Life is good Playmakers Overview:

Life is good Playmakers, formerly Project Joy, is a national movement, started in 1989, to heal and strengthen children – especially those whose lives have been deeply impacted by trauma. Millions of our nation’s youngest children have experienced profound trauma in its many forms – community violence, abuse, neglect, natural disasters, and extreme poverty. Theirs is a tragic and largely silent epidemic. It receives a fraction of the attention and resources directed at other childhood illnesses, yet it cripples development, devastates young lives, and shortens life expectancy.

Play is an essential part of the cure for these wounded children. Empowering, joyful play with sensitive, caring adults can help to restore what trauma violently strips from a child. Life is good Playmakers ensures that the adults closest to these children – often frontline childcare providers like yourself - have the knowledge, skills, and resources to deliver the powerful medicine of joyful, loving, life-changing relationships through playful engagement to the children who need it most. Our goal is that this manual, coupled with your experience at this training retreat, will help you use play to lovingly connect with your children, diminish their fears, renew their joy, and boost their capacity to learn and grow into healthy, happy adults.

The Impact of Childhood Trauma

Psychological trauma can be defined as an extremely threatening experience, or series of experiences, that completely overwhelms a child’s psychosocial capacity to cope. Sadly, exposure to childhood trauma has impacted millions of children nationwide (some estimate that as many as ¼ of the nation’s 80 million children have been victimized by trauma) and is considered by many to be the greatest health crisis facing our nation today.
In 1998, The United States Center for Disease Control conducted the largest study of its kind ever to show how exposure to trauma, which they called ACE (an acronym for Adverse Childhood Experience), was the root cause of many common diseases that prematurely claim the lives of millions of Americans each year. What they proved was that millions of Americans experience one or more ACEs during childhood. As a result of these experiences, many went on to develop social and emotional impairments. As a result of these impairments, some engaged in health risk behaviors (such as street drug use, drinking, smoking, etc) in an attempt to cope with the ensuing loneliness and emotional pain. In some cases, these health risk behaviors eventually led to disease and disability and, as a result in some cases, they even led to premature death (see Figure 1).

**Designed to Survive: How Children Respond to Trauma**

For all human beings, severe threat automatically triggers a physical response that is initiated by the oldest and most primitive region of our brain. This response, often referred to as the “fight or flight” response, is brilliantly designed to help us respond
immediately to threat and hopefully help us get to safety. However, when the threat is so severe that it overwhelms the individual and prevents them from taking effective action, the brain (and the entire person for that matter) can get thrown out of balance. In the words of esteemed trauma psychologist Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, “Preventing people from moving and taking effective action is what makes trauma trauma.” The bodies and minds of young children are even more susceptible to the impact of traumatic stress because their brains are still developing.

According to Dr. Bruce Perry, “Our brains develop in use-dependant ways.” This means that if people, especially children, are put into situations where they are constantly forced to respond to threat, then the areas of their brains that are responsible for responding to threat (which are the lower, more primitive regions of the brain) will develop more than other important regions of their brains. As a result, the development of higher brain regions, which are responsible for social, emotional and cognitive functioning, run the risk of being severely compromised.

In other words, forcing a developing child to focus on surviving instead of on loving, playing, and exploring has devastating long-term effects on their health and development.

**Fear Destroys Playfulness**

Psychologist and neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp conducted a very interesting research project examining how fear impacts playfulness in young, developing mammals. During his research, he discovered that playful engagement was instrumental in the brain development of young rats. To determine this, he looked at the brain development of rats that were raised in two different types of living environments. The first environment, which he called an “enriched environment,” consisted of several rats living together with lots of toys to explore (balls, tunnels, running wheels, etc). The second environment, which he called an “unenriched environment,” housed only a sole rat in an empty cage,
with no toys. Over the course of several experiments, Panksepp found that rats living together in enriched environments had far greater dendrite development (neurological connections that are representative of brain development and learning) than rats living alone in unenriched environments. He even learned that rats laugh during play. (But that’s a story for another time. Go to YouTube and search for “laughing rats” if you don’t believe me.)

Once Panksepp proved that rat pups did indeed play and learn, he decided to measure the impact that fear would have on play and learning. To do this, he measured the level of play activity of a group of rat pups (Figure 2) in an enriched environment. Once he determined their baseline level of play activity, he put a cat hair into their cage. As one might have guessed, upon smelling the cat hair, the rats became frightened and immediately stopped playing (Figure 3). Panksepp then removed the cat hair from the cage to see if the rats would return to their previous level of playfulness. Much to his surprise, the rats never returned to their previous level of play activity even after the “threat” (the cat hair) was removed (Figure 4). Sadly, it was concluded that exposure to severe threat, at a vulnerable young age, forever changed the development and behavior of these playful little mammals.
Obviously, human beings are not the same as rats. Although our autonomic responses to threat are actually quite similar to those of other mammals (including rats), our brains are far more evolved. We can think more complexly, feel more deeply, express a wider range of emotions, and have the potential to employ far more coping behaviors. In children, overwhelming fear can cause them to withdraw from once joyful activities, like playing (It’s difficult to pay attention to the toy blocks if your focus needs to be on basic survival.) Overwhelming fear can also cause difficulties forming trusting relationships, as well as induce feelings of powerlessness and despair.

**Playfulness - the single most important trait of childhood**

We often ask professionals who dedicate their lives to helping the most wounded and vulnerable of our nation’s children one simple question - “If you had the power to nurture just one trait in a child that would best help that child overcome any and all adversity that they face in their lifetime, what would that trait be?” In other words, what trait best helps a child develop resiliency? We have had the honor of asking this question to thousands of outstanding teachers, social workers, coaches, psychologists, psychiatrists, parents, and others, and have heard some great answers - answers like trust, confidence, self-esteem, discipline, and creativity to name a few. One answer that we almost never hear, and the one that we believe to be most important to children, is the trait of playfulness. **Playfulness is the motivation to freely and joyfully engage with, connect with, and explore the surrounding world.** What could be more important than that? Playfulness is an approach to life – an attitude. It is a spirit with which one can approach every (and we mean every) aspect of life – the good, the bad, and the ugly.
Play v. Playfulness

When most people think of play, they usually think of it in terms of a type of activity – let’s say playing baseball, swinging on a swing, and/or making sand castles in a sandbox. However, our belief is that an activity alone can’t be considered play unless it is engaged playfully (Figure 5 is a pretty good example).

