



Communities of Care Games & Activities

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Introduction

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 children discover, explore and engage with the world around them.

In his research, Jaak Panskepp has shown that when animals experience fear and exhibit a stress response, they will stop playing. In these studies using rodents, upon dissection it was found that the rats that did not play have substantially less neuronal connections, thus making them less adaptable to life. So from an evolutionary standpoint, play is not an immediate requirement for survival, but it allows for greater levels of complexity to arise, and perpetuation of the species in the long run. And as the saying goes, “Necessity may be the mother of invention, but play is certainly the father.”

The take-home message is we need more play in school, not less, even as there is increasing pressure to focus on academics. Some educational writers have said play is simply practice for future adult behavior, such as hunting in the animal kingdom, stalking or fleeing, depending on if they are a predator or prey. But more and more research is showing that play sets the stage for virtually all learning, vestibular system integration, amygdala regulation, increased neuroplasticity and BDNF (brain derived neurotrophic factor), etc.

Since games and play activities can be so varied, they allow for many different types of skills to be built and practiced. Research shows, in fact, that 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 the comfort zone, and not in the panic zone, either. That right amount may be different for everyone, depending on their own experiences, learning needs, and neurodivergences.

Peter Gray has written, “The most important skills that children everywhere must learn in order to live happy, productive, moral lives are skills that are not necessarily taught in school. Perhaps such skills cannot be taught at all. They are learned and practiced by children in play. These include the abilities to think creatively, to get along with other people and cooperate effectively, and to control their own impulses and emotions... The creative mind is a playful mind.”

Many great thinkers and leaders in education have noted this. For example, Carl Jung comes to mind: “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.”

This is a basic PDF that serves as a starting point to use play for building connection and trust. For a more comprehensive resource see Howard Moody’s *Heart of Play Games Manual: Over 200 Activities for Connection and Joy*.

In building toward more restorative approaches in your school community it is important to focus on the basic needs that students are striving to meet in their day to day lives. Sure, we want to be able to sit in restorative circles to share our feelings, resolve conflicts, and repair harm that has happened. Of course we want to take mindful moments throughout the day to reset ourselves to a balanced, present and ready to learn state. To be in that balanced and ready to learn state it means that everyone’s basic needs of rest, safety, and nourishment need to be met. And yet students may have had various stresses at home or in their everyday life. We do our best within a school learning community to meet the students’ basic needs. When these basic needs of safety and nourishment

are met, you people are by nature curious and highly social beings. They have a very strong desire to meet their needs for connection, fun, joy, community and belonging. To meet these needs, and many others, is important. To do this first means there has to be a culture of trust, safety and connection and one of the fastest and most effective ways to do this is through play.

Since safety and trust are such important needs for everyone it is vital to create that safety when offering engaged social play experiences. Playing is by its nature a risky enterprise. You are trusting the others you are playing with to be playful, safe, and equitable (i.e, to follow the rules). There is also an element of surprise, the outcomes are unknown and often students have been hurt physically and emotionally in play experiences with others. Thus, play is a risky endeavor. So, when choosing a group game having just the right amount of risk is important. Perhaps one low risk game is all a group can engage in the first few 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. Then maybe the next time you can start with a medium risk game followed by a high-risk game. Also, do your best to never assume a group is in the same state as they were the time before. Perhaps dropping back to a low-risk game is important to redevelop some safety and trust within the group.

This resource is 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.

Low Risk Games

Name & Movement Replay (5 - 40)

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

Set-up

1. Have everyone in a circle.
2. Explain that each person will do a movement and say their name.
3. Tell the players that the only thing they need to do is remember their own movement and name!
4. As the leader, demonstrate by doing a name and movement. The group then replays your name and the movement. Then the next person does their name.
5. For example, John steps forward, says his name, and bows at the waist. The group then says John's name and does his movement.

