



Communities of Care Games & Activities

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Introduction

The creation of something new is not accomplished by the intellect, but from the play instinct acting from inner necessity...the creative mind plays with the object it loves.

– Carl Jung

Why Play?

Play has a magical quality. Play helps people connect to each other and to the joy that lies inside them. Play is also the way people of all ages discover, explore and engage with the people and the world around them. Playing games is not just child's play—it's a way to help students of every age and adults prepare for learning and teaching.

- Playing games improves our mental and physical health¹;
- Play builds resilience²
- Creating connections with others increases our neural plasticity³;
- Laughter increases learning;⁴
- Play can trigger the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals—relieving stress and pain.⁵
- Playing games with each other increases a sense of connectedness, the greatest protective factor for a wide range of adverse behaviors in youth.⁶
- For more research and resources on the power of play [visit here](#).

In his research⁷ with mammals, Jaak Panskepp discovered that play sets the stage for virtually all learning – vestibular system integration, amygdala regulation, increased neuroplasticity and BDNF (brain derived neurotrophic factor), etc. From an evolutionary standpoint, play is not an immediate requirement for survival, but it allows for greater levels of complexity, collaboration, creativity and problem solving to arise.

The take-home message from all this research is that we need more play not less, especially with the increasing pressure to focus on academics.

¹ "Adult playfulness, subjective well-being, physical well-being, and the." 31 Mar. 2013, <https://www.europeanjournalofhumour.org/index.php/ejhr/article/view/Rene%20Proyer>. Accessed 9 Nov. 2021.

² "How Play Helps Us Develop Resilience | PlayCore." 19 June. 2019, <https://www.playcore.com/news/how-play-helps-us-develop-resilience>. Accessed 9 Nov. 2021.

³ "The Neuroscience of Human Relationships: Attachment and the" 21 Oct. 2014, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03057240.2014.971483>. Accessed 3 Aug. 2019.

⁴ "Laughter and Learning: Humor Boosts Retention | Edutopia" 31 May. 2015, <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/laughter-learning-humor-boosts-retention-sarah-henderson>. Accessed 19 Oct. 2021

⁵ "The Playful Advantage: How Playfulness Enhances Coping with Stress." <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/01490400.2013.761905?journalCode=ulsc20&>. Accessed 9 Nov. 2021.

⁶ "School Connectedness | Adolescent and School Health | CDC." https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/school_connectedness.htm. Accessed 9 Nov. 2021.

⁷ Louk J.M.J. Vanderschuren, E.J. Marijke Achterberg, Viviana Trezza, The neurobiology of social play and its rewarding value in rats, Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews, Volume 70, 2016, Pages 86-105, ISSN 0149-7634, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2016.07.025>.

Play and relational activities also develop our capacity and motivation to take positive risks in front of others. Like engaged learning, play requires that we step outside our comfort zone and take the risk of getting it wrong, relying on others, and developing new ways to solve problems collaboratively.

Play's Connection to Building Restorative Schools

Creating the conditions for people to actively engage in and contribute positively to their community and to name, acknowledge and repair harm and inequities they see or cause is difficult work. A restorative culture of care, resilience and accountability requires that everyone – youth and adults – experience high levels of safety, respect, belonging, joy and voice. To develop these qualities we need to focus on building the needed capacity, skill and motivation in systematic and intentional ways.

- **Capacity** is strong when our basic needs are met and we feel relationally and physically safe.
- **Skill** is strong when we've been given time to learn, practice and reflect on things like interpersonal communication, decision making, self-awareness, self-management, social awareness.
- **Motivation** is strong when we care about each other and the community we are building; we feel connected and inspired by a shared purpose; and we feel seen and heard as a valued person and contributor.

This resource shines a light on one of the most effective tools for cultivating the soil from which this restorative culture of care and accountability can grow – socially engaged play. Well led, socially engaged play is vital for students to learn the requisite social and emotional skills of self-regulation, cooperation, teamwork, solving problems, imagination and creativity as well as build motivation, capacity and skill to engage and contribute to the community.

As we begin this work, we start small, with low-risk relational games and activities. Along the way we assess emotional/relational/physical safety and make necessary adjustments – repeatedly checking in, adjusting, and checking in again. As trust and relational strength grows we use a circle process to collaborate on shared agreements and group goals/vision. Eventually, when our assessment shows that safety, respect, belonging and voice are high we use the circle process and others to explore difficult topics and engage in restorative processes to repair harm. The bottom line is that authentic engagement by youth and adults in restorative processes requires that we move at the speed of trust and relationship. Play and connection activities get us there!

The goal with all play and relational activities is to build, what we call, the “relational ballast” needed to create a community of care and accountability.

How to Use this Guide

This guide allows us to choose games that have the appropriate amount of risk. Everyone learns best when receiving just the right dose of challenge – not so little that they're bored, not so much that they're overwhelmed; not in their comfort zone, and not in the panic zone, either. That “right amount” for the group depends on many factors. Just as educators seek to fit their learning tasks

within the “zone of proximal development⁸,” play facilitators must assess, through attunement and check-ins, what their group is ready for and needs. And just like in the classroom, the facilitator is tasked with creating shame-free scaffolding for neurodivergence, disabilities, and alternative learning styles.

Perhaps one low risk game is all a group can engage in the first few or many times. Or perhaps a group is solid and in a safe and trusting state so after one low risk game a medium risk game can be played. Do your best to never assume a group is in the same state as they were the time before. Perhaps doing more dropping back to a low-risk games is important to redevelop some safety and trust within the group, such as after a school break.

This resource offers nearly everything you need to bring more play into your practice and do your part to build a community of care, resilience and accountability. From providing guidance on how to introduce or “pitch” circles and play to students and adults to how to structure the session and how to give feedback. Finally we offer instruction on a list of games broken down into three categories: Low, Medium and High Risk games to give you a sense of how to use engaged social play activities to help build the “ballast” that we talk about in creating the environment and culture needed to engage in restorative practices. We refer to this intentional scaffolding as “progressive risk taking.”

For a more comprehensive resource see Howard Moody’s **Heart of Play Games Manual: Over 200 Activities for Connection and Joy**.

Introducing Community Building Circles & Play by Annie O’Shaughnessy

Before we even begin the process of restorative community building we need to make a case to the students and/or staff for why it’s important. It’s your job to develop a “pitch” that’s meaningful and authentic to you. My pitch always comes back to research: School connectedness and sense of safety improves our mental and physical health⁹; creating connections with others increases our neural plasticity¹⁰; sharing our stories offers health benefits¹¹ and increases empathy and self-compassion¹², and emotions are the “rudders” for our deeper thinking¹³.