I would suggest that on any given Saturday afternoon, at ball fields across America, there are lots of children who are “playing” baseball without any sense of joy, passion, connection, or empowerment. For those children, “working” baseball would be a far more accurate description of their activity.

On the other end of the spectrum, activities that we generally think of as work - such as doing math homework, raking leaves, cooking dinner, and/or cleaning one’s bedroom - can be better described as “play” if they are approached in a playful manner. According
to British historian Arnold Toynbee, “The supreme accomplishment is to blur the line between work and play.” At Life is good Playmakers, we couldn’t agree more.

**Barriers to Playfulness**

For children who have been deeply impacted by trauma, engaging the world playfully is difficult. As Panksepp’s research with rat pups suggests, it is likely that exposure to overwhelming threat during a child’s formative years can alter their potentially “playful brain” – one that is open to exploration and connection – and turn it into more of a “surviving brain” that is forced to primarily focus on avoiding threat (See Figure 6).

In other words, when basic survival is a child’s primary goal, it is impossible for them to engage the world playfully. What does it take for a child to engage the world playfully? It takes the cultivation of vital social, emotional, and cognitive traits such as confidence, trust, joy, creativity, passion, and love. We believe that this collection of internal traits, as well as others, can be simply organized into four domains of playfulness.
The Domains of Playfulness

Life is good Playmakers has classified the four domains of playfulness as Joyfulness, Social Connection, Internal Control, and Active Engagement. In order for a child to reach their full potential of playfulness, they must excel in each of these four vital areas (See Figure 7).

Joyfulness

Joyfulness is defined as the child’s sense of love, fulfillment, and hope that is expressed with displays of pleasure and exuberance. It differs from happiness in that it is more stable and far less influenced by external factors. For example, as a die-hard Red Sox fan, I can’t say that I am happy when they lose. However, my joyfulness
allows me to still love the team and remain hopeful and optimistic about what tomorrow’s game may bring. Joy is not the absence of sadness. It is the spirit of love and hope that remains deep inside you that gives you the strength and courage to persevere despite the sadness. I am reminded of one of my favorite jokes in which a seven-year-old boy is joyfully singing and dancing in the outfield during a Little League baseball game. His dad arrives at the game a little late, sees his son having the time of his life and proceeds to ask him the score. Overjoyed, the little boy shouts that the score is 27 to nothing! Excited, the dad shouts back, “Wow! You guys are winning 27 to nothing?” The little boy replies, “Heck no dad, we’re losing 27 to nothing!” Surprised, the dad asks, “Then what are you so happy about?” To which the boys proudly replies, “We haven’t even been up yet!”

This joyful little boy could have responded in many different ways to his dad’s question. He could have said that he was happy to be playing baseball; happy to feel the warm sun on his face; happy to have a dad who cares enough to watch his baseball game, or a whole host of other little “blessings.” Joy is not dependant on the score but rather on our “love of the game.” It is our loving and hopeful spirit that gives us the strength to never to give up.

Social Connection

Social Connection is defined as the child’s cooperative interactions with others and the surrounding world. Dean Martin once sang, “You’re nobody ‘til somebody loves you,” and Barbara Streisand once sang, “People who need people are the luckiest people in the world.” Who knew that this once famous crooner and this still kind-of-famous diva were such experts on attachment? People – especially children – need adults to love and care for them. It’s as simple as that. It is this love and caring that enables children to develop secure attachments that ultimately give them the confidence to explore the world around them. This confidence is essential to helping children reach their playful potential.
Humans are herd animals. We travel in packs (called families / communities) and don’t do well in isolation. This does not mean that we don’t enjoy being alone at times. People – especially those who have the option of returning to loving networks of social supports – also enjoy moments (even hours and days) of solitude. Yet the universal act of laughter gives us good reason to believe we need connection with others. It has been said that laughter has no foreign accent. Think about it. It’s true. All over the world, human beings “choose” to laugh (did you know that most laughter is not an involuntary response to humor but a conscious choice) in order to signal to other people that they are safe to connect with. Perhaps it’s true that the shortest distance between two people is a laugh.

**Internal Control**

*Internal Control is defined as the child’s sense of safety, worth, and competence that allows them to engage with the surrounding world.* All people, especially children, need to feel some level of safety and competence in order to effectively explore the world around them. After all, the world is a terrifying place for someone who views him or herself as powerless and incompetent. Children deserve to feel as if they are safe, special, and of great value. From this foundation of safety and competence, we develop a psychosocial “base camp” from where we can embark on life’s adventures and return to when these adventures prove too difficult or when we need to rest and “restock our supplies.” One of my favorite Internal Control stories is about a five-year-old girl who is drawing a picture in her art class. The teacher, seeing her hard at work, asks her what she is drawing. The little girls inform her that she is drawing a picture of God. Surprised, the teacher says to the little girl, “But nobody knows what God looks like.” To which the little girl replies firmly, “They will when I’m done!” It is this kind of confidence and healthy “self-centeredness” that allow for us to continue to go out into the world and explore despite all of our vulnerabilities.

**Active Engagement**
Active engagement is defined as the child’s enthusiastic and complete immersion in an activity. In other words, Active Engagement is not only about being completely in the moment, but really enjoying that moment too. Children who have experienced severe trauma have difficulty being in the moment. They are often so preoccupied by their past experiences and so anxious about what they can expect (or not expect) in the future, that as a result, traumatized children often find it exceedingly difficult to be present. Without the ability to be in the moment, healing can’t occur. Experiences of safety, joy, wonder, and love can only be felt in the moment. Even when we reflect on past joys, it is the moment of reflection, not the past experience, where joy is felt. With this in mind, we need to create environments where children can experience moments of wonder, passion, imagination, and joy—moments that are powerful enough to help soothe past fears and sorrows, and prepare a space in which joy can take root.

**Action Steps**

Now it’s time to put all this theory into action! One thing to keep in mind is that the best way to bring joy and playfulness to your children is to have it yourself! You need to be a living example of joy, love, creativity, and peace in order to nurture these same qualities in your children. With this in mind, we strongly encourage you to actively and playfully participate in the following activities with your children. This way, all of you can lead healthier, more joyful lives. Turn the page for some fun activities that we recommend. We have no doubt you’ll be creating many more of your own in the days ahead!

Breathe deeply, smile, and enjoy…
A few more important ingredients...

What You Pay Attention To Grows

Even very competitive sports and games can help nurture the development of children when, as facilitators, we pay attention to what is truly important – trust, respect, love, and creativity.

