomes part of the lengthening protoplasmic chain. And thus the insidious Blob keeps growing.

Unlike your run-of-the-mill, made scientist-created Blobs, this one is not content merely to ooze along, seeking its prey. It gallops around the field, cornering stray runners and forcing them to join up. (You’ll have to agree on boundaries for this game; some people will go to any lengths to avoid meeting an untimely end at the hands of the primordial slime.)

SNAKE IN THE GRASS

All ages

This game works just as well on a carpeted floor as on the grass.

Define a limited area, outside of which the runners cannot go. One player is "it" and crawls around hissing like a snake, trying to touch the others running around in the "snake pit" - the playing area. When a player is tagged by the snake, that player becomes a snake as well and must try to tag the others. Eventually everyone is crawling and hissing.

Variation

Have half the players start off as snakes and the other half as people. Every time a player is touched by a snake, they switch positions. Thus, the game can go on for a very long time - maybe forever.

In this variation, it is not necessary to choose players to be snakes. Ask for volunteers; it usually works out to be fairly even.