

June 2004: Cooperation versus Competition

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Publisher's Pen: Cooperation versus Competition

HUG OF WAR:

I will not play at tug o'war,
I'd rather play at hug o'war,
Where everyone hugs,
Instead of tugs,
Where everyone giggles
And rolls on the rug,
Where everyone kisses,
And everyone grins,
And everyone cuddles,
And everyone wins.

Shel Silverstein

I used to think that competitive games simply fostered violence, so I used every opportunity to play cooperative games in my classroom. However, I came to realize that it is not the game itself that creates violence, but rather the character of the coaches, players and spectators. A competitive game helps us to improve our skills, but taking competition too seriously can put us out of balance and stifle enthusiasm.

I now believe that both cooperative and competitive games have value. However, within the competitive game structure, children must learn to play cooperatively, in order for it to be beneficial. The skills involved do not come automatically, and as parents, coaches and teachers, we must be the conduit for children to learn valuable lessons that they will carry throughout their lives. We must teach them self control skills, fair play, respect for others, learning from loss, and strategies for improvement.

A good way to start children down that path is to use cooperative games to build those skills, and to help keep their perspective on winning and losing in balance. Cooperative games take the pressure off, provide just as much excitement and challenge as competitive games, and can be a lot of fun. And fun, as we know, is good medicine.

Adding cooperative games to our lives adds a new dimension to our inner selves, and promotes growth. A lot of what I learned about cooperative play came from observing children. Toddlers instinctively know how to play cooperatively. My granddaughter asked me for extra sand toys so that when we go to the beach or the park each week, she can invite other children to play with her. Now it's up to me to continue that tradition as she enters the stage of life where competitive games are the norm.

May we be in tune when our children choose to play games with other children, and use the opportunity to teach them the life skills they will need as they grow and evolve.

Smiles,

Elaine

Empowering Parents and Teachers:

Cooperative games involve everyone, and everyone wins. They aren't sappy or "Pollyanna," as one might initially think. Cooperative games can be challenging and competitive, as the group competes against its own previous best effort. Here are some cooperative games that can be adapted to any age group.

Roll Call Game:

One fifth-grade classroom played this simple game each morning before starting lessons. It creates a fun and enthusiastic atmosphere in starting the day, and can be adapted to any grade level:

Students learn the order of the names called for attendance.

Each day, they practice saying their names in order as clearly and quickly as they can.

The teacher keeps track of the order of the names being called, and also keeps time.

Once students are proficient at calling their names in order, and have achieved their best time, the game can be made more interesting by having students rotate into the position of teacher. The class can decide whether or not the student in the teacher position calls his/her name or remains silent to make the game more challenging.

Moonball:

This game is taken from Project Adventure's initiation games and trust activities. It requires only 1 or 2 beach balls, any size group, simple skills, and is easy to understand. It is popular with all ages:

Scatter the group.

Hit the ball upward as many times as possible before it falls to the ground.

A player cannot hit the ball twice in a row.

Count one point for each hit.

Watch the fun and excitement as each new world record is made.

(Do not use basketballs, volleyballs or soccer for this game).

Turtle Tag:

This is a tag game where everyone must help those who are tagged and down. Foam pipe insulators work well as items to use to tag players, and are inexpensive. Depending on the size of the group, distribute one or several pipe insulators.

Players run around at the sound of the whistle (use two short sounds to start play).

As players get tagged with the pipe insulator, they must lay down or sit down, but hold up both hands.

Players running past the ones who are tagged can tap one hand, and the tagged player puts that hand down, while still holding up the other hand.

Another player must tap the other hand, and then the tagged player can get up and get back in the game.

To end the session, use one long sound of the whistle.

Nonelimination Musical Chairs:

This is taken from Art Kamiya's book, *Elementary Teacher's Handbook of Indoor and Outdoor Games*. It is a new twist on an old game.

Place chairs in a row.

Play music while students walk around the chairs.

When the music stops, everyone must sit down.

Before starting the music again, remove one chair.

When the music stops, students must cooperate and share the available chairs to accommodate all the members of the class. As each chair is removed, players must either sit on one another's laps or share chairs.

Further Reading:

Kamiya, Art. Elementary Teacher's Handbook of Indoor and Outdoor Games. Parker Publishing, West Nyack, New York 1985.

Orlick, Terry. The Second Cooperative Sports & Games Book. Pantheon Books, New York, NY. 1982, 1996.

Rohnke, Karl. Silver Bullets: A Guide to Initiative Problems, Adventure Games and Trust Activities. Kendall Hunt Publishing Co., Dubuque, Iowa. 1984, 1994.

Web Resources:

<http://www.amazon.com/>

<http://www.cooperativegames.com/>

<http://www.freechild.org/Firestarter/games.article.htm>

Empowering K.I.D.S. (Kids In Daily Situations):

Play some truly zany cooperative games guaranteed to make you giggle.

People of the Mountain:

This game is similar to King of the Mountain. But, in the old game, one person got to be the king of the mountain by having to push everyone else away.

In the newer version, everyone tries to see how many people they can gather on the mountain together. One person gets on top and holds onto another, who holds onto another.

Try to get as many people as possible before everyone falls down.

Sardines:

This is a funny new version of hide and seek.

The person who is IT is the one who hides.

Everyone else counts to 100 and then goes to look for IT.

Whoever finds the IT person, must join him/her by sharing the hiding space.

Keep going until everyone had found everyone.

This game works best in places where there are lots of nooks and crannies. It then becomes fun to jam everyone into one hiding place.

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