For example, I’ve seen soccer coaches who only cheer for children when they make great passes, score a goals or make some type of outstanding play. In addition, the cheering is usually most robust when their team is winning. The message they are sending to their players is that they are only valued when they physically perform to a certain standard. What grows in these players is often a “win at all costs attitude” and a desire to get noticed by making great individual plays.

I have seen other coaches who, in addition to cheering great plays, also cheer for players who are being supportive of each other, giving great effort regardless of the outcome, trying despite adversity, or encouraging players to do their best and have fun. What grows in these players is the desire to be a supportive, persevering team member who takes pride in going out, putting forth a great effort and enjoying the sport.

If our goal is only to create great players, perhaps we should focus more on performance and skill. However, if our goal is to create great people, we need to pay more attention to qualities like compassion, cooperation, communication, attitude, ethics, effort, humility, courage, responsibility, and enthusiasm.
Often times during sports, young children will ask me, “Who is winning?” My response is often, “Are you having fun?” If they say yes, then I tell them that they are winning regardless of the score. When they keep pushing for the score, I tell them that I’m not really sure. I’m having so much fun that it’s been difficult to keep score. Pretty soon they get the message that having fun and playing is more important than scoring more points than the other team.

**The Use of Fantasy in Collaborative Games**

The rules and required pieces of equipment for cooperative games provide a skeletal structure to each activity. When fantasy is added to this structure, basic games are transformed into adventures capable of expanding the minds and experiences of all participants. For fantasy to be effective, we must ensure that the fantasies we use are developmentally appropriate, relevant to the group’s goals, stimulating, and safe.

Most games consist of players trying to achieve an objective while observing various rules. For example, in the game “Squirrels and Nuts,” the participants must simply collect objects and bring them back to their base without being tagged by the instructor. If participants are tagged, they must wait for a team member to tag them and they can proceed with the game. By adding fantasy to the basic rules, we can give this game a new personality to which each child can assign meaning. One such fantasy that we have created is that the children are squirrels, their home base is a squirrel hole, the cones that they are collecting are nuts and that the counselor who is trying to stop them is a fox. The fantasies in this game represent…

- Who you are
- Where your safe place is
- What you are trying to get
- What is trying to stop you from getting it

I played this game before with preschoolers who created this fantasy…

- We are kittens
Our safe place is on the couch
We are trying to get ice cream cones
A puppy dog is trying to stop us

I played this one with a bunch of teens who created this fantasy...

I am me
My safe place is hanging out with my friends
I am trying to get a new car and a girlfriend
Parents and adults are trying to stop me

As you can see, creating the fantasy for the game can be more fun than the actual game. Allow the children to take active roles in creating their own fantasies. The group does not always need to agree on one fantasy per game. Children can play the same game despite engaging in different fantasies. It is important to make sure that the fantasies used are not overly threatening to any of the group participants.

By changing the fantasy and keeping the rules and objectives the same, most of these collaborative games can be safe and stimulating to a wide range of developmental levels.

**Guidance**

Some people call it limit setting, some call it discipline, others call it behavior management, but we are not here to manage children’s behavior. We are here to *guide* children and help them thrive.

In order for children to feel safe and comfortable while participating in the groups, they must have the choice to participate or not. Some children will want to play every game, while others might want to sit out or watch at times. It is important for us to support their choices and listen when they ask for this space. During the first group and in creating the goals and ground rules, be sure to remind the children that, “Nobody is going to be forced to participate in this group. One of my jobs in this group will be to ensure that we
all have fun and stay safe, so you can let me know if there is something you don’t feel interested in doing.”

On occasion during group sessions, there will be times when a child's behavior is disruptive and violates the group’s ground rules. During these times, the group leader must remind the child of the ground rules and the consequences for continued offending behaviors, while supporting them in re-engaging in the group in a positive manner.

To effectively guide children’s behavior, the group leader must be able to distinguish between serious behaviors that need addressing and behaviors that are simply petty nuisances. By ignoring as much petty behavior as possible, interventions for more serious infractions will be more effective. Try to remember that "misbehavior" is a form of communication. It is helpful to step back and think about what children are telling you by their behavior. For example, a child who is oppositional during the set-up of a game might simply be expressing that he/she is nervous about a particular aspect of the game. By saying, "I noticed that you don’t seem comfortable playing this game and are arguing a lot about the rules, is there something about this game that is making you nervous?" - you can more effectively get to the root of the problem.

Once a behavior is determined to be disruptive and in violation of group rules, the group leader must inform the child that the behavior is disruptive and needs to stop. The group leader should also explain why the behavior is disruptive. If you cannot think of a reason why the behavior must stop, it is probably a good idea not to set the limit.

If the behavior continues, the group leader must remind the child that the behavior must cease and inform them of a consequence that will be administered if the behavior continues. Consequences should be fair, respectful, and logical. They should not be punitive. For example, if a child intentionally paints on his desk, the fair and respectful consequence would be to have the child wash his/her desk. The punitive consequence
would be for the child to clean all the desks in the class. Punitive consequences result in children feeling resentful and angry. These feelings will most likely result in increased behavioral difficulties.

Once a limit is set, it must be enforced. If you do not enforce the limits you set, behavior management will be a perpetual problem. With this in mind, make sure that the limits you set are ones that you are comfortable enforcing.
Now Let The Games Begin…

If you are running regular group sessions, the structure should consist of the following:

A. 1 or 2 group warm-up activities
Warm-up activities, comprised of a series of simple movements, help welcome and honor each unique child to the group, recognize each child as a vital member of the group, and prepare them physically and socially for play. In addition, these activities help children connect with one another, while also allowing them to practice listening and self-regulation. The group leader does not need to do every one of these warm-up activities. However, we suggest that you choose at least one or two warm-up activities at the start of each session. Warm-up activities are done in a circle and/or even around a parachute!

“The circle is physically and symbolically essential in group work of any kind. Being in a circle everyone is equal and recognized. Everyone can be seen; everyone can see. In a circle everyone is connected, no one is left out. Everyone is essential to the development of the circle; if someone leaves the circle, there is a hole in it.”
- Dicki Johnson Macy, M.A. Expressive Therapist

B. 1 Big Game (or a couple little ones)
The games in this manual are organized by theme for your reference:
- Foundational, Teambuilding games
- Circle Games
- Cooperative Tag & Collecting Games
- Tag Games
- Problem-Solving & Challenge Games
- Large Cooperative Games

C. Free time
Free time is an opportunity for kids to engage, connect, and explore in a safe environment that is less structured than the big games.

