

# **COOPERATIVE GROUP GAMES AND INITIATIVES**

Environmental Education Lesson  
EDWARDS CAMP AND CONFERENCE CENTER

## SUMMARY

Students will participate in fun, noncompetitive group games and initiative activities that focus on building teamwork, cooperation, communication, and leadership skills and encourage them to interact with others in new ways and look at problems in new ways.

## USAGE

Any age, can be done indoors or outdoors.

## OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson students will...

- be able to define “team”
- be able to identify three or more components of teamwork
- be able to compare and contrast cooperation and competition

In addition students could...

- have fun and release energy in a positive way
- increase their level of cooperation
- gain greater awareness of diversity in their group
- become less inhibited and gain personal confidence
- be better able to deal with frustration in any endeavor
- realize how these activities could relate to future situations.

## MATERIALS

- Collection of small balls
- Blindfolds
- 2 bicycle inner tubes
- length of rope, 20-40 feet
- 4 carpet mats
- trolleys (located by baseball backdrop by low ropes course)

## INTRODUCTION – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This lesson is intended to promote the awareness and the practice of concepts, attitudes, and behaviors that comprise teamwork and cooperation. These games emphasize participation, cooperation, problem-solving, and fun rather than competition and individual goals. These games are intended to get groups to think as a team, so that everyone has input and shares ideas. Components of teamwork and cooperation include communication (sending and receiving), awareness, support, respect, leadership, trust, decision making, problem solving, and personal responsibility.

**Team** - a group of people working toward a common goal

**Cooperation** - the attitudes and actions taken by individuals to help the team/group achieve their goal.

**Competition** – the desire and attempt taken by individuals or a group to “win” by overcoming other individuals and groups.

The following activities are arranged starting with warm-up or ice breaker activities followed by more cooperative group activities and games. You may pick which activities you prefer. It is usually best to start with at least a couple ice breaker or initiative activities.

It can be beneficial to briefly discuss learning at the end of each activity. You can discuss what worked and what did not and why? What skills did they use? Advantages and disadvantages of working in a group?, etc. Discussion periods can be made more efficient by meeting in a circle. That way everyone can make eye contact and no one is behind anyone else.

Ask the students to gather in a circle. Let them know that this class is called “cooperative group games and initiatives” and that they will be participating in activities to explore and practice cooperation and teamwork. Help them to clearly define “team”, “cooperation”, and “competition” (see above). Ask them what they think teamwork and cooperation consist of. They should come up with a list that includes with some of the following: communication, common goals, support, respect, leadership, decision making, problem solving, and personal responsibility.

Encourage the students to be creative and imaginative and try new ways of doing things. Let them know that they may experience frustration and possibly failure, and should explore new ways of dealing with that. It may be beneficial to set guidelines regarding behavior such as no putdowns or other destructive behavior (read your group).

## WARM-UP / ICEBREAKER ACTIVITIES

### Group Juggle

Everyone stands in a circle, arm’s length apart from their neighbor. Begin by saying “My name is \_\_\_\_\_”, and then throw a ball to anyone in the circle who is not directly next to you. Then they say “ Thank you \_\_\_\_\_, my name is \_\_\_\_\_” and throw the ball to a new person. Repeat this process until each person has received the ball. The last person then throws it back to the first person. Now repeat the process several times, using the same order that was established the first time, until everyone knows the names and correct order. (Start over whenever a ball is dropped or a mistake is made.) You can add more balls one at a time to see how many balls the group can juggle without dropping them, or time how fast the ball can make it through the group.

### Shoe Tie

Have your group pair up, but make sure every pair has at least one shoe that has laces. Have one of the partners untie their shoe. Working together, the partners must re-tie the shoe, but each person may only use one hand. You can make them both use their non-dominant hand to make it more challenging.