Game Play

So now that everyone sees how the game is played the next person to the leader's left (you could go to the right) shares their name and movement, and everyone repeats it. This goes all the way around the circle, giving everyone a chance to create their own movement associated with their name. Once it is complete, tell the group: "now we are going to do it three times as fast." As the leader, do your name and movement and then the group quickly replays it and on you go around the circle.

Variations

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 simple. No somersaults, flying leaps etc. Just trust their bodies and make a movement. This is a low-risk game due to its simplicity. However, 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.

The Cool Breeze Blows for Anyone Who (10 - 40)

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

Set-up

1. Everyone is seated in chairs.
2. Demonstrate to the group how when a statement is said in the form of the “Cool Breeze Blows for Anyone who...” and the answer to the question is yes then they get up and move to another chair.
3. For example, “The cool breeze blows for anyone who... likes vanilla ice cream.”

Game Play

The teacher/leader calls out the first few statements. After a few statements the leader can ask for suggestions as to how players could move in different manners of i.e. Slow motion, bunny hop, like a robot etc... remembering to keep it safe.

Then the leader can ask for volunteers to give the statements. “The cool breeze blows for anyone who ate pizza last night.”

Variations

When the answer is yes you all go to the center of the circle and give each other high fives or a loud cheer. Or play the game with everyone choosing to be a member of a category. For example, everyone chooses to be something in nature. So, the question would be “The Cool Breeze blows for anyone that walks on four legs.” Or the Cool breeze blows for anyone that grows in soil.” Or use different phrases such as the “Big Wind Blows for anyone who.”

Teaching Points

Remind the players 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 (15 – 40)

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

Set Up

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

Game Play

The person in the middle names off several vegetables and then says “switch!” 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. Whoever is left without a spot becomes the next detective in the middle. If the person in the middle calls out “vegetarianism” everyone has to go. 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.

Set Up

1. Can be played in a circle with one person picking a one syllable word and everyone else is the guesser.
2. Choose only one syllable words.
3. 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."
4. The secret word chosen is "rat."

Game Play

So, anyone that wants to can act out, mime out, a word that rhymes with "cat." A person jumps up and mimes out the word they are thinking of. The person who has chosen the secret word now in essence becomes the guesser of what that person is acting out and responds in ritualistic fashion and says....."No, it's not bat"..... "No, it's not mat" "No it is not fat" until someone mimes out the correct word. "Yes, it is a rat." That person who guessed it correctly will now pick a new word (or choose anyone randomly if that person does not want to come up with a word). 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. The person who guesses correctly can be the next secret word creator.

Variations

The game also works very nicely with 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.

Whoosh

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

Set Up

1. Gather everyone in a circle.
2. Demonstrate how with the simple gesturing of passing a wave at waist level we are going to pass a “Whoosh” around the circle. Maybe practice on time sending a whoosh around the circle before setting the team goal of time.
3. Ask if there is someone who can be a timekeeper in the group who has a stopwatch on their watch or cell phone as we are going to time how long this takes.

Game Play

With a group of thirty it will usually take about 15 - 20 seconds. “Now that we have done that, let’s see how much faster we can do it.” People will say twelve or ten seconds. Invariably someone says a decently low number and the group will make all kinds of declarations of doubt. They can’t possibly do it in 6 seconds. I usually pick a time as the goal that is close to that lowest, maybe even lower than someone suggested but not too low. In a group of thirty I might say let’s shoot for under 7 seconds appeasing the person who said 6 who almost everyone thinks has made a wild guess.

“Okay let’s get ready and try again.” Almost always the group cuts their time in half. And you say “look we just cut 9 seconds off our previous time so now we have done it in eleven seconds. We only have to cut four more seconds off the time. I ask the group for suggestions as to how they can do it faster. Getting closer is a good suggestion. Let’s try it. Or maybe the suggestion is to go in the other direction and try that. Another suggestion is for everyone to turn their head in one direction. Doesn’t usually help but you can try it.