D. A short series of cool down activities
Cool down activities are simple, basic ways to help children regulate their bodies (slow down their heart rate and breath) and transition from very active, high-energy games. It is also a perfect opportunity for children to process and reflect on their group experience.
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Part 1: Warm-Up Activities

Body Shakes

Standing around the circle, you can talk about the energy that we all have in our bodies that sometimes gets stuck. Children are each asked which part of their bodies they would like to shake and wake, in order to release that energy and get it moving. If a child suggests hands, the whole group shakes their hands while chanting, "hands shake, hands shake, hands shake, STOP!" If the next child suggests shoulders, the whole group shakes their shoulders while chanting, "shoulder shakes, shoulder shakes, shoulder shakes, STOP!" The game continues until each child has had a turn to suggest a type of "body shake." After each turn, we thank each child for his or her great suggestion.

Hot, Hot Hands (Rubbing, Rubbing, Rubbing, Warm)

Sitting in a circle the facilitator asks the group if they are ready to get warmed-up! He or she guides the children to quickly rub the palms of their hands together. The faster they rub, the warmer their hands will become (rub, rub...rub-rub...rub-rub... waaarrrm). You can tell the children that the warmth that they feel in their hands is happy energy or love, which they can share with other parts of their body through touch. Guide them to use their hot hands on different parts of their body to help them warm-up and get ready to play together.

Mad, Hot Ball-Roll

· The group is asked to hold hands and form a circle. They are then instructed to let go of hands and sit “pretzel legs” in a circle.
· The group facilitator, who is also part of the circle, introduces a foam ball to the group and invites the group to move this ball throughout the center of the circle without picking up the ball, allowing it to stop rolling, or allowing the ball to leave the circle.
· This is accomplished by “slapping” gently or pushing the ball with open hands.
· Once the group has accomplished this & the ball is moving quickly within the circle, one child is asked to enter the circle.
· His/her job is to dance while trying to avoid letting the ball touch his/her toes.
· It is important to remind the group that the ball must stay rolling.
· Each child should be allowed a turn in the middle for a set time (15 – 30 seconds) and should not be asked to leave the center of the circle as a result of being touched by the ball. The facilitator notifies when a child’s turn in the middle has ended and it is time for another child to have a turn.
· Explain to the children how the job of the outer circle is to help the person in the middle invent new dance moves by challenging them with the quickly rolling ball. The lesson that this can teach is that facing challenge can sometimes bring out the best in us.
· This game is a lot more fun when some lively dance music is introduced.
NAMEBALL

Children sit pretzel-legs in a circle. The adult introduces the name ball to the group (any soft ball will do) and passes it around the circle. When each child has the name ball in their possession, they are asked to say their name anyway they would like (for example, they can say it loudly, quietly, in a silly or creative way, singing it, rapping it, --and demonstrate these ways with your own name as you offer the suggestions about how they can say their names). Once the child says their name, the rest of the group echoes back that child's name just as he or she originally said it. If a child chooses not to say their name, the adult can ask if that child would like for the group to help them say their name. If the child still declines, the adult should thank the child for telling the group what they want and let the child know how happy they are that the child is part of the group.

NEWSBALL

In this game, the children sit in a circle and use the Newsball (any soft ball will do) to tell news about themselves with the group. Everyone in the group will “share” news, even if they do not tell news, simply because they’re in the circle. Everyone shares news either by telling or listening! The news may be about something they did, something they like, something that happened to them, a favorite TV show or movie, what they had for breakfast, anything! It's also important to specifically say that their news can be any kind of news (and give some examples of kinds of news: happy news, sad news, serious news, silly news, difficult news, funny news, etc.) Really, ANY kind of news! When a child is holding the ball, they can first say how they would like the group to respond to their news, and then they can share their news. Some children may want to get a standing ovation after their news, others might like a silent appreciation as the group puts their hand to their heart, and still other children may want to make up their own unique response. The rest of the group listens to the news and responds as the “teller” asked, and then raise their hand or ask for the ball when they would like a turn to tell news.

PARACHUTE SHAKE IT UP

The children stand in a circle holding onto the handles of the parachute. The adult either invites the children to begin shaking the parachute or asks for their ideas about what they could do with the parachute, and the children decide to shake it. While they are shaking, the adult leads in chanting, "shake-shake, shake-shake, shake-shake, stooooooop (a hand motion accompanies the stop command)!" Adults and children can explore their creativity by thinking of all kinds of different shakes to do, making sure every child who wants to pick/make up a shake gets a turn. If a new shake gets invented, just ask the inventor to demonstrate it, so everyone else can do it too!

TAPS 1 - “JUST FOR FUN”

This can be played by simply getting into groups of 2 to 7 people and tapping a beach ball (or balloon) around, trying to keep it up in the air—no more rules than that! It’s a great idea to put on some beach ball-tapping music while you play (Jack Johnson's “Better Together” is one of
our favorites.) Tap when the music is on, stop when the music stops.

It is helpful to invite the children to play with a Playful Mind (be present & be accepting of your abilities, which means no need to apologize for “bad” taps), a Playful Body (be relaxed and feel all the sensations there are to experience), and a Playful Spirit (smile & breathe).

You can add rules in a progressive format, to make the game more challenging or competitive.

_A helpful guideline for deciding which level is best for your group:_ The greater the level of trust in the group (within each child and between group members), the greater the tolerance for competition.

**“JUST FOR FUN” VARIATIONS**

You can make small rules to make the game more interesting, such as:

- **Other Hand Taps:** Try to tap with your “other” hand only
- **Body Taps:** Try to tap with your head or other body parts besides your hands
- **Funny Noise Taps:** Each person picks a funny noise to make (boing, oink, whistle, etc.) each time they tap the ball
- **Crab Taps:** Try to tap with your hands or your feet while in a “crab walk” position (hands and feet on the floor with belly up to the sky)

Have the group come up with additional ideas to make it interesting.

**TAPS 2 - “TEAM CHALLENGE”**

Start with Taps 1 and add these rules:
- No double taps (when one person taps the ball twice in a row)
- Count the taps to create a group record

**TAPS 3 - “BIGGER TEAM CHALLENGE”**

Start with Taps 2 and add these rules:
- Create multiple tapping circles and have each set team challenge records, then add records together for a total team score. Set a total team score goal to aim for, if it will help motivate them.