Here’s how my pitch might start: “Scientists have discovered that as a species we are wired to connect, kind of like pack animals, but we have become quite disconnected and this has had some negative effects on our mental and physical health. What is some evidence that we’ve become

⁸ "Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Scaffolding." 11 Jul. 2020, <https://educationaltechnology.net/vygotskys-zone-of-proximal-development-and-scaffolding/>. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

⁹ "School Connectedness | Protective Factors | Adolescent and ... - CDC." https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/school_connectedness.htm. Accessed 3 Aug. 2019.

¹⁰ "The Neuroscience of Human Relationships: Attachment and the" 21 Oct. 2014, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03057240.2014.971483>. Accessed 3 Aug. 2019.

¹¹ "Why Sharing Your Personal Story Can Offer Real Health Benefits." http://www.oprah.com/health_wellness/why-sharing-your-personal-story-can-offer-real-health-benefits. Accessed 3 Aug. 2019.

¹² "How Stories Change the Brain | Greater Good." 17 Dec. 2013, https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_stories_change_brain. Accessed 3 Aug. 2019.

¹³ "Emotions Are the Rudder That Steers Thinking - ASCD." <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education-update/jun18/vol60/num06/Emotions-Are-the-Rudder-That-Steers-Thinking.aspx>. Accessed 3 Aug. 2019.

disconnected? How were we more connected in earlier times? We are going to do some things in this class to create more connections. You won't need to share anything you don't want to, but your participation matters. We are together until June and feeling connected and respected will hopefully make our school days go better. Most important! I am going to count on you to give feedback on how this time is for you."

How are "Restorative Games" different?

Any time we introduce play into education we will most likely increase engagement, wellness and collaboration. But, applying a holistic restorative framework to play maximizes its benefits by attending to equity, trauma informed practices and social emotional learning. Consider these guidelines a starting place as you develop your restorative approach. You may add more to attend more specifically to learning differences and intersections of privilege and power that exist in your classroom and school.

Not Just an Icebreaker—Creating Balance in the Process

What distinguishes restorative games is the degree to which we attend to the "Balance in the Process." By doing so we create safety, respect, belonging, and voice in a structured and intentional way. Balance in the Process is a foundational framework for restorative work that prioritizes social emotional learning, equity and trauma sensitive practices.

The Balance in the Process in Action

1. Welcome and Pause: Pause to gather in a circle, settle and "open" the activity "Welcome everyone! We've probably been rushing all morning. Let's take a moment to arrive together..." Offer any of the grounding, centering, mindful activities you feel comfortable with: a) take 3 breaths b) become aware of our feet on the ground. c) notice 3 things you can see, 2 things you can hear, 1 thing you can feel. (For more ideas [visit here](#).)
2. Share how you feel and a bit of who you are (humanize yourself): . i.e. "I'm nervous leading games because they always felt so awkward at camp, but I am really excited to spend this time with you and get to know you. Are you willing to give this a try?!" (For your first activity this is where you might give your "pitch" discussed in the introduction.
3. State purpose & Opening Quote: "Today we are going to try an activity to...." and read an opening quote, play an opening song, etc. (You can read a quote here if you'd like, Example: "We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing." -George Bernard Shaw)
4. Review Guidelines: Point out or display group norms previously developed by group and ask for agreement or amendments.
5. Quick Check-In "I just shared that I am feeling nervous. Show me how you are feeling with your thumb (or one word etc)." (See [Check-in Resource](#))
6. Lead activity Pause often to reflect back to the group the positive things you are seeing and hearing. "I am hearing a lot of laughter!" "Way to be patient!" "I like how you helped your classmate out!"
7. Debrief: Ask a general reflection question to the whole group like "What did you notice?" and then introduce the talking piece for a round or two of more debrief questions or follow up activities.

8. Closing: Thank the group, offering appreciation for the “good” things you saw, even if it was that the group was able to stick with the activity, even when it went poorly. Read another quote if you’d like.

Some Tips and Guidelines

- Restorative Games build a group’s capacity to eventually be in circle with a range of more difficult topics and situations so start small and take baby steps. You are trying to build internal motivation.
- The focus is on fun, connection, inclusion, and active, equitable, participation.
- Student engagement is fueled by the facilitator’s authenticity and willingness to be vulnerable along with the kids. It’s helpful to do games that you like or enjoy, especially at first.
- The facilitator is charged with creating ways to invite equal voice and leadership in the group when it comes to resolving any tensions or problems that arise. In this role, the facilitator models restorative communication and invites all voices into problem-solving if and when conflict arises. Remember, games offer an explicit space to build and practice restorative skills.
- Accommodations should be made to meet participants’ needs so they can be part of the activity to the best of their capacity. These activities can be very difficult and dysregulating for kids with trauma histories or chronic stress. So provide options for different levels of engagement and work with some students on dignified and prosocial “escape plans” if they feel themselves moving out of the “window of tolerance”—too stressed to be their best self. This plan might be as simple as excusing themselves to get a drink of water
- Remember to return routinely to some fun games to reset the group’s fun factor, even when your class circles are going well.
- Leave on a high note and celebrate successes—even the small ones. If these games go off the rails, end with a neutral tone by saying, “Looks like we aren’t quite ready for this kind of activity today. Let’s circle up for a closing.” And just read a quote or wish them well. Before the next circle, attend restoratively to the conflict and then revisit the norms with the group the next time you meet. “So last time we had a hard time following our guidelines. Let’s revisit them to see if they need to be changed, or if we need to add some.”
- Check your personal expectations around what “success” looks like. In some groups, just standing in a circle together and passing a ball is a huge success. Name what you see. “Two weeks ago we were challenged to pass a ball to each other, today we’ve been able to listen to each person’s favorite movie. Well done!”

Selecting and Learning Games and Activities

We offer a list of some favorite games starting on page 6. There are many more and many ways to learn them! It can be really helpful to watch games in action on Youtube or get together with some colleagues and practice the games yourself. One thing you want to make sure is that you have run through the process of setting up the game to make sure you have all the props and instructions in order. Your own comfort level with the process goes a long way however you learn or lead!

Debriefing and Reflecting on Games and Activities

Closing and debriefing together are an important step in ensuring balance in the process while playing games in a restorative framework. Intentional time and space to debrief allow all participants to reflect on their thoughts, feelings, and experiences throughout the game and identify main takeaways. A restorative approach asks that we reflect on our experiences with others as reflection helps deepen our understanding of ourselves and others and identify and create space for learning and growing together. Reflecting on our thoughts, feelings, and actions often causes discomfort as we take the time to think about our values and how our actions are or are not aligned. This is tough work! Games offer a fun and lower-risk opportunity to develop and practice this important aspect of a restorative approach.

Reflection Questions and Prompts

The following questions and reflections can be used in circle or small groups to prompt exploration and reflection. Start with low-risk questions like, “What did you notice?” as you begin introducing games and activities into the classroom routine and expand from there!

