

Games that Support Children's Emotional and Social Development

Remember, games offer wonderful opportunities to acknowledge children in a positive way. Among other positives, they acknowledge endeavour and effort, good sportmanship and collaborative behaviour. But as teachers we ought to watch too for creative strategies and plays and also acknowledge these. Some teachers have simple tangible rewards, which are great and to be encouraged, but by simply telling a child he or she is working or contributing well we provide an excellent, germane and affirming reward. The more these can be input into a session the better the outcomes for children. We might even dismiss children with individual compliments and EVERY child ought to get one.

The 'Laughing' Game

The group forms a single standing circle, facing inwards. Depending on numbers a small group of 4 to 6) students is selected as 'laughers'. Their task is to move around the inside of the circle making students in the outer rim smile, or laugh. Only the 'laughers' may talk (or sing or whisper, etc). They may move as close as they like to a prospective 'victim' but must not make physical contact. 'Put-downs' and inappropriate language are discouraged but almost anything else goes. Students in the outer rim must make eye contact and cannot physically hold their mouths or faces. When a 'laugher' successfully makes a student smile or laugh that student sits. The last students standing become 'laughers' in the next round

Honey, do you love me?

Consider a rather challenging variation on this 'laughing' theme. In this game the child or boys inside the circle ask the others one fixed question: 'Honey, do you love me?' They can act this one out or simply try to keep a 'poker' face. Children in the circle circumference must answer 'Honey, I still love you, but I just can't smile!' without the glimmer of a smile. If they succeed in responding without cracking a smile they swap places with the child who asked the question. I would introduce this game only after the Laughing Game had been played successfully a number of times. Children often find a game like this too confronting to be comfortable. Of course that's not a reason to withhold it but choosing your moment is critical!

The 'Trust' Tunnel

Students pair off with partners of roughly similar height and form a double line of facing pairs. Distance between the two lines is established by students holding both arms in front and making fingertip to fingertip contact with their partner.

Keeping their arms extended thus - fingertip to fingertip, students will create a kind of 'Mexican Wave' as each takes turns to run the 'gauntlet' through the 'tunnel' created between the facing lines. Each 'run' is facilitated by a leader who calls 'ready', making sure students in the double line are making fingertip contact. On the next call 'RUN HARD!' the student 'runs hard' and unhesitatingly through the line, as those in the line drop their arms a 'millisecond' before the running student reaches them. Those who successfully 'run hard' are rewarded by a feeling of immense satisfaction as they complete the run. The 'trust' involved is the key to this 'gratification'!

Negotiating Obstacles

This is effectively another trust game. Children pair off. You can organise this randomly but, for the first play it might be politic to let friends go with friends. Static obstacles (chairs, adults) are randomly placed across the working space.

Children pair off at either or both 'long' ends of the room. One closes his or her eyes and is thus 'blind' or visually impaired. The task of the other child is to guide him or her verbally through the obstacles as he or she accompanies him or her for the length of the room. If the visually impaired child hits an obstacle they must start again. Once the room has been negotiated children swap roles and traverse the length of the room returning to the original starting place.

Children enjoy this game, of which collaboration and the empathy which ought to grow from it are obvious strengths. Next time the game is played children can be paired off randomly.

I've Been To Harlem

'Harlem' is described in 'UpBeat', still an excellent music program for primary schools in Australia. In pairs, students form a double circle, with one partner in the outer circle facing in and the other in the inner circle facing out to their partner. On commencement of the song the outside circle travels clockwise and the inner circle anticlockwise. On the word 'over' students turn to face students in the opposite circle and hold hands. They swing these together side by side until the words 'turn the glasses over' when they swing through and turn through, back to back and face each other again. Letting go they travel in their own circle again in the previous direction.

As the song reaches its conclusion, 'or you'll lose your friend in the' students wait for either 'ocean' to be called in which case they sit promptly - last one down is out OR something else is called which although it might begin like 'ocean' is incorrect - eg 'Oh she'll be right!' Anyone who sits down or begins to sit down is out. The winner is the last student standing. An additional rule in groups where students are unwilling to hold hands can be that anyone who hasn't taken a partner's hands by the count of 'three' is out!