**TAPS 4 - “COMPETITION”**

Start with Taps 3 and add these rules:
- Play on two teams and then compare record number for a winner (This is best played with kids on one team and adults on the other, unless you are confident that the level of trust within the team is strong enough to support kids playing vs. kids while the experience is still joyful, connecting, safe, and engaging for all team members)
TEAM WARM-UP CIRCLE

This game starts with the group standing in a circle around the parachute.
· Going around the circle, each member of the group is given the opportunity to teach and lead the group through a warm-up activity of their choice.
· Anything is possible. From traditional warm-up activities like jumping jacks and push ups, to non-traditional warm-ups like lion roars or gorilla chest pounding!
· This activity works well with background music.

TEAM WARM-UP CIRCLE - GREENBAYS

· In a circle, the children are asked to run briskly in place – during this time the leaders repeatedly chants “foot fire.”
· When the leader shouts “sky”, the children jump and reach as high as the can.
· When the leader yells, “hit it,” the children drop to the ground (almost in a push-up position) and pop right back onto their feet.
· Each child in the group should have a chance to lead for a short time following the lead of the group facilitator.
· Also, children can be given the opportunity to make up different commands other than sky, foot fire, and hit it.
· Everyone who participates should be out of breath. Especially you!
Part 2: Big Games - Foundational, Teambuilding Games

Circle of Power  
(After being played as a Big Game, this is a great warm-up activity.)

- The children are invited to stand in a circle and think of one movement (i.e. jumping up and down, shaking their head, taking a deep breath) that represents their power or joy.
- Very importantly, we then ask the children to find a place in the circle that represents the amount of challenge they would like to undertake.
- Participants who only want a little challenge are instructed to stand closer to the right of the group facilitator while those who want a big challenge should be to the left of the facilitator. The child who is to the immediate left of the facilitator will have the biggest challenge as they will have to remember everybody’s movements while the child to the immediate right of the facilitator will have the least amount of challenge.
- The group facilitator enters the circle first, demonstrates his/her movement, & returns to their original place as part of the circle.
- The child to their immediate right then enters the circle, demonstrates the previous person’s movement, and then introduces his/her own movement.
- The next child must remember and demonstrate each previous person’s movement as well as introduce their own.
- The further you move through the circle, the more difficult it is to remember all of the previous movements.
- If a child forgets a movement, they ask the group for help.

Cool Breeze Blows 1.0  
(great for introducing the game and for younger children)

Chairs are arranged in a circle with one chair for each child and the adult(s). The adult starts the game by saying, “The cool breeze blows for everyone who…” and then completes the sentence by saying something that some of the children may have in common. For example, the adult might say, “The cool breeze blows for everyone who loves ice cream” or “The cool breeze blows for anyone wearing a red shirt” or “The cool breeze blows for anyone who has a sister,” etc. Anyone seated in the circle for which the statement rings true, simply has to get up and move to a different seat in the circle (switching seats with other children with whom they have something in common). If only one child gets up, leaving them unable to switch seats with someone else, they can simply take a bow and sit back down in their original seat. It is important to give children permission to choose how much they want to share with the group. All children can elect to stay seated even if “the cool breeze blows for them.” When the adult has offered enough “cool breeze blows for…” questions for the children to be engaged and understand the game, you can then ask children for ideas. They can simply volunteer for a turn, and when you pick them, they say what the “cool breeze blows for” to start the round.

Example questions
The cool breeze blows for anyone who:
- Has a brother or sister
- Has a pet at home
• Likes to be outside
• Likes to dance
• Likes to draw
• Likes to use their imagination
• Likes to eat pizza
• Likes to read stories

A fun variation of the Cool Breeze Blows: Instead of saying “The cool breeze blows for anyone who...” you can start the game by saying “The big bunny hops for anyone who...” and that lets everyone know to move to a new seat by hopping. You can make up a new phrase for lots of different movements – hopping, skipping, galloping, shuffling, crawling, slithering and many more!

COOL BREEZE BLOWS 2.0

· Chairs are arranged in a circle with one chair for each group member.
· The group facilitator stands in the middle of the circle and starts by saying, “The cool breeze blows for everyone who...” and completes the sentence by sharing something about themselves that is true, and that they think they have in common with others in the circle. For example, if the leader loves baseball, they may say, “The cool breeze blows for everyone who loves football.”
· Anyone seated in the circle who loves football would then get up and walk quickly a new chair (they can’t go back to the seat that they were just seated at). Whomever is left without a chair stays in the middle and begins the process again by saying, “The cool breeze blows for everyone who...”
· It is important to give children permission to choose how much they want to share with the group even if it means staying seated when the cool breeze blows for you. For example, if somebody in the group were to say, “The cool breeze blows for everyone who has ever kissed somebody” - and a person in the group was uncomfortable revealing this about themselves - they could elect to stay seated regardless of whether or not they had ever “kissed somebody.” Even if a child sits for the entire game, they are still very much a part of the group.
· It is also important to tell the children that they can only share if the cool breeze blows for them--even if they know that the cool breeze blows for someone who is NOT switching chairs, they may not announce this or make someone else get up.
· I also like to give children an opportunity to think of a few cool breeze blows statements prior to starting the game so that they are not put “on the spot” to think of things when they are in the middle.
· Finally, I like to give children an opportunity to use a “lifeline,” which allows them to pass on their turn to share, if they really don’t want it or are feeling too nervous to be in the middle, and switch with someone who really wants a turn in the middle.

COOPERATIVE MUSICAL CHAIRS (a.k.a: Musical Shares)

This is played just like musical chairs but with a cooperative twist. Chairs are set-up in a circle. To begin, there should be one chair for every child playing in the game. The backs of the chairs should face towards the middle of the circle. The children dance around the outside of
the circle to music. When the music stops, all the children must find a chair and lift their feet off the floor. After each round, the facilitator removes one chair. (You can let the group decide whether to remove 1 or 2 chairs for added choice.) The children once again dance around the chairs until the music stops. Again, the children need to find chairs. This time however, there will not be enough chairs for each child to have his or her own chair. Children must cooperate and share chairs so that everyone has a seat and feet are off the floor. When all children are seated, another chair is removed, and the next round begins. If facilitators feel that sitting on laps or coordinating themselves on chairs is unsafe for their children, they can use circles made with ropes or hula hoops instead of “chairs.” When the music stops, children must find a circle to put at least one foot inside.