- What did you notice while playing this game?
- This is an activity that asked us to be really silly with each other. What was that like?
- What was easy about this activity? What was difficult?
- What did you find surprising while doing this activity?
- What did your partner(s) or teammate(s) do that helped make this activity go well?
- If we did this activity again, what would you do differently next time?
- What could this activity teach us about [skill or purpose stated at the beginning of game]?
- When is another time when you might use something you practiced during today’s activity?
- What feelings came up for you while doing this activity?
- If we did this activity again, what would you need from your partner or teammates?

Other Debrief Ideas

If a reflection question in circles, pairs, or small groups isn’t the right fit, that’s okay! There are other ways to debrief a game or activity. The important piece is that all participants have the opportunity and space to share about their experience.

- **Indoor Snowball Fight:** Everyone writes down on a piece of scratch paper one takeaway or response to a prompt and crumple the paper up into a “snowball”. When given the go-ahead, everyone throws their paper in the air (or at the teacher in the center of the circle). Each participant picks up a snowball and reads the response aloud.
- **Beach Ball Reflection:** On an inflatable beach ball, write different reflection questions and prompts. All participants stand in the circle and toss the beach ball to someone across them, saying their name. Participants catch the beach ball with both hands, read the questions closest to their thumbs, and choose one to answer. This activity allows for some movement and choice.
- **Write 3, Share 1:** Post 3 reflection prompts for participants to think about. All participants write down responses to all three and share one with the group. Students choose to write their name

and hand in if they would like the facilitator to read their other responses or recycle them after the activity is over.

- **Speed Share:** Pose a prompt with a one-word answer (i.e. “what’s one thing you felt during this game?” or “what’s one skill you used during this game?”). Give participants a moment to think, then do a speed share around the circle, with everyone sharing the one word they chose.

Low Risk Games

Name Whip

A simple name game that is fun to play however not necessarily about learning names. A good low risk energizer that gets everyone saying names.

Number of people: 10 - 50

Time: 5 – 10 Min.

Set-up: Gather the group in a circle so that everyone can see each other.

Game Play

1. Explain that the group is going to go around and say their name, and then the next person will say their name all the way around the circle.
2. Ask, is everyone ready to say their own name out loud when it is their turn.
3. The leader, or someone who would like to start us off says their name and the person to their left say their name and on it goes around the circle
4. After completing one time around say, "Let's do it a second time; however let's really whip it around while still enunciating the names clearly. Okay Let's Whip it Around!. Carole, Sue, Trevor....."

Variations

1. Perhaps the 3rd time around go in the other direction.
2. You might add in: "Can we do it even faster? Shall we time it?"
3. Do two names in opposite directions and see if they can get passed successfully around the entire circle at the same time. This ups the risk so be sure the group is ready for such a game.

Teaching Points

If you choose to use a timer understand it can boost enthusiasm but can add an element of higher risk due to the competitive nature of some participants.

The Cool Breeze Blows for Anyone Who

A great getting-to-know-you activity from my friends at Life is Good Playmakers.

Number of people: 10 - 40

Time: 5 - 10 min.

Set Up/Overview: Set up a good circle of chairs with nothing in the center so that participants can move freely. Prepare a list of “Cool Breeze” statements to use that are developmentally appropriate and sensitive to all identities and generally inclusive. For example, the statement “The cool breeze blows for anyone who has been out of the country” only includes those who have the financial means and opportunity to travel.

Game Play

1. Demonstrate to the group by choosing a simple statement like, “The cool breeze blows for anyone who... likes vanilla ice cream” and prompting any participant who also likes vanilla ice cream to get up and find a different seat.
2. Before beginning, outline some basic rules to support safety and fairness: If you agree with the statement, walk slowly to another seat. AND, do not call people out for not moving. This is a challenge by choice game!
3. The teacher/leader calls out the first few statements. Then the leader can ask for volunteers to give the statements. “The cool breeze blows for anyone who ate pizza last night.”

Variations

1. When the answer is yes you all go to the center of the circle and give each other high fives or a loud cheer.
2. After a few statements the leader can ask for suggestions as to how players could move in different manners to a different seat. i.e. Slow motion, bunny hop, like a robot etc... remembering to keep it safe.
3. Ask for volunteers to be in the center.
4. Take one chair away from the circle and tell the group that whoever does not find a seat has to be in the middle and say a statement.

Teaching Points

Remind and model for the players how to move safely and that the object of the activity is to not contact anybody. This is a low-risk game because in the beginning the leader (teacher) calls out the questions.

Vegetarianism

Very similar to the games Have You Ever, and The Cool Breeze Blows.

Number of people: 15-40

Time: 10 min.

Set Up/Overview: Have all the players sit in chairs in a circle except one person who stands in the middle. This middle player is going to play detective and try to find out who hates what vegetable. All the seated players think of the one vegetable that they hate. They keep their choices secret.

Game Play

1. The person in the middle names off several vegetables and then says “switch!”
2. The people who had their vegetables called must switch to another chair or spot, of course the middle person also tries to get to a now vacated chair.
3. Whoever is left without a spot becomes the next detective in the middle.
4. If the person in the middle calls out “vegetarianism” everyone has to go.
5. At the conclusion of the game go around the circle and ask everyone to name their most hated vegetable to see if anyone did not get named.

Variations

Or play the game “fruit basket.” In this version everyone goes around the circle at the start of the game naming their favorite fruit and repeats are okay. The center person then names several fruits “kiwi, strawberries, bananas” and then says “switch.” Or if the center person calls out “Fruit Basket” everyone must move and change places.

Teaching Points

Great lead in game for “Have you Ever”. Remind the players to be safe in their bodies and that the object of the game is to not touch anyone while changing places. Try a round or two moving in slow motion or like zombies to emphasize the fun of moving. This game is right on the border of being medium risk since you are asking students to think of something secretly and also they will be scrambling to get a chair.

To make it truly a low-risk game: as the teacher, stand on the outside and do the calls without having a middle person. Perhaps play fruit basket first making the calls as the teacher then introduce this secret version of vegetarianism.

Rhyme Mime

I love to call this the simplest game of charades. Surprisingly basic yet so very fun.

Number of people: 2 - 30

Time: 5-10 min.

Set Up/Overview: Can be played in a circle with one person picking a one syllable word and everyone else is the guesser. Only one-syllable words are used.

Game Play

1. One person has a secret word and they give a rhyming clue word for the group i.e. "I have a word and it rhymes with Cat." The secret word chosen is "rat."
2. Popcorn style, anyone that wants to act out, mime out, a word that rhymes with "cat" stands up and does so. For example someone might mime swinging a bat.
3. The person who has chosen the secret word guesses what that person is acting out and responds in ritualistic fashion saying, in this case, "No, it's not bat".
4. Group members keep jumping up to mime a new word for the person to guess until someone gets it right. The game might sounds like this: "No, it's not mat" "No it is not fat" until someone mimes out the correct word. "Yes, it is a rat."
5. That person who mimed the correct guess will now pick a new word (or choose one from a selection randomly).
6. The person who guesses correctly can be the next secret word creator.