'Wink Murder'

Students sit in a circle in a clear space on the floor. One is selected to be 'detective' and is directed to wait outside the room while a 'murderer' is selected from the remaining circle of students. The 'murderer' may be selected 'secretly' by asking members of the circle to close their eyes and lower their heads. In this case the leader walks around the inside of the circle and taps one student on the shoulder. 'If I tapped your shoulder you are the murderer.' Otherwise the 'murderer' may be selected as the group watches. The object of the game is for the 'murderer' to 'wink-murder' fellow students by winking at them, without the 'detective' realising who is doing this. Thus the detective is returned to the room and has three chances to guess who the 'wink-murderer' is. If he/she guesses correctly he/she takes another turn. Otherwise the murderer becomes the detective and a new wink-murderer is selected. A variation on this is to select two detectives and two murderers

The 'Coin' Game

Students sit in a circle on the floor. One student is selected to lie on his/her back, eyes securely closed (caps over eyes is one way to ensure this) in the centre of the circle. He/she places a coin on his/her chest. He/she has an imaginary 'gun' in each hand, finger pointed, with a total of six shots, identified as a loudly spoken 'bang!' The object of the game is for another student to enter the circle at any point and quietly approach the student in the centre to snatch the coin before he/she is 'shot'. The game encourages collaborative behaviour to ensure silence.

Alternative 'Coin' Game.

Students again seated on the floor, facing into centre. A child, delegated to be the 'detective', hides his or her eyes in an appropriate place in or outside the room. The object of the game is to pass the coin (a fifty cent piece is ideal) from child to boy, behind their backs without the 'detective' guessing who has it. He or she has three guesses.

Ukalele - stick circle

While any rhythmical chant can accompany this game it is made more authentic by singing 'Ukalele' as it is played. Students kneel or sit cross-legged on the floor. A newspaper roll is placed in front of each student. The leader calls the 'beat', introducing it by counting in '1,.. 2,... 3,... 4,...' at which point students simultaneously pick up their stick, raise it in an exaggerated arc, carrying it across their own bodies to place it in front of the person on their right. In this way everybody gets a new stick to replace their own. The game continues as each stick moves to a new person on the right, on every 'beat' of the sung chant (Ukalele, or another appropriate chant). Have the group practise this first until they can achieve synchronised passage of the sticks around the circle without 'log-jams' of sticks piling up in front of individuals.

When the chant stops students without a stick raise one hand. Other students with more than one stick gently and sensibly roll their excess sticks across the floor SAFELY to those without. Now the group is ready to play the game. This entails the addition of the call 'Change' on which direction students will pass the sticks in the

opposite direction. The game may be made increasingly difficult by interjecting 'Change' more frequently into the play.

Exercise Balls

These ideas are a consequence of colleague Wes Campbell's inventive genius. Wes arrived one afternoon at his school's Boys' Business sessions with a large 60cm 'medicine' or gym ball. This and the games we were able to play, proved such a big hit that we've introduced these to other Boys' Business groups. Local sports stores have been selling the balls at a greatly reduced price. A word of warning - it seems that some people have been over-inflating the balls and despite assurances they are unbreakable... they have... broken, that is! Nevertheless they are great vehicles for exciting cooperative and creative play. Consider these great participant games for middle years children:

Dodge Ball. The children sit in the usual circle on the floor. At first one child (later when the children becomes more experienced and safety is assured a second and even third child can be added) stands in the circle. He must 'dodge' the ball as the others push it and roll it across the circle. Some simple constraints apply - to keep the ball safely on the floor and not bouncing - first that the ball is pushed and not thrown, second that 'bottoms' must stay firmly glued to the floor. If either constraint is ignored and the ball touches the boy/s in the circle he stays in. Whoever succeeds in tagging the child in the centre with the rolling ball takes his place.

Ghost Ball. This game was introduced to me by boys at Karama Primary School: Two teams of equal numbers of children line up on either side of an imaginary or real line across the central width of the space.

The rules are simple: The task of each team is to bowl or toss the large ball to a member of the other team. If he fumbles the catch he takes his place on the sideline (temporarily) (I must stress here that this is a really critical opportunity as always to encourage good sportsmanship by acclaiming children who 'go out' with good grace. Arguments with the umpire are 'no-go' in our activities. Whenever a team member catches a ball on the full - without fumbling - a team member sitting out may be returned to the game. The game continues until children begin to lose interest! It is not a competition but rather another cooperative exercise.