**MAD, HOT BALL-ROLL**

- The group is asked to hold hands and form a circle. They are then instructed to let go of hands and sit “pretzel legs” in a circle.
- The group facilitator, who is also part of the circle, introduces a foam ball to the group and invites the group to move this ball throughout the center of the circle without picking up the ball, allowing it to stop rolling, or allowing the ball to leave the circle.
- This is accomplished by “slapping” gently or pushing the ball with open hands.
- Once the group has accomplished this & the ball is moving quickly within the circle, one child is asked to enter the circle.
- His/her job is to dance while trying to avoid letting the ball touch his/her toes.
- It is important to remind the group that the ball must stay rolling.
- Each child should be allowed a turn in the middle for a set time (15 – 30 seconds) and should not be asked to leave the center of the circle as a result of being touched by the ball. The facilitator notifies when a child’s turn in the middle has ended and it is time for another child to have a turn.
- Explain to the children how the job of the outer circle is to help the person in the middle invent new dance moves by challenging them with the quickly rolling ball. The lesson that this can teach is that facing challenge can sometimes bring out the best in us.
- This game is a lot more fun when some lively dance music is introduced.

**NEWSBALL**

In this game, the children sit in a circle and use the Newsball (any soft ball will do) to tell news about themselves with the group. Everyone in the group will “share” news, even if they do not tell news, simply because they’re in the circle. Everyone shares news either by telling or listening! The news may be about something they did, something they like, something that happened to them, a favorite TV show or movie, what they had for breakfast, anything! It’s also important to specifically say that their news can be any kind of news (and give some examples of kinds of news: happy news, sad news, serious news, silly news, difficult news, funny news, etc.) Really, ANY kind of news! When a child is holding the ball, they can first say how they would like the group to respond to their news, and then they can share their news. Some children may want to get a standing ovation after their news, others might like a silent appreciation as the group puts their hand to their heart, and still other children may want to make up their own unique response. The rest of the group listens to the news and responds as the “teller” asked, and then raise their hand or ask for the ball when they would like a turn to tell news.
**ONE THROUGH SIX** (After being played as a Big Game, this is a great warm up activity.)

- The adult thinks of six different actions and gives each action a number. For example, one is jump for joy, two is run around in a circle, three is get down and do push-ups, four is give somebody in the group a high five, five is moo like a cow, and six is do a dance move, like the running man.
- The group then spreads out and the adult puts on some good music for dancing around. While the music plays, the group can dance around and include the movements in the dancing as the adult calls out the numbers in random order. The faster the numbers change – the wilder the game gets.
- Once the children get comfortable with the game, you can give them opportunities to think of actions and/or call out numbers.

**TAPS 1 - “JUST FOR FUN”**

This can be played by simply getting into groups of 2 to 7 people and tapping a beach ball (or balloon) around, trying to keep it up in the air—no more rules than that! It’s a great idea to put on some beach ball-tapping music while you play (Jack Johnson’s “Better Together” is one of our favorites.) Tap when the music is on, stop when the music stops.

It is helpful to invite the children to play with a Playful Mind (be present & be accepting of your abilities, which means no need to apologize for “bad” taps), a Playful Body (be relaxed and feel all the sensations there are to experience), and a Playful Spirit (smile & breathe).

You can add rules in a progressive format, to make the game more challenging or competitive.

*A helpful guideline for deciding which level is best for your group:* The greater the level of trust in the group (within each child and between group members), the greater the tolerance for competition.

**“JUST FOR FUN” VARIATIONS**

You can make small rules to make the game more interesting, such as:

- **Other Hand Taps:** Try to tap with your “other” hand only
- **Body Taps:** Try to tap with your head or other body parts besides your hands
- **Funny Noise Taps:** Each person picks a funny noise to make (boing, oink, whistle, etc.) each time they tap the ball
- **Crab Taps:** Try to tap with your hands or your feet while in a “crab walk” position (hands and feet on the floor with belly up to the sky)

Have the group come up with additional ideas to make it interesting.
**TAPS 2 - "TEAM CHALLENGE"**

Start with Taps 1 and add these rules:
- No double taps (when one person taps the ball twice in a row)
- Count the taps to create a group record

**TAPS 3 - "BIGGER TEAM CHALLENGE"**

Start with Taps 2 and add these rules:
- Create multiple tapping circles and have each set team challenge records, then add records together for a total team score. Set a total team score goal to aim for, if it will help motivate them.

**TAPS 4 - "COMPETITION"**

Start with Taps 3 and add these rules:
- Play on two teams and then compare record number for a winner (This is best played with kids on one team and adults on the other, unless you are confident that the level of trust within the team is strong enough to support kids playing vs. kids while the experience is still joyful, connecting, safe, and engaging for all team members)

**TEAM JUGGLE**

- The children are asked to sit or stand in a circle and one member is given a fleece ball.
- He or she starts the game by tossing the ball to someone in the group, who in turn tosses the ball to another group member (before tossing the ball to somebody, the tosser should make eye contact and say the person’s name to make sure that they are ready to catch).
- This continues until each member of the group has touched the ball once & the ball is returned to the person who started the game.
- The group continues passing the ball throughout the circle following this same pattern. As the group gets comfortable, they can move the ball more quickly. If the group decides that they would like to really increase the level of challenge, additional balls can be added.
- There are no penalties for dropped balls. Just pick them up and keep them flying.
- When you are ready to bring the game to an end, have the person who added the balls gradually begin taking them out, rather than passing the balls around the circle again. This allows for a “cooling-down" and calming feeling at the end of the game.

**Variations:**  
After using names to signal a pass, use different topics to learn about teammates. Go around the circle and have the children ask the question first, (i.e., What's your favorite movie), then play the game again but refer to the person you pass to by their movie, instead of their name. Other ideas for rounds of the game could be favorite sports, compliments, or famous people you’d like to meet. The team can also come up with ideas for new rounds.
TEAM WARM-UP CIRCLE

This game starts with the group standing in a circle around the parachute.
- Going around the circle, each member of the group is given the opportunity to teach and lead the group through a warm-up activity of their choice.
- Anything is possible. From traditional warm-up activities like jumping jacks and push ups, to non-traditional warm-ups like lion roars or gorilla chest pounding!
- This activity works well with background music.