Variations

1. Use two small teams of 3 to 6 people on a team. Each team huddles up and chooses a word. One team begins and when the word is guessed the other team goes. When playing in teams when they see the word being mimed is not the correct word the team tries to say in unison "No it's not hat."

Teaching Points

Remind people that it is very specific alliteration. For example, the word "sleep" in this game does not rhyme with "feet". Some good rhyming type words, lots of "air" words...share, care, hair etc. "ore"words floor, score, tore. "Eat" words...seat, beat, sheet.... This could be a medium risk game as it involves a bit of acting however since it is voluntary if someone wants to act out a word and the words are so simple it lends itself to simple and safe fun. It may be best to have the players raise a hand for a turn and the guesser points to them and then they act it out

Whoosh

A very simple game however with the little introduction of setting a team goal makes this fun and delightfully rewarding.

Number of people: 15 - 100

Time: 2 - 5 min.

Set Up Gather everyone in good circle so that they can see each other. Introduce the game by asking everyone to practice a sound and gesture with you. Demonstrate a simple gesture of passing a wave at waist level while making the sound, “whoosh.” Have a stopwatch or cell phone timer handy so you can do the timed variation.

Game Play

1. Without much instruction, other than the modeling, say, “I am going to pass the ‘whoosh’ around on 3. When it comes to you, just pass it on.”
2. Tell the group they did great and then ask them what they noticed. (People will often note, laughter, cooperation, etc)
3. Now ask them, “Do you think we can do it faster?” If they say yes, ask them how. “What are some things that might improve our time?”
4. Gather some tips and try again. This time have your timer out and hit go just as you pass it. Stop the timer as it comes back round to you.
5. Ask the question again, “Who thinks we can still be faster?” and “What are some more suggestions?”
6. After a few times getting the time down, ask, “what do you think will happen if we go in the opposite direction?” And we try that.
7. When the group gets the time way down ask again, “So what are we noticing now?” Comments about collaboration and laughter usually come up. It’s at this point you might point out that all this laughter and sense of connection happened with no great risk and no deep sharing. You can also mention that even the act of getting in a circle can increase a sense of connectedness.

Teaching Points

This is low risk because everyone is doing the same motion and then building an investment in the group goal that is also surprisingly easy to accomplish. This is great to do with folks who might be adverse to “community building” games or people who believe community building needs to be complex.

Medium Risk Games

Name & Movement Replay

The simplest, easiest, and one of the most fun name games you can play.

Number of people: 5 – 40

Time: 5 – 10 Min.

Set-up

Create a space that has enough room so that when folks are in a circle everyone can see each other. You might consider putting sticky's on the floor to indicate where people can stand if your time is limited or the group is large. This helps the creation of a “good” circle.

Game Play

1. Call your group into a circle and direct some adjustments so everyone is seen. Note: Explain that each person will have the chance to say their name and do a movement.
2. Tell the players that the only thing they need to do is remember their own movement and name!
3. Model the activity yourself by saying your name out loud and demonstrating a movement. Make a point to ask for only context appropriate movements or gestures.
4. Ask the group to repeat back your name and mimic your movement together.
5. Beginning to your right, ask the next person in the circle to offer their name and a gesture. Prompt the group to mirror back the name and movement.
6. Continue, with prompts if needed, until everyone has offered their name and gesture.

Variations

- Tell the group: “Now we are going to do this again three more times. Say your name and offer the same movement, but this time see how fast you can do it. (Note: Use a stopwatch and report their time for some no-lose competitive fun. If you choose to time it, consider asking the group what tips might help reduce time. And then, as part of the debrief, ask the group what their experience was when time pressure was added.
- A slightly more complex version (therefore medium-risk) of this game, and still delightfully fun, is to say your name, and then say what you like, while doing a movement that represents what you like i.e., “My name is Joe and I like to surf,” and as you pretend to surf, and then everyone repeats it and says, “Your name is Joe and you like to surf... I am Sue and I like to knit...”

Teaching Points

Remind everyone to keep it appropriate, simple and safe. No somersaults, flying leaps etc. Some people may be stumped to think of a movement when it is their turn. Having everyone's attention on them can seem overwhelming. Encourage the person to just move their body in any fashion and say their name. Generally, most everyone in the group will be non-judgmental even though when it is a person's turn they might feel they can't create something on the spot.

Name and Movement and Alliteration

A fun and creative way to learn names, and kids learn what alliteration means.

Number of people: 5 – 40

Time: 5 - 10

Set -up/Overview Invite everyone to stand in a circle so they can see each other. This is very similar to name and movement replay.

Game Play

1. The first person says their name and adds a quality, or an adjective that begins with the first letter of their first name. Also ask for a movement that goes with this. For example, the leader starts and demonstrates, “I am Silly Susan” and she makes a silly gesture. Everyone then replays that back to her. “She is Silly Susan!”
2. The leader demonstrates doing their name and alliteration, and then passes it to the left, whereby that next person has the attention while doing their name and alliteration, etc.

Variations

If it is a small group, each person can repeat the person’s name to their left, the name and alliteration, before doing their own (higher risk). Or, for even more difficulty, they have to say each person that has gone before them (much higher risk). Or change the game to what the person likes. My name is Joe and I like to surf, and Joe pretends to ride a surfboard.

Teaching points

If the group is larger than 30 people this will take a little more time than name and movement replay, so be sure the group is ready for this level of focus.

This game is medium risk as each person is being asked to come up with a creative response. Sound alliteration is fine too. If the group is a bit hesitant don’t emphasize the acting out as much or at all just the alliteration. Also, the group does not have to repeat it back if the group is shy.

You may want to create a guideline that any alliterative name created should not be used outside of the game

Introduce A New Friend

A great game with a relatively new group and a way to have partners focus on what is special about each person.

Number of people: 10+

Time: 10 - 15 Min.

Set Up Use a space that can accommodate a circle of all the participants.

Game play

1. Have the players find partners, preferably someone whom they have not met before, or do not know well.
2. Give the pairs a few minutes to have each person tell their partner a couple of things that they would like other people to know about them: accomplishments, hobbies, favorite sports teams, favorite music, or favorite book, etc.
3. Then have them gather in a circle to introduce their new friend.
4. Remind the players to listen carefully because in a few moments they will be introducing their friend and sharing what they just learned about them.
5. Have the players stand in a circle and introduce their partners, telling the group a few of the interesting things they learned about them. For example, "This is my new friend Sue, and she loves to play soccer, and she also loves chocolate ice cream." Then it is the other person's turn to introduce their new friend.

Variations

You can vary this game by naming how many things the partners can share. It can just be one thing or several. Another variation with a large group is to have everyone walking around with their partner and introducing themselves to other pairs. Take the next five minutes and introduce yourself to five other pairs.