Zip Zap Boing with a ball. You may find that this game is made easier when the actions in it are accompanied by the passage of a ball. Check it out by clicking [here](#)

Indians and Tepees

This old game has many variations. There is a small element of danger when children are asked to move fast so stipulate that running is out - fast walking is the rule. Immediately remove anyone from the game who runs.

Children find a partner and form a double circle, one standing outside, feet apart, and the other sitting inside, cross-legged. Both face circle centre. If you, or a child leader calls 'Indians' the children, crosslegged in the inner circle, must crawl quickly between the legs of their 'tepee' and walk quickly clock-wise around the circle, back between the legs of their own 'tepee' and sit crosslegged facing circle centre again. The last 'Indian' and his tepee are 'out' and must leave the circle. If the teacher calls 'tepee' the tepees fast-walk around the circle, clockwise and back behind their 'Indian'. The same rules apply. The 'winners' are the last pair left. But don't forget, in 'Boys' Business' boys who 'lose' with good grace are winners also and must be acknowledged as such.

Mal, Mal, Mal

This is, in a sense, a variation on the previous game. Ideally the PNG chant 'Mal, Mal, Mal' should accompany the game but other simple chants will suffice. Students beat the rhythm of the words of the selected chant with the paper roll on the floor in front of them. On the final syllable of the chant each student passes the roll to the person on their right. The challenge in this musical game lies in students keeping paper roll exchanges in time with the increased and decreased tempo of the chant.

Sumo Students move about the cleared classroom space to music. When the music stops the leader counts backwards from '5' as each student seeks a partner for the activity. On reaching the count of 'ONE!' each student faces his/her partner in a crouching 'sumo' position. This entails squatting on the balls of their feet with the toes of one foot in line with the other. The aim of the activity is for one student to catch the other off balance. Students may gently bounce with feet together. Whichever student first touches the floor with anything but the 'balls' of their feet is out.

Same - Different Use the double line strategies for the 'Trust Tunnel' above to set up two equidistant lines for this game. The children in one of the lines are labelled 'Same', and the children in the other 'Different'. Standing opposite each other in their respective lines children wait for the caller to call

'Ready, set, UP!' On the call 'UP!' both children must raise either (but only one) pointing arm. If both raise an arm in line with that raised by the other this is 'Same'. This means the child in the 'Same' line wins and the other steps backwards out of his line. If both raise an arm diagonally opposite to the other this is 'Different'. This means the child in the 'Different' line wins and the other must step backwards out of his line. Now the children who remain in both lines pair off ready for a repeat 'Ready, set, UP!' OF course it is probable that lines will now be uneven. In this event the children who are left over wait for a possible round on the next input. The game finishes when only one line has children left in it.

Heads Down, Heads Up. Students form a standing circle similar to that for the 'Laughing Game'. The leader directs the game by continuously calling 'Heads down (pause) heads up!' Each time students raise their heads they must try to catch the eyes of one new person in the circle. IF THEY MAKE EYE CONTACT with that person they sit down. The winner can be either the last person standing or the last person sitting! Honesty is an important characteristic of this activity

Dead Dog. 'Dead Dog' is a 'Freeze game' with a difference! Students begin by finding a space on the floor and lying down. The leader moves about among the 'Dead Dogs' Whenever they are out of sight of the leader students are encouraged to risk moving to another freeze position. The leader attempts to catch them moving. Adolescent children we work with love this simple activity.

Point. Students find a partner and pair off facing each other, side by side with other pairs, to form a double line. One line is now 'Line A' and the other 'Line B'. Both arms hang at each student's side, with the forefinger of each hand pointing. The game requires each student to keep his/her own personal score. On the call 'point' students simultaneously raise either left or right hand to 'point at' their partner. If both partners point with the opposite hand (ie left to right, or right to left, the partner in 'Line A' wins, and gains one point. If both partners point with the same hand (ie both left or both right) the partner in 'Line B' wins that round. The first partner to accrue 20 points wins.