TEAM WARM-UP CIRCLE - GREENBAYS

- In a circle, the children are asked to run briskly in place – during this time the leaders repeatedly chants “foot fire.”
- When the leader shouts “sky”, the children jump and reach as high as the can.
- When the leader yells, “hit it,” the children drop to the ground (almost in a push-up position) and pop right back onto their feet.
- Each child in the group should have a chance to lead for a short time following the lead of the group facilitator.

WRECKING BALL

Using paper cups, plastic cups, or cardboard blocks, the children are asked to build a structure. They are told ahead of time that they will have time to build the city of towers and structures, then they will make sure that everyone is safely out of the city they built, and then they be given a chance to knock it down with fleece wrecking balls, until it is completely knocked down. Finally, they will get to sort, stack, and get the building materials ready to be cleaned up and recycled. The adult can use ropes to make a line for the children to stand behind while tossing the wrecking balls. The further the line is from the structure, the more challenging the activity. The adult and children can decide whether the children should build one structure as a large group or build several structures in one area as smaller groups or pairs. When the children wreck what they built, the adult can retrieve the balls from across the rope line, until the structure is knocked down. This is a fun activity that gives children experiences of building, wrecking, and recycling! Remember that music can really add to and influence the feeling of this game.
Circle Games

**Bodyguard**

- All members of the group hold hands to form a circle.
- Once the circle is stretched out without any members breaking hands, group members can let go of hands. The group then takes two giant steps backwards. To insure that children do not move closer into the circle, you can use cones to mark the perimeter.
- Two group members are invited to step inside the circle. The circle shifts a bit to fill in the gaps of the circle.
- One of the two members inside the circle becomes the "celebrity" (can be any music, movie, sports star-etc.) the other becomes his/her "bodyguard."
- A ball is given to one of the group members forming the circle. The goal is for the group forming the circle to hit the "celebrity" with the ball without stepping into the circle. The celebrity and bodyguard can decide to use a beach ball (easiest), fleece ball (medium difficulty), or gator ball (hardest challenge).
- The group can pass the ball around the circle in order to get a clear shot. The Celebrity tries to stay behind the Bodyguard as they rotate together to keep from being hit. The bodyguard tries to block the balls in order to protect the Celebrity. Play each round for about a minute. (There is no penalty for getting hit, and the round goes until time is out—it does not end early if the Celebrity gets hit.)
- It is fun to ask children what “star” they would like to be and why. You can also ask the bodyguard what hero they would like to be and why. This adds an element of fantasy to the game.

**Carem Scarem**

- To set up, create a large ring that the game will be played inside using materials available to you (walls, folding mats, tables, benches, anything!). The ring should prevent the ball from leaving the play area. If you cannot create a perfect ring, then establish the boundary and the rules for how to respond if/when the ball goes out of bounds.
- In this game, each player is trying to win the game by getting all other players out. The ball can only be advanced around the playing area with players’ hands but cannot be picked up, held, or thrown in any way.
- Dribbling between hands by rolling it back and forth is the best way to move around, and shots can be made at other players by rolling or hitting the ball with an open hand toward others.
- Other players can protect themselves by moving away from the ball or by using their hands to guard their feet.
- A player is out if he/she is tagged from the knees down by the ball that is rolled or hit by another player. When out, the player goes to the outside of the ring and waits to return to the game until the person who got him/her out gets out.
- All players must stay on their feet during the game, as kneeling down makes it very difficult to be tagged.
CIRCLE OF POWER (After being played as a Big Game, this is a great warm up activity.)

· The children are invited to stand in a circle and think of one movement (i.e. jumping up and down, shaking their head, taking a deep breath) that represents their power or joy.
· Very importantly, we then ask the children to find a place in the circle that represents the amount of challenge they would like to undertake.
· Participants who only want a little challenge are instructed to stand closer to the right of the group facilitator while those who want a big challenge should be to the left of the facilitator. The child who is to the immediate left of the facilitator will have the biggest challenge as they will have to remember everybody’s movements while the child to the immediate right of the facilitator will have the least amount of challenge.
· The group facilitator enters the circle first, demonstrates his/her movement, & returns to their original place as part of the circle.
· The child to their immediate right then enters the circle, demonstrates the previous person’s movement, and then introduces his/her own movement.
· The next child must remember and demonstrate each previous person’s movement as well as introduce their own.
· The further you move through the circle, the more difficult it is to remember all of the previous movements.
· If a child forgets a movement, they ask the group for help.

COOL BREEZE BLOWS 1.0 (great for introducing the game and for younger children)

Chairs are arranged in a circle with one chair for each child and the adult(s). The adult starts the game by saying, “The cool breeze blows for everyone who...” and then completes the sentence by saying something that some of the children may have in common. For example, the adult might say, “The cool breeze blows for everyone who loves ice cream” or “The cool breeze blows for anyone wearing a red shirt” or “The cool breeze blows for anyone who has a sister,” etc. Anyone seated in the circle for which the statement rings true, simply has to get up and move to a different seat in the circle (switching seats with other children with whom they have something in common). If only one child gets up, leaving them unable to switch seats with someone else, they can simply take a bow and sit back down in their original seat. It is important to give children permission to choose how much they want to share with the group. All children can elect to stay seated even if “the cool breeze blows for them.” When the adult has offered enough “cool breeze blows for...” questions for the children to be engaged and understand the game, you can then ask children for ideas. They can simply volunteer for a turn, and when you pick them, they say what the “cool breeze blows for” to start the round.

Example questions
The cool breeze blows for anyone who:
· Has a brother or sister
· Has a pet at home
· Likes to be outside
· Likes to dance
· Likes to draw
A fun variation of the Cool Breeze Blows: Instead of saying “The cool breeze blows for anyone who…” you can start the game by saying “The big bunny hops for anyone who…” and that lets everyone know to move to a new seat by hopping. You can make up a new phrase for lots of different movements – hopping, skipping, galloping, shuffling, crawling, slithering and many more!