Teaching Points

This game is all about listening so remind the players to listen carefully. This is a medium-risk activity as you are asking players to listen to their partners and to share something personal about themselves. You can decrease the risk by asking them to share just one thing about themselves or increase the risk by sharing more details. Or they can even make it more personal by sharing something about themselves that people don't generally know that they might like people to know.

Gotcha

An excellent game to experiment with the element of surprise in play. There is also a nice moment of present moment awareness as you get ready for the “gotcha” command. It does require touch.

Number of people: 10 – 40

Time: 2 - 5 Min.

Set Up Use a space that can accommodate a circle of all the participants.

Game Play

1. Have everyone stand in a circle almost touching shoulder to shoulder. If spread too far apart people are reaching too far to set up the play.
2. With the players in a circle, have them place their left palm facing upward, about waist height, next to the person on their left. Then everyone places their right index finger onto that left palm the person next to them has placed next to them at waist height.
3. The leader then explains that at the call of the word “Gotcha” everyone tries to lift their right index finger while at the same time trying to grab the finger of the person to their left that is in their palm.
4. The leader shouts out the word “gotcha”, and everyone reacts.
5. The leader then asks the players to reset back to the starting position and play continues.
6. Then choose other players to be the callers and perhaps switch hands for balance and do one more round.

Variations

You can do this game in partners very effectively just have the players face each other and repeat the above directions. Or you can use other words as the “go” word. So, the magic word is supper. “Ready, Surprise.....Super oops, reset, ready, Surprise!

Teaching Points

This is a great opportunity to emphasize the fun of playing rather than just winning. The game is so silly that it lends itself to laughter and surprise. Also, you can emphasize how excited we can get when anticipating the action and how it is good to breathe and stay relaxed.

This game is medium risk since it involves a little bit of touching which can be uncomfortable for students. However, it is so very silly and quick thus it is a good way to have a little bit of touching. A great game to follow the lower risk game, “Whoosh.” Works with groups of any size and most any age.

Group Juggle

A great cooperative game.

Number of people: 8 – 20

Time: 10 - 15 Min.

Set -up Have the group form a circle with 2 feet or so between players. Make sure there is enough room for some movement and any very fragile items are secured.

Game play

1. One person will be designated as the starter. The starter has several soft tossing balls or beanie babies available.
2. The starter starts by tossing a ball to a person across the circle. This first person will throw to that same person every time.
3. This second person then tosses the ball across the circle to a new person. This person then crosses their arms (or hand on head, or one foot forward) to indicate they have already received it and this continues until everyone has their arms crossed indicating each person has caught the ball once and the pattern is complete by coming back to the person who started it.
4. Remind the players the one thing they must remember is who they toss it to.
5. Repeat the pattern to make sure everyone knows it, (no need to cross arms as everyone should remember who they tossed it to
6. Commence to send the ball around as quickly as possible.
7. Begin adding more balls gradually.
8. If people drop the balls just get the balls going again.
9. Pause the game after a bit and ask for feedback. “What are you noticing?” and then “What are some things we could do to differently to be more successful?”

Variations

1. Try adding a command such as now in ‘slow motion’ or ‘hyper speed’ or try reversing the throwing pattern.
2. With younger children you can have them in smaller groups and roll a couple of balls in that same person to person pattern.

Teaching Points

Great for 10 to 15 people. With large groups, break the group into two circles. Can be done with more however takes a bit of time to set the pattern. A great opportunity to reflect on how we all tend to be more successful when just focusing on one basic task at a time. i.e Watching the person you receive it from then turning and tossing it to another person. Ask players how they can apply this to their everyday life. Focusing on one task at a time even amidst the chaos of everything around them.

This is a medium risk game. Could almost be considered a high-risk game as it takes a fair amount of cooperation and patience to set it up. However once play begins there is usually so much laughter

and almost everyone makes mistakes the first time they try this that everyone feels a part of the mistake making silliness.

Have You Ever?

Another variation on the switching chair's theme. A great getting to know you game.

Number of people: 8 – 40

Time: 5 - 15 Min

Set-Up Arrange chairs in a circle or place items on the floor to mark places in a circle..

Game Play

1. Each player, except one, sits on a chair (or something like a pillow or jacket to designate their space), and the chairs are in a circle.
2. The extra person goes to the center of the circle.
3. Demonstrate to the group how when the question is asked in the “Have You Ever” form then anyone who answers yes to that question gets up immediately and SAFELY moves to another chair.
4. The person in the middle must also be able to answer yes to the question they ask.
5. The person in the middle attempts to find an open seat. The player who does not get a seat is the next person in the middle and asks the next question
6. The middle person asks a “Have You Ever Question?” question. “Have you ever ridden a bike?” Anyone who answers yes to that question immediately gets up and finds another chair.
7. The person who does not get a seat asks the next question..

Variations

Anyone who answers yes to the question comes to the Center and gives each other a high five.

Variations for younger children are described in “The Cool Breeze Blows for Anyone Who...”

For added “safety” and to avoid inappropriate or exclusive questions, create a set of question cards for students to choose from.

Teaching Points

Sometimes players will get stuck when they have to think of a question on the spot, so recommend easy questions such as “have you ever eaten pizza?” When playing with younger children the teacher may actually ask the questions or be in the middle and help the middle player think of a question

It is important to remind players that the object of the game is not to make physical contact with anybody. They need to be safe with their bodies and to not dive into chairs. Remind them continually. With kids who have not played cooperatively (or conversely, that crave physical contact) they may start pushing or bumping each other on purpose so stopping and clarifying the no contact rule may be necessary.

So, for this reason this is a medium-risk game and also one person gets “stuck” in the center. Some players could feel singled out or feeling as if they have lost. Some kids though love this attention. If someone is in the center twice give them an out meaning they can ask for support and someone else can volunteer to be in the center.

Pass the Clap

A fun circle game that is all about rhythm and energy.

Number of people: 6 – 30

Time: 5 - 10 min.

Set Up This game is played in a seated or standing circle.

Game Play

1. Demonstrate how the leader turns to the person on their left (or could be right) makes eye contact and together they clap at the same time.
2. That person then turns to their left and makes eye contact and with that person, they clap at the same time thus passing the clap.
3. Share with the group that the goal is for the claps to happen at exactly the same time and for the claps to be passed in rhythm.
4. Start the claps and after a round or two pick up the pace just a bit.
5. Now introduce that a person can change the direction of the clap. This change in direction is initiated by the receiving person, who has just received the clap. Instead of turning to clap the next person's hand, they stay facing that person and clap a second time with the hope they will carry on in the other direction with the clap.
6. Tell the group that the challenge is to do it in the same rhythm and really pay attention when the clap shifts directions.

Teaching points

The essence of this exercise is one of awareness and rhythm. The object isn't to go faster and faster; however it is fun that once the group gets the rhythm to build up the energy with a bit more speed.