So now I bet the group is close to the goal, maybe improving a couple of more seconds. You can make a bit of a joke about where in the circle it moved quickly and where maybe it didn’t. Eventually I may share the “secret”, which is anticipation. You know it is coming to you so just keep it going, just like in the wave at a sporting event. Once everyone gets this, it will go faster. If they don’t reach their goal, tell them no one is going to care if they are a little bit ahead of the wave. Just get it flying around the circle. Sometimes someone will be smart and say “can we say Ooh” all at once. In essence this fits into the challenge. I have seen large groups of forty or fifty people send it around in a wave of about 8 seconds. Groups of twenty I have seen them do it in under 4 seconds. It is just how fast the wave can go. Ready, “Whoosh!”

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.

Medium Risk Games

Name and Movement and Alliteration (5 – 40)

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

Set -up

1. Having everyone standing in a circle is best.
2. Very similar to name and movement replay, in this version 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.
3. 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!”
4. The next person says, (for example) “Hi I am hopping Harry”, hopping as he says it. Everyone responds, “He is Hopping Harry... or, Courageous Carol”, etc.

Game Play

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. Allow for someone like Karen to say “Crazy Karen.” 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.

Introduce A New Friend (10 - 30+)

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

Set Up

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.

Game play

Have the players stand 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 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. If the group is comfortable with each other, have them link arms as they walk around. 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 (10 - 40)

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.

Set up

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.

Game Play

The leader shouts out the word “gotcha”, and everyone reacts. The leader then asks the players to reset back to the starting position and play continues. Playing with that feeling of anticipation and maybe a head fake to fake players out before actually saying the magic word “gotcha” will get everyone laughing. 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 (8- 20)

A great cooperative game.

Set -up

1. Have the group form a circle.
2. One person will be designated as the starter. The starter has several soft tossing balls available. Soft beanie baby stuffed toys or tennis balls can work.
3. The starter starts by tossing a ball to a person across the circle. This first person will throw to that same person every time.
4. 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.
5. Remind the players the one thing they must remember is who they toss it to.

Game play

Repeat the pattern to make sure everyone knows it, (no need to cross arms as everyone should remember who they tossed it to) and then commence to send the ball around as quickly as possible. Begin adding more balls gradually. If people drop the balls just get the balls going again. Remind the players that for optimum success to remember to watch the person who they are throwing it to and to throw underhanded.

Try adding a command such as now in 'slow motion' or 'hyper speed' or try reversing the throwing pattern.

Variations

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? (8 - 40)

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

Set-Up

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.

Game Play

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. The person who does not get a seat asks the next question.

Sometimes players will get stuck when they have to think of a question on the spot, so recommend travel questions, i.e. "Have you ever been to New Hampshire?" Or suggest anything simple 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.

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..."

Teaching Points

This game is ideal for 10 - 40 people. If chairs are not available, it can be done with people standing in a circle and the last person to find a space in the circle is the next questioner.

It is important to remind players that the object is not make physical contact with anybody, 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 (6 - 30)

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

Set Up

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. The goal is for the claps to happen at exactly the same time and for the claps to be passed in rhythm.

Game Play

Start the claps and after a round or two pick up the pace just a bit. Then introduce that a person can change the direction of the clap. This happens by the receiving person who has just received the clap not to turn and face the next person rather they stay facing that person and clap a second time which hopefully that person picks up the change and claps at the same time in the same rhythm that has been happening. Thus, it gets sent back in the direction it came. The challenge is to do it in the same rhythm and the person who just turned and passed the clap really must pay attention when this happens because everyone has gotten used to turning and passing.

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 (8-20)

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

Set Up

1. Have everyone get in a circle.
2. Demonstrate how each person will mirror as best they can the sound and movement that is created by the leader.

Game Play

The leader turns to the next person in the circle and does a sound and movement and this person immediately replays that same sound and movement and immediately turns to the next person and recreates this same sound and movement which and on it goes around the circle, like a wave. 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.

Variations

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.

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

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.

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! (5 – 40)

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

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 (10 - 40)

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

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 (8 - 30+)

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

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 (8 - 30+)

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

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.

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.

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

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.

Gift Giving - (What's in the Box?)

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

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.