

Games for All Occasions

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Games provide an opportunity for children to learn social skills and to become aware of each other while doing tasks. And above all, games are fun! They are entertaining and provide an alternative to television. Games play an important role at birthdays and may also be useful when traveling or brightening up the day for a sick child or just passing the time waiting for dinner. They range from quiet little finger songs for young children to noisy group events.

Each game is different; some contain children's energy and some spread it around. At different ages the games that are satisfying change, but as a general rule the younger the child, the less competitive the game. Little children live in the moment and cannot cope with winners and losers. Interestingly, this can be especially hard for little boys who can become discouraged unless they are given non-threatening games.

Some games are improved by the use of verses. All children love "Hide and Seek." It provides a wonderful archetype of being secure in the world and then venturing out. There are endless variations of the "Hide and Seek" theme; one with a verse is as follows:

Cat and Mice in the Kitchen

*We mice, we live in our place.
We smell something, how might it taste?
We nibble eagerly on cheese and cake.
Oh my, the cat is awake. (clap)*

The cat is in the middle of a circle (in the kitchen) and mice all walk around eating here and there. When you clap they scamper away and the cat tries to catch them. The verse allows the parent to give the game a rhythm, and you can make the rules to suit the children. For example, some children hate to be the cat and so you might ask "Who wants to be the cat?" All games need rhythm and rules which will suit the children playing.

The Golden Ring

*Golden ring, golden ring wander around
Where can that golden ring be found?
Looking here, looking there
Round and round and everywhere.*

A golden ring (or whatever you choose, changing the rhyme accordingly) is passed around the circle while the person is blind-folded or has shut eyes. The children in the circle all have closed fists as the person guessing walks around and points to the fist she thinks the ring is in. She has, say, three guesses and then it is another's turn.

The next rhyme can be done with one child or more.

*Candle, candle burning bright
Cobbler working day and night*

*Can you see me let it show
Up above or down below?*

Here you place one fist on top on the other and in one is a crystal (or whatever). Using a bowl full of different colored buttons you can also build a tower of fists each with a different colored button and you have to guess what color is on top. Try resting the fist tower on a table and guess which fist has the red button.

Hiding Games

For little ones you can have a little gnome which you hide somewhere (but never behind or under anything). You can give clues like “warm” and “cold”. Some families play hiding the forks and spoon while preparing for dinner. For very young children a music box that plays a tune can be wonderful to hunt for, again not behind or under anything.

A wonderful parent and child game uses the following rhyme:

*My castle is closed for years one hundred
Till you hear a mighty thunder;
My castle is open for just one year
In, out, be quick my dear.*

The parent holds the child on his lap with arms encircling the child and says the rhyme, stamping his feet for the thunder, then opening arms “for just one year” and allowing the child out then back in for the last line. If the child wants, you can leave the child out while you repeat the verse (as many times as they want) and they slip back again in the last line.

Jack in the Box

*Jack in the box, Jack in the box,
Waiting, waiting, waiting for someone to open the lid.*

The child crouches in a little ball and at the word “lid” you ring a bell or tinkle a triangle or whatever and the child jumps up.

Blindfold

*In my cellar it is dark,
Can't hear a noise, can't hear a bark.
Who is my light, to shine for me tonight?*

Here the person in the middle is blindfolded and another quietly joins him in the center of the circle and the blind person has to guess by feeling who has joined him. If it is too hard the blind person can ask the other to whisper a rhyme or say something to give him a clue.

Obstacle Walks

Blindfolded obstacle walks can be fun, with trust. You can have a basket or box with treasures in it, and the children, blindfolded in pairs, take turns touching and finding certain things before they get to the treasure, e.g., a tree, or water. Other obstacle walks involve balancing, crawling, or jumping. Sometimes you can add carrying an orange or a marble on a spoon, depending on the age of the children. They can do this on the way to get a magic word which they have to carry back. When everyone is back, perhaps after more tasks, they put the words together and see what each person got. The words may make up a song or poem.

Treasure Hunts

These need to be geared to the age of the children. For little children they may follow different colored wool laid out to get them to where the treasure is. At the start each child chooses a piece of matching colored wool and takes turns leading the group according to when their color is needed.

Scavenger Hunts

Children have paper and pencil and can list or draw what is asked for; e.g., something yellow.

Tag Games

Outside we can draw houses in sand or with chalk on concrete, and the children run from one to the other without being caught. These houses can be called names like Sun, Moon, and Star house. All the little birds have to fly out now from these houses and get something. One child is out and tags those flying. Then when you say “sunshine,” they all go back to the sun house. Or with “star sparkle,” “moon gleam” or “earth hold,” the birds fly to the appropriate houses without being tagged.

Tag games need to be geared to the age and nature of the children, as some children hate being “it.” They can also be made seasonal; e.g., running from the Mer King at the beach in summer.

Horses

A simple game for the little ones is to all be horses (you have a bag of food). When you say trot, they trot, when you say lie down they lie down. Then back to the stable to get some food from the food bag.

Circle Games

A simple circle game with a little rhyme allows children to fill an empty seat next to them. You start the game by creating one empty seat.

*My nice, nice place is empty,
I wish to have Jane here.*

This leaves Jane’s spot empty, so her neighbor takes up the rhyme until everyone is moved around.

Quiet Games

It flies, it flies, it flies.

You all stick out your index fingers (“pointers”) and in time to the words “it flies” strike each finger up and down, like playing a drum. The adult then calls out the name of an animal. If it flies, the children point their fingers up. If it doesn’t fly, the fingers stay quiet. Add tricky things like “dragon.” If a person gets it wrong she can give into the circle something like a ribbon or a jacket, and then to get it back she must sing a song, kiss the rabbit, or whatever (something nice!).

Show a Profession

Master, master do you have work for me?

The “master” has to guess what the whole group is, e.g., chefs. If he does guess, then he chases them. They walk nearer each time as in statues.

Drawing Blindfolded

Each person adds to the drawing. For example, a person is told there is a house without the roof, so she adds the roof, and in the end the group has made a picture.