Pass the Sound and Movement

There are lots of passing games using sound and movements. Here is a basic one that is simple and fun.

Number of people: 8 – 20

Time: 2 - 5 Min.

Set Up Have everyone get in a circle.

Game Play

1. The leader explains that they will be passing a sound and movement around the circle.
2. They turn to the person next to them in the circle and does a sound and movement.
3. This person immediately replays that same sound and movement and turns quickly to the next person to recreate the same sound and movement.
4. On it goes around the circle, like a wave.

Variations

1. Have each person take the sound and movement and make it louder, bigger and more animated until the last person makes it as big, loud and expressive as possible.
2. Pass the sound and movement across the circle. The person receiving it mirrors that sound and movement as if they are catching it and then creates a new one that they toss onto another person.

Teaching Points

Remind the players to do this quickly. Best to try to not think, just move your body and do the sound and movement. After everyone gets a feel of this, each person keeps this wave going however they now change the sound and movement slightly. Go around a few times and see how the sound and movement has morphed.

When the players are asked to change the sound and movement slightly the idea is to not think about what you are going to do. Just react and allow the change to happen naturally.

What Are You Doing?

A very simple and yet very engaging partner game.

Number of people:

Time: 5 - 10 Min.

Set Up

1. Everyone chooses a partner.
2. Demonstrate the activity with a volunteer.

Game Play

One person, Joe, begins by acting out a simple action like, brushing their teeth. Their partner, Sue, asks them the question “Joe, what are you doing?”

The person brushing their teeth says something totally different from what they are doing. “I am flying a kite.” Sue now acts out flying a kite. Then after 5 – 10 seconds of acting out the suggestion, Joe asks the question, “Sue, what are you doing?” and Sue replies “I am washing the dog,” and back and forth.

Do your best to never repeat anything that has been said.

Variations

If you have a small group, this is a great game to do in a circle. The person to the left of the person doing an action asks the question, “What are you doing?” and it goes on around the circle.

A nice addition is to have the players concentrate on adding an adverb, an “ly” word to their activity. For example. “I am riding a bike clumsily,” or “I am brushing the dog angrily,” or also demonstrate how combining two activities together are fun to act out, i.e. “I am skipping rope and eating an ice cream cone.”

Teaching Points

This is a simple improv. theater game so you may want to remind the players of two of the guiding principles in improv theater. One principle is “dare to be average.” So, any simple activity is fun to act out. And the other principle is “make your partner look good.” So, if your partner might be embarrassed by suggestions such as “picking your nose” then just choose something simpler and easy to act out, “washing the dog,” or “playing basketball.”

High Risk Games

You Are Susan!

A bit different than a simple name game, this is an experience.

Number of people:

Time: 5 - 10 Min

Set up

1. Tell the group that this is about truly stepping into your own power and allowing yourself to stand and hear your own name.
2. Due to the repetitive nature of the experience, it truly helps people to remember the names—and we need to know everyone's name, so focus is important.

Game play

The first person steps forward and says their name with pride and confidence, “My name is Susan.”

The group then responds with, “You are Susan, Susan, Susan!” Susan steps back and the next person in the circle steps forward and says their name. “My name is Roberto. You are Roberto, Roberto, Roberto!” Go around the circle and have each person declare their name.

Variations

Have each person step forward and declare something they believe is true about themselves. I am Susan and I am strong! The group then responds, “You are Susan and you are strong!” or “You are Susan and you are creative!”

Teaching Points

There is something very powerful about people repeating your name in this manner and yet some people will be very reluctant to step forward and be present to this experience. It is important to coach each person to let this experience wash over them and to let it in.

Elephant/Rabbit/Palm Tree

A great game to emphasize that mistakes are okay and that it is just fun to play.

Number of people: 10 - 40

Time: 10 - 15 Min.

Set up

1. Arrange the players in a circle and start by giving everyone some practice in forming the characters of this jungle world game (which always involves three players reacting together to create the shape with a center person and two others).
2. An elephant is composed of one center person who turns into a long trunk, while two other players—one on each side—become large floppy ears. The trunk is made by sticking your right arm out and wrapping your left arm under and around the right arm and grasping your nose.
3. A palm tree has a tall trunk that reaches for the sky (the center person), flanked by fronds arching outward or a coconut underneath the middle person upward reaching arms.
4. The third picture is the rabbit. The middle person makes big ears and big teeth. The two side people thump their outside foot.

Game Play

The game begins with the leader standing in the center of the circle. Their job is to point to a person and say either (1) elephant, (2) palm tree or, (3) rabbit. The signified person and the person to the left and the person to the right must perform the specific pantomime called for before the person in the circle counts to ten.

If the sequence is not done correctly or not done in time, the offending person must take the place of the person in the circle. If the sequence is performed correctly, then the initiator points to another person until someone eventually makes a mistake.

After the players get more proficient making the symbols and they no longer make mistakes add the rule of Bippity, Bippity, Bop. If the “it” person points to someone and starts saying, “Bippity, Bippity, Bop” the person they pointed to must say the “Bop” before the person saying the phrase “Bippity, Bippity, Bop” does. If not said in time that person becomes “it”. Used strategically this rule makes it easier for the “it” person to catch someone making a mistake.

Add more than one person in the middle to increase the action – and add more symbols as the group gets proficient at forming the first three.

Variations

Other symbols: Supermodel – Middle person walks the runway – two side people take pictures.

Viking ship – Middle person makes a Viking helmet with horns, the two outside people row and chant a rowing chant, *hoa, hoa, hoa*.

Jello – Middle person jiggles, outside people join hands around the jello to make the bowl.

Have the group brainstorm their own symbols.

Teaching Points

Also introduce the concept of “total it power” meaning the person pointing is the one who decides if anyone made a mistake. This is a wonderful tool that generally eliminates arguing. If the “It” person says you made a mistake you did, and you replace them in the middle. Generally, the players won’t mind being in the middle anyway. It is lots of fun.

Human Statues

A great opportunity to witness creativity in action and to focus on stillness and self control.

Number of people: 8 - 30+

Time: 5 - 10 Min

Set up

1. Everyone can be in a large circle or seated in an audience style set-up leaving a lot of space for the activity.
2. Demonstrate how everyone is going to build a collective statue by adding one person at a time.
3. Demonstrate with two or three people to start so that everyone sees how it is done. Tell them if they do touch another person that they are not to put their weight on that person.

Game play

One player starts the game going into the center and creating a pose that they can hold for at least a minute. Then another person goes into the center and joins this other person and makes a new pose that joins with, complements or adds to this ever growing statue. More players join until the leader or the group feels it is done. Perhaps ask for suggestions for the name of this statue.

The players then leave one at a time in the same order they went in and now the last person that went in stays and holds that pose and then a new statue is built starting with this last person's pose.