### Last Detail

Have your group pair up. Take a minute for each person to study the appearance of their partner. Then have them face away from each other and change 3 things about their appearance. Examples: Flip their hat around, put hair up or down, untuck or tuck in shirt, take off a piece of jewelry, untie shoes, unzip coat, etc. Next, have everyone turn and face their partners. Have each person try to figure out what has changed about their partner.

### **Everybody Up**

Participants pair up with someone of similar size. Ask them to sit back-to-back with knees bent and feet flat on the ground. Then, while pressing against each other, stand up. (It is best not to interlock elbows. Instead, squeeze elbows together in order to avoid twisting arms.) Once they have mastered pairs they may progress to triples, quads, and possibly the entire group in a circle.

### **Lineups**

Without talking or any verbal communication or mouth movements, have the group line up according to age, birthdays (month and day), alphabetical order by middle name, or any other category you can think of. (You can make it more challenging by blindfolding all or some of the participants.)

### **Square!**

Have the group form a square around you, and tell them to remember both who their neighbors are and how they are positioned relative to you. Tell them that this is their square and whenever you call out “square!” they need to get back in this position. Try it out. Turn 90 degrees and yell “square!”; run 10 yards or so and call “square!” again. Later that day if you need the group to get together, call out “square!” You can also time them to see how fast they can get in their square.

### **Human Knot**

Have the group stand in a tight circle. Everyone should reach one hand in the circle and grasp the hand of another person (not an adjacent neighbor). Then everyone puts their other hand in and grabs someone else’s hand. –Not the same person whose hand they already grabbed with their first hand. Then they need to untangle themselves without letting go hands, until they are standing in a circle or a line. To avoid twisting arms, they may rotate their grip without letting go hands.

### **Blind Polygon**

With each member blindfolded, hand them a long piece of rope. Ask them to form geometric shapes (square, rectangle, triangle). Encourage straight sides and exact corners. Each person must be using both hands on the rope. This is a great communication and leadership activity, but takes a lot of patience and can be quite frustrating.

## **GROUP GAMES**

### **Infinite Circle**

Have everyone join hands in a circle. Two people in the circle join hands through the center of a bicycle inner tube. Have the group pass the inner tube around the circle without letting go hands or using fingers. It needs to be passed all the way around. (they may help each other by lifting arms, bending down, etc) You can turn this into a name game by asking each person to introduce themselves (name, favorite food, animal, etc.) before passing it on.

### **Blind Soccer**

Divide group into teams of about 5 people. Have the teams spread out on one side of a level field. Each team picks a person to be blindfolded. Once the team member is blindfolded, there should be NO talking by anyone until you say “go!”. Put one small ball out in the field for each team. Make sure each team sees which ball their blindfolded member needs to go get. Then say “go!” The seeing team members must instruct their blindfolded member verbally which way to go to get their ball and bring it back to their group, and place it in a designated area where they began. (inside a

hula hoop or inner tube works well). The seeing team members have to stay at the starting line. They cannot move with or touch the blindfolded person. The blindfolded people cannot run, they must walk! This is to keep blindfolded players from running into each other.

The students will usually figure out that it works better if only one person is giving instructions to the blindfolded person.

Pay close attention to the blindfolded players and make sure the balls are not too close to each other to avoid collisions.

### **Variation of Blind Soccer:**

**(This is a more challenging way of playing the game)**

Divide the group into teams of 3. Within each group designate who will be the eyes, body, and voice. The eyes can only see, they cannot talk or walk around. The body is blindfolded and cannot speak but can move around. The voice is blindfolded but can speak and must remain stationary. Once the roles have been explained and the proper people are blindfolded the object is for the group to tell the body where a ball is located. The body needs to go get the ball and bring it back to their group. This is a tough challenge. You can give them time to plan a way to communicate before, depending on the ability level of the group.