Machines Children are invited to move around the room to music. (How you set this up is entirely over to you and the children. We usually suggest they move as the music tells them). When the music stops they must freeze. Teacher then calls a number from 2 to 7 or 8. The first group formed comprising that number, and seated on the floor, wins. Now instruct the groups to prepare a 'machine' in 30 (extended!) seconds. The more ridiculous the 'machine' the better. For example on suggestion was for a machine that peeled bananas and fed them to lines of elephants. Obviously this needs to maintain a G Certificate feel but ideas that appeal to children need to be encouraged. One suggestion by children was for a giant blender that blended nasty green things.

Letters, Numbers and Words This game can be started like the previous game, with group sizes a maximum of say 4. The first time the music stops call 'Two'. Ask each pair to devise a letter or number either standing or lying down. "O" is a good first letter/number as it is easy to construct in pairs. Play more music and try more pairs and letters/numbers/. When the music stops next time call 'Three' or 'Four'

and have the groups formed create a two, three or more-lettered 'word'. Homophones are particularly effective. Try 'To' which could be interpreted as '2', 'to', 'two', or 'too'.

Zip, Zap, Boing

Students form a circle. The game comprises three physical ways of communicating with others in the circle. To communicate with somebody elsewhere in the circle a 'zap' is used. The physical 'zap' must be an exaggerated 'shooting' action of the arm accompanied by a strong vocalised 'ZAP!' The third and final communication is always in response to a zap and only three in a row are allowed. This is a vocalised 'boing' accompanied by 'whole body trampoline type reaction. In other words a person who has been zapped responds with a 'BOING!' by extending both arms and throwing their torso forward to 'return' the 'zap'.

To communicate with the person on the immediate left or right a 'zip' is used. This is simply a quick 'safe' touch with the back of an open hand accompanied by a strong vocalised 'ZIP!' Once neighbouring students begin to go out, the new 'neighbours' shift to the next standing student on either side. If students use an incorrect command, exceed the three zaps allowed in sequence, are not strong enough in their communication they are 'out' and must sit down at their location in the circle. (We encourage 'losers' who sit with good grace to consider themselves 'winners'). The last two people standing are the winners.

Music Box

Individual students find their own space on the open floor. Choosing a music focus the leader calls a question. The first student to raise his/her hand and give the correct response may move one step in any direction. The aim of this movement is to tag the nearest person. Anyone tagged is out and must sit out. If the response is incorrect the person must move away from the nearest person. The last person standing is the winner. An example of question and response is in a line of words in the lyrics of songs. 'Which song do these words come from?'

'Freeze Frame' Samurai

I play slow and dramatic chords on the piano, each intended to introduce the next 'frame'. Children can only move on each new chord and must freeze between chords. The game has no winners or losers; it simply requires children to stage a scene from a samurai movie in freeze frames. To give the game credence get pairs of children who prove creative in playing the game to demonstrate their scene to the others who sit to watch the pair perform.

Squirt

"Squirt" involves some lateral thinking and is consequently quite challenging, but a lot of fun. The class stands in an inward facing circle. The person who starts eyeballs another across the circle, names him or her, points a finger and calls "squirt" as he or she fires an imaginary water pistol. What follows is critical to the success of the game: The nominated person ducks so that the students on either side are free to face off and "squirt" each other, calling "squirt" loudly. Whoever wins stays standing, the loser sits (with good grace!!). NOW the person originally squirted stands again and continues the game in the same vein. The primary "squirters" can not squirt their immediate neighbour. The game becomes more complex as more students go out and spaces appear around the circle.

Taxi

Two students are chosen to be "taxis". Their ultimate task is to get the most fares. The winner is the taxi with the largest group of children in his corner of the room. The process of the game is easy. The two taxis solicit fares by chanting "I'm a taxi, I'm a taxi, do you want a ride, toot?" and the student selected must "get in the taxi" behind the "driver". Then the taxi hurries to the next child and repeats the chant, adding a second "toot" for the second fare. He repeats the chant one more time with an additional "toot" (ie 3 toots for the 3rd fare) and with three on board he has a full load. Now he ushers the three "fares" to his corner of the room and tells them, "please get out". The fares stay in the corner while he pursues three more fares repeating the chant verbatim. If at any stage he gets the chant wrong he must start again with the first of his new fares.