Variations

Just do one full statue without having anyone leave at the end. Or divide into smaller groups of players and make statues in a museum. Have some people walk around and view all the statues in the museum.

Teaching points

Take a moment to recognize the incredible creativity, cooperation, stillness and balance that the group just exhibited. Point out how they clearly followed the rules. It is not necessary for the players to touch however the game works well when some of the statue pieces can be in contact. Set very clear boundaries as to what is okay. Demonstrate what it looks like to be in contact without having to support the person's weight in any way.

Human Machine

A great opportunity to witness creativity in action and to recognize all the amazing values expressed both by the group and individuals.

Number of people: 8 - 30

Time: 5 - 10 Min.

Set up

1. Everyone can be in a large circle or seated in an audience style set-up leaving a lot of space for the activity
2. Demonstrate how we are going to build a collective machine by adding one person at a time.
3. Demonstrate with two or three people to start so that everyone sees how it is done.

Game play

One player starts the game as the first part of the machine. This player steps into the center and does a certain repetitive movement, and along with this movement, makes a corresponding sound as if a part of a machine. Another player then joins this player and adds another movement and sound that blends with or complements the first player's sound and movement.

One-by-one the players join this ever-growing machine as they become the cogs and gears in this machine. After all the players have joined (or those that want to....it is also fun to just be an observer and watch the machine being built) the machine the movements speed up and the sounds grow louder.

To end the game, have the players speed the machine up and then slow the machine down until it comes to a complete stop.

Variations

Eventually the machine is just working too hard and "boom" it collapses from over exertion. Also have the students brainstorm for what the next machine makes. Oh, it makes balloons, or band-aids, or baseballs. Ready, let's build a machine that makes bubble gum.

Teaching Points

Take a moment to recognize the incredible creativity and cooperation that the group just exhibited. Point out how they clearly followed the rules. Children love the creativity of this game however it can lend itself to some chaos. Set very clear boundaries as to what is okay. Initially it may be best to state that there is no touching. Later it can be you can contact another person (after all machine parts are connected) but not lean on them. Also, this game can be a great way to reflect on the day. Ask the students what the key value for that day has been. Maybe it was listening. Let's build a machine that represents listening.

Many Ways to Get There (10 – 40)

(From Artie Kamiya) Great game for young children. How many ways are there to travel? Biking, walking, by car, by train, by plane. In this game we get to travel the way we want to across the circle.

Number of people: 10 -40

Time: 5 - 10 Min

Set Up

1. Have everyone in a circle. Seated on the ground is fine or it could be in a circle of chairs, or even standing.
2. Have a few spaces empty in the circle.
3. Tell the players there are many ways to travel across this circle, safely and creatively. Someone could walk slowly, or you could hop, or walk like a robot, or a zombie, or a snake, or really any movement pattern or expression with their bodies.

Game Play

Start with just one person traveling across and everyone can applaud or just be in wonder at this person's creativity. Then ask for another volunteer. After a bit of time, have two or three people travel at once. If the group is large enough and there is enough space, have even more players go at the same time.

Variations

Everyone can go across at once. Or how about moving like animals across the circle.

In my laughter yoga classes I teach this to adults and I call this the Ministry of Silly Walks in honor of the Monty Python Skit and we all laugh along with the silly creations.

Teaching Points

A great game for children to offer support to each other for their own uniqueness. At the end of the game ask the player to share recognitions and appreciation to each other for their fun creations.

Memory Loss

A very simple partner storytelling game.

Number of people: Partners or small circles (4 - 8 players)

Time: 10 - 15 Min.

Set Up

1. Divide the players into pairs.
2. Decide who will be the first storyteller.
3. Have the group suggest a topic for a story such as going on a vacation or going shopping.
4. Bring up a volunteer to demonstrate how the activity is done.

Game Play

The first player begins telling the story but then has a memory loss indicated by them fumbling and not having any words “uh,uh mmm”, an obvious loss of memory. The other player now fills in the blank with a word or phrase and the story telling player continues with the story with this new idea thrown in.

After about a minute or so, ask the players to try and bring their story to an appropriate ending in the next 20 seconds. After the story is done ask the players who were filling in the memory loss if they were trying to trick their partners up or were they trying to support their partners with interesting and yet supportive ideas.

Switch roles, pick a new subject and do it again.

Variations

Have the storytelling person just start telling any story. You can also do this in groups of three with two people alternating filling in the blank, the “memory loss” moment. Or, do a standard story circle where each person tells a line or two of the story and then passes it on to the next person.

Teaching Points

This is a great activity to teach the fundamental principle in improv theater which is to say yes to any idea and then to build upon that idea. In this activity the storyteller takes what their partner has said and continues the story from that point, thus saying yes to their idea and building upon it.

Story Circle

A very simple storytelling game Told in a circle. A great compliment to the game Memory Loss

Number of people: 4 - 20

Time: 2 - 10 Min.

Set Up

1. Have everyone seated in a circle.
2. Decide who will be the first storyteller.
3. Have the group suggest a topic for a story such as going on a vacation or going shopping.
4. Or another standard way to start a story in “once upon a time” which lends the story to being more of a fantasy story.

Game Play

The first player begins telling the story and after a sentence or two turns to their partner to the left and passes the story to them. This can be done by ending a sentence or just saying the word “and” or “suddenly” or some appropriate bridge word. The other player now picks up the story and continues on.

For example, “I was hiking in the woods and I saw a.....” next person says “ a big black bear eating Berries. I walked up to the bear and asked if I could have some berries and.....” the next person says “ and the bear said I could have some berries if I had some honey to go with the berries. Fortunately I had a jar of honey in my backpack and the bear and I had a picnic then suddenly...”

See if the last person in the circle can end the story. A player can always pass when it is their turn by just saying “and” or just motioning to pass it to the next person.

Variations

Tell the story one word or two words at a time. Much more difficult.

Teaching Points

Might be good to remind students that conflict is interesting, but violence tends to end a story and also anything too violent may not feel safe for people. Also remind the players to not take over the story, just one or two sentences keeps the story moving. This is a great activity to teach the fundamental principle in improv theater which is to say yes to any idea and then to build upon that idea. This game could possibly be in the medium risk category since there is safety being in the circle.

You Shouldn't Have - (What's in the Box?)

A great game to teach the principle that creative choice is always available.

Number of people: Partners or a circle of 4 - 30

Time: 5 - 15 Min

Set Up

1. This is a great game to play with partners or in a circle.
2. Explain that your imagination is endless and that players in improv get to choose what they create.
3. Also share that making giving something personal and meaningful in this game can be rewarding

Game Play

When playing in a circle the first person starts by taking an imaginary box, perhaps miming and indicating the appropriate size and weight of the box as they hand the person to their left the box. They say, "Hey Joe, I have a gift for you. Joe starts opening the box and the gift giver announce as they unwrap the gift, "Yep, I got you, your own pet snake. I know you love snakes!" Or "Yes that is a signed copy of the first Edition, first book in the Harry Potter series." The receiver and gift giver offer thanks and excitement and Now Joe turns to the person to their left and offers them a gift. And on it goes around the circle.