### **Hagoo**

Divide group into 2 equal teams. Have the 2 teams line up facing each other with room in the middle for 2 people to walk. The first people in each line start walking down the middle, each walking next to the opposing teams line. The two lines try, without touching or saying anything inappropriate, to make the person on the opposite team laugh or smile. If the walker laughs or smiles, they have to go to the other team's line. If they refrain from smiling or laughing, they stay in their line. The object is to have the most people in your line. You may have to be the person who watches the walkers and decides what constitutes a smile.

### **Jelly Crossing**

Ask the group to imagine themselves at a giant patch of jelly. They need to get across without stepping in and getting stuck in the jelly. Provide four carpet sections which are their jelly shields. The carpet should be placed close enough together to step across so they do not have to jump. The jelly area should be far enough across that they cannot simply walk across on the first four carpet placements. They should have to be picked up and put down again.

### **Trolleys** (located by baseball backdrop by Low Ropes Course)

The group lines up with left feet on one beam and right feet on the other, ropes in hands, all facing in the same direction. They then attempt to walk a certain distance, or to a certain place and then turn around and walk back. After a while, they usually figure out that it's easier if they have some sort of verbal or nonverbal signal and a leader.

### **Dragon's Tail**

Define boundaries. Divide group up into at least 3 teams. Each team forms a train or dragon's body by holding on to each others shoulders. The person at the back of each line gets a dragons tail (a bandana). The tail is tucked into their back pocket so it is sticking out. The object is for the head of the dragon to grab the tail of another dragon, while at the same time protecting its own tail; if there is a break in the body of the dragon, they must stop and reconnect.

### **Blob Tag**

Define boundaries. Pick one person to be “it” or to start the blob. That person tries to tag people. If someone gets tagged, they join the blob by holding hands with the person that tagged them. This will eventually form a long line that gets slower as it gets bigger. If the blob is having trouble tagging people, have them take a time-out to talk about strategy. You could also split the blob in half and have two blobs chasing people. Last person to be caught becomes the next game’s “it”.

### **Elbow Tag**

Define boundaries. Have the group pair up with a partner. Choose two people to be “it”. One of them will be the chaser, and one will be the chasee. The other pairs link elbows and spread out inside the boundaries and stand still. When you say go, the chaser tries to tag the chasee. The chasee may become safe by linking elbows with one member of one of the pairs, forming a triad. The person on the opposite end of the triad chain must break away before they get tagged and is now the chasee. If the chasee gets tagged, the game reverses and they become the chaser and whoever tagged them is now the chasee.

### **Lap Sit – Good Closing Activity**

This activity also works well as a closing activity following the review discussion if there is time. Ask the group to form a very tight circle with right shoulders all pointing at center and each person facing the back of the person in front of them. /the circle needs to be very round and uniform. Each person reaches forward and puts their hands on the shoulders of the person in front of them. On your signal, everyone gently sits down on the lap of the person behind them. They will probably need to readjust and try this more than once. If everyone participates and cooperates, they will all be able to have a seat.

### **WRAP-UP:**

This can be a brief review or a more involved wrap-up exercise depending on the needs and age of the group.

To review, ask students again to define “team” and to compare cooperation and competition. You can ask the students what skills they used, what worked, what didn’t work, what might they do differently next time?

Ask the students how what they did and learned today might apply to situations in their lives at school, at home, in the future in their jobs?

More involved processing can be achieved effectively by using the “what?, so what?, now what?” method. First discuss the facts of what happened during the lesson period, then the effects or consequences of this, and lastly what has been learned and changes that can be made in the future.

- Start by going around the circle and have each student describe a part of what took place, in detail, from beginning to end.

- Next discuss the following: did things go smoothly or not, was the goal achieved, did people change their methods, etc.

- Then discuss what insights they have gained and how they can apply their learning to future situations.

### **RESOURCES**

Karl Rohnke, Fun Stuff, Dubuque, Kendall/Hunt Publishing Iowa 1996.

Ed. Andrew Fleugleman, New Games and More New Games, New Games Foundation.

Karl Rohnke, Silver Bullets, Project Adventure Inc. 1984.

