

WHY ACTIVE GAMES?

As children and young adults, we revel in play - games such as Tag and Hide & Seek go back generations. God has created us with physical bodies that thrive with exercise and that same exercise clears the mind as well. Children need to physically expend energy periodically during the learning process.

Games are vehicles where children develop socially, learn to relate to each other, and how to compete and/or work together. In them are lessons in individual strengths and weaknesses, coping with success or failure. Many games act as abstractions of reality, where the principles of life are acted out in "play" situations.

Games are also an excellent way to build cohesion in a group of people as they learn to trust and work together. They break the ice and help people new to a group become better acquainted, and accepted. Teen groups enjoy new games. Adults, once they relax, find them quite refreshing and invigorating as well.

All this Theory aside, here are some guidelines for those who would lead children in games (or grown up "children" willing to revert to child-like play for a time.)

BASIC GUIDELINES

Start with the group as it is, considering the age range, clothing, available play area, and their psychological readiness to interact with each other and go on from there. Aim for games where everyone is involved. Standing around idle is opportunity for shoving, etc. And nobody likes to be "eliminated" from play for a long period of time and have to just stand around watching.

Be very open and welcoming to everyone, even a bit silly, modeling the style of play you want to encourage. Assure them with words and gestures that each game will be fun. Dress up the games with names promising fun, add appropriate "pretend" elements, and develop the group's ability to play together.

Whatever the situation begin with simple games, easily explained, with simple equipment that provide easy access and that have few rules, that will end quickly so transition can be made to new games. Make room for new arrivals or latecomers and quickly incorporate them into play. Be ready to shift games as group size changes.

Game playing is best started by having the group initially form a circle – all joining hands – while the leader explains the game. You can play games in this formation, count off to create teams, or walk around the circle, while everyone has their eyes closed, touching backs to designate secret players or create "It" Make sure everybody can hear you. Begin with a general description of the game including its imagery, object and if possible a familiar game category. Try to give them choices as to who plays what. Practice any special moves or phrases ahead of time.

Have a balance of strenuous and lower activity games. Let players stretch their bodies and feelings slowly at first. Try to conclude with an appropriate "wind-down" game as well. Be sensitive to when the players are getting tired and may need a less strenuous game, or even to stop playing; or when they are becoming bored and need something new or more "interesting".

Be very safety conscious, and give clear safety instructions to the children. Make it clear that the objective is a good time for everyone. Stress the use of strategy and teamwork. Avoid contact games- some will get rough, tempers get shorter as time goes by, and someone always gets hurt.

Work towards building trusting relationships between players. Balance individual expression with group awareness and community sharing. Play down aggressive competition, stress co-operation.

As the Referee-leader, **don't take yourself too seriously.** Keep your sense of humor at all times, just one outburst of anger will turn everybody off. Encourage and keep alive the make-believe imagery of the games. Play with them as much as practical and possible. Ideal situations are those where the children take over the leadership of the play.

Try to Keep teams evenly matched - Some kids will always try to stay together, some will need so "nudging" to get them involved, hopefully most will show some enthusiasm once you get started. Expect some resistance, be enthusiastic! Boys and girls will tend to separate from each other. Counting off usually produces fair mixes.

Have a signal for "everyone to be quiet and pay attention" such as everyone raising the "one way" sign. Don't tolerate rowdiness or discipline problems - persistent troublemakers should be told to return to their class room.

Be prepared to modify the game to maintain or create a balance in the level of challenge. Keep the game from being too goal-oriented. Give everyone equal opportunity to play different roles, and don't allow certain people to dominate. Increasing or decreasing challenge, simplifying or complicating moves, and changing boundaries may be necessary to adjust the speed of the game, its dimensions and the ease of achieving it's object. You want everyone to have as equal an opportunity to enjoy participation in the game.

Be flexible - if a game isn't working, adapt the game or do something else. If a game is working well, stick with it. A variety of several games they know well and enjoy are better than trying new games every single day. Older kids especially seem to prefer the same game everyday. Relay races always work well, especially if made slightly complicated, and are good to fall back on when other games aren't working. With older players, Steal the Bacon usually works. With larger groups, break in multiple teams.

Watch your time!

There are plenty of Games on Eldrbarry's Group Games Site:
<http://www.eldrbarry.net/vbs/games.htm>

BASIC GROUP GAMES EQUIPMENT:

- Assorted soft balls (Nerf, Soft rubber, etc)
- Flags: Several Bright colored pieces of fabric. (knot one corner)
- Several lengths of White Clothes line for marking lines and circles
- White plastic Milk jugs (All sorts of uses)
- Several Frisbees
- A Whistle (To get attention)
- Megaphone (Cardboard cone) (to save your voice)