Variation

Another version of this game is called What's in the box. In this scenario it is the person receiving the box that determines what is in the box. This is a good exercise in improv that shows there is endless creativity. As the receiver opens the box the possibilities are endless. There is always something in the box. "Oh, wow a magic wand. Thank you, I always wanted a magic wand."

Teaching Points

In gift-giving, encourage the givers to make it specific to that person if the player knows the person well to make it something that will be desired by this person. Comedy is always fun however whenever possible the gift giving exercise can actually be used as a gratitude exercise. Although this is simple it is a high risk game because if played in a circle everyone is watching the interchange as the gift is being opened and it takes some creativity for the giver to declare what is the present they are giving.

Some More of our Favorite Restorative Games & Activities

Sharing Greatness

Ask everyone to think of something they are “great” at. This could be “taking a nap” or “wasting time” or “binge-watching bachelorette” or “playing the piano.” Once everyone has thought of something, tell them they will be in pair introducing themselves with what they are great at. Model it with a volunteer. Then find another pair and introduce your partner with what they said they were great at. Now as a foursome, go find another foursome and repeat the introductions verbatim. Keep going until you are one big circle and then have folks do a lightening where they simply say their name and their greatness. “Annie, napping!”

Scavenger Hunt

Use a random letter generator to select a letter. Participants find an object that begins with that letter in the room and share it with the group.

This or That

Participants take turns responding to a “This or That” prompt, starting with low risk prompts such as “winter or summer”, “movies or tv”, “cats or dogs”, etc. You may ask participants to share around the circle or add movement by asking them to move from one side of the room to the other. Participants should only share when comfortable doing so.

The Wind Blows

One person stands in the center of the circle with one less chair than the number of people playing. The person in the center says “The wind blows to anyone who...” followed by a statement that is true for them, such as “has siblings”, “plays basketball”, “likes the color blue”, etc. Every participant for whom that is also true must stand up and find a new chair. The person who is not in a chair at the end of the round is the new person in the middle.

Group Count

Sit or stand in a circle. The idea is for the group to count to ten, one person saying one number at a time. Anybody can start the count. Then a different person says the next number - but if two or more people happen to speak at the same time, counting must start again from the beginning. It is possible to get to ten if everybody really concentrates - but try and be relaxed as well. To add a layer to this game, try doing it with and without eye contact, with participants facing away from each other with eyes closed, or counting backwards.

21 Counting Game

Sit or stand in a circle. The goal is to count to 21 in circle order. The person who gets to 21 makes a new rule for the group to follow such as replacing a number with a sound or movement, or swapping numbers in the order. For example, “instead of saying 7, make an animal sound” or “instead of 8, sit

down”. The game gets harder as more rules are added. If a rule is missed, the next person starts at 1. See how many numbers the group can replace with a rule each game!

Green Glass Door

This is a hidden rule or puzzle game. The rule is “words with double letters”. Start by saying “I’m going through the green glass door and I’m bringing a [word with double letters]”. Each participant in the circle repeats “I’m going through the green glass door with...” and makes their own guess. Then, let each person know if they can bring the item or not. You may play a couple rounds at a time over a longer period, until everyone figures out the rule, or a set number of rounds or time before revealing the rule to everyone. If students enjoy this game, you can play it again with a different rule of your choice, such as items beginning with the first letter of the guesser’s name.

- a. To help the group get to the hidden rule, you may choose to respond with a clue such as “no, you can’t bring a chair, but you could bring a stool” or “no, you can’t bring a rock, but you could bring a pebble”.
- b. You may choose a “secret helper” from the group to share the rule with beforehand so they can help guide the group.

Cheerleader

Participants find a partner and play a single round of rock, paper, scissors. Whoever wins, moves on to play another person and whoever loses becomes their “cheerleader”. This continues until only two people are left with the rest of participants cheering them on. Everyone cheers for the final winner.

The MARTHA Game

This is an improv game with the goal of creating a silent picture. Facilitator calls out a setting such as a park, a planet in outer space, a grocery store, etc. The “stage” should be a clear area at the front of the space. Participants take turns adding themselves into the silent picture by going to the stage, posing, and stating “I am a _____” (examples: “I am a tree in the park”, “I am a shopping cart”, etc. They hold that pose until the picture is complete. The only rules are that they cannot talk or move once they are in the picture and they cannot be touching other participants (this does not mean they can’t add to someone else’s action, like being a person pushing the shopping cart). When no one else is adding to the photo, the “director” calls cut and starts a new scene.

Silent Line-Up

The goal is for participants to line up in the correct order without speaking or writing to each other. Give the group a rule, such as “alphabetical order”, “birthdays January-December”, or “age oldest-youngest”. You may increase difficulty by giving a time limit.

Cross the Circle

Sit or stand in a circle. Students count off 1-4 (or whatever number works best for your group). Call a number and a style of walking such as “ballerina”, “elephant”, or “astronaut”. All students with that number cross the circle to one of the open chairs walking in the style named.

Beach Ball Connection Questions

Write low stakes connection questions all over an inflatable beach ball. Participants stand in a circle and get ready to catch the ball with both hands. When they catch the ball, participants read the questions closest to both thumbs and choose one to answer. They then toss the ball to someone else in the circle. Participants who haven't gone yet raise their hand until the ball comes to them.

“You shouldn't have!”

Standing in a circle, one person hands the person next to them an imaginary gift of any size. The person who receives it opens it and exclaims, “Oh! It's a _____, You shouldn't have!” making up something on the spot. The person who gave it to them then says, “I am so glad you like it. I thought it would be perfect for you since you.....” They finish that sentence by somehow connecting the gift with something they know about the person.

Catch My Name

A fun way of learning names. The group stands in a circle and begins by throwing a beanbag or bouncing a medium-sized ball, such as a children's football, across the circle from one person to another. Make sure people are ready to throw and ready to catch. Eye contact is important. Now, introduce yourself as you throw or bounce the ball across the circle - 'Hi, I'm Robert'. Once everybody has had a go at that, continue the game but this time say the name of the person that you are throwing to - 'Jessica to Kelvin'. The group should ensure that everybody receives the ball. One way of doing this is for everybody to hold one hand up until they have caught the ball, or each person folds their arms when they have thrown it.

Variations:

1. The catcher can call out the name of the thrower
2. Ask everybody to call out the name of the thrower
3. More balls can be added in so that it develops into a Group Juggle.
4. Don't make name games into an actual test - people are less likely to learn names if they feel pressurized. Keep it light and enjoyable
5. A useful adaptation for language learners - use word categories so that each person throwing the ball must say a word in the named category.