COOL BREEZE BLOWS 2.0

· Chairs are arranged in a circle with one chair for each group member.
· The group facilitator stands in the middle of the circle and starts by saying, “The cool breeze blows for everyone who…” and completes the sentence by sharing something about themselves that is true, and that they think they have in common with others in the circle. For example, if the leader loves baseball, they may say, “The cool breeze blows for everyone who loves football.”
· Anyone seated in the circle who loves football would then get up and walk quickly a new chair (they can’t go back to the seat that they were just seated at). Whomever is left without a chair stays in the middle and begins the process again by saying, “The cool breeze blows for everyone who…”
· It is important to give children permission to choose how much they want to share with the group even if it means staying seated when the cool breeze blows for you. For example, if somebody in the group were to say, “The cool breeze blows for everyone who has ever kissed somebody” - and a person in the group was uncomfortable revealing this about themselves - they could elect to stay seated regardless of whether or not they had ever “kissed somebody.” Even if a child sits for the entire game, they are still very much a part of the group.
· It is also important to tell the children that they can only share if the cool breeze blows for them--even if they know that the cool breeze blows for someone who is NOT switching chairs, they may not announce this or make someone else get up.
· I also like to give children an opportunity to think of a few cool breeze blows statements prior to starting the game so that they are not put “on the spot” to think of things when they are in the middle.
· Finally, I like to give children an opportunity to use a “lifeline,” which allows them to pass on their turn to share, if they really don’t want it or are feeling too nervous to be in the middle, and switch with someone who really wants a turn in the middle.

MAD, HOT BALL-ROLL

· The group is asked to hold hands and form a circle. They are then instructed to let go of hands and sit “pretzel legs” in a circle.
· The group facilitator, who is also part of the circle, introduces a foam ball to the group and invites the group to move this ball throughout the center of the circle without picking up the ball, allowing it to stop rolling, or allowing the ball to leave the circle.
· This is accomplished by “slapping” gently or pushing the ball with open hands.
Once the group has accomplished this & the ball is moving quickly within the circle, one child is asked to enter the circle.

His/her job is to dance while trying to avoid letting the ball touch his/her toes.

It is important to remind the group that the ball must stay rolling.

Each child should be allowed a turn in the middle for a set time (15 – 30 seconds) and should not be asked to leave the center of the circle as a result of being touched by the ball. The facilitator notifies when a child’s turn in the middle has ended and it is time for another child to have a turn.

Explain to the children how the job of the outer circle is to help the person in the middle invent new dance moves by challenging them with the quickly rolling ball. The lesson that this can teach is that facing challenge can sometimes bring out the best in us.

This game is a lot more fun when some lively dance music is introduced.

**NEWSBALL**

In this game, the children sit in a circle and use the Newsball (any soft ball will do) to tell news about themselves with the group. Everyone in the group will “share” news, even if they do not tell news, simply because they’re in the circle. Everyone shares news either by telling or listening! The news may be about something they did, something they like, something that happened to them, a favorite TV show or movie, what they had for breakfast, anything! It’s also important to specifically say that their news can be any kind of news (and give some examples of kinds of news: happy news, sad news, serious news, silly news, difficult news, funny news, etc.) Really, ANY kind of news! When a child is holding the ball, they can first say how they would like the group to respond to their news, and then they can share their news. Some children may want to get a standing ovation after their news, others might like a silent appreciation as the group puts their hand to their heart, and still other children may want to make up their own unique response. The rest of the group listens to the news and responds as the “teller” asked, and then raise their hand or ask for the ball when they would like a turn to tell news.

**PARACHUTE PLAY!**

1. **DOWN, UP & UNDER**

Standing in a circle holding onto the edges of the parachute, the children lower and raise the parachute slowly as low and high as they can, while the adult chants/sings, “Down, up, down, up, down, up…” When the adult says, “UNDER!” (always following the third “Up”) the group lifts up the parachute together and goes under. If time permits, children can have a turn being the leader and guiding the “Down, up, down, up, down, up, UNDER!” chant. Once under the parachute, the adult can take the children on an imaginary trip (i.e., under the sea on a scuba trip, in a cave to explore, through a forest, etc.) to see all the make-believe things they can think of!
2. SHAKE IT UP

The children stand in a circle holding onto the handles of the parachute. The adult either invites the children to begin shaking the parachute or asks for their ideas about what they could do with the parachute, and the children decide to shake it. While they are shaking, the adult leads in chanting, "shake-shake, shake-shake, shake-shake, stoooooop (a hand motion accompanies the stop command)". Adults and children can explore their creativity by thinking of all kinds of different shakes to do, making sure every child who wants to pick/make up a shake gets a turn. If a new shake gets invented, just ask the inventor to demonstrate it, so everyone else can do it too!

3. TEAM BLAST OFF (After being played as a Big Game, this is a great warm up activity)

· Each child, one at a time, is invited to lie in the middle of the parachute, on his/her back, with their hands behind their head—making sure hands are between their head and the floor.
· For safety, the parachute should be placed on a soft surface (grass or a mat).
· The rest of the group circles around the parachute.
· The child in the middle is asked if they want a little lift, a medium lift, or a big lift. They are also asked what name they would like to be called when the group lifts them.
· When instructed, the children circling the parachute are instructed to grab the edges of the parachute (not the handles) with both hands and stand with one foot in front and one in back.
· The group facilitator slowly counts to three. On three, the group gently leans back and pulls out on the parachute together causing the person in the middle to rise. While pulling, the group chants the name of the child in the middle.
· The group slowly and safely brings the child all the way down to the ground and then repeats this process until the child in the middle has been lifted three times.
· All children are offered an opportunity to be lifted by the group.
· The group must be responsible enough not to let the child in the middle drop to the ground.

It is necessary to have at least two adults, standing across from one another at the child’s sides (not at head and foot), to lift the parachute. It is best to have extra adults, standing across from one another, helping lift the parachute. If you have doubts about the group’s ability to follow directions and protect each group member, do not try this particular activity.

4. WASHING MACHINE

· Spread the parachute out on the ground and ask the children to stand around it. The inside of the parachute is the washing machine.
· Each child can have a turn to sit in the center of the parachute and get washed. Once a child sits down in the middle, ask half the children to stand facing the child’s shoulder that is sitting in the middle. The other half of the children can stand facing the child’s other shoulder.
· To start the washing machine, one half of the children pulls the parachute towards them, sliding the child and parachute along the floor, and shouts, “Splish!”
· Next, the other half of the children pulls the parachute back in their direction and shouts,
“Splash!”
- Keep the machine washing pulling back and forth for 3 splish-splashes, while shouting, “Splish, Splash, Splish, Splash, Splish, Splash, STOP!”
- You can let the child in the middle know that it’s okay to use their hands so they can keep themselves balanced if they would like to. The child can also stop the wash at anytime they would like by saying, “Stop!”
- For safety, the parachute should be placed on a soft surface (grass, carpet, or a mat) and two adults should be positioned across from one another splishing and splashing with the children.
- It is also fun to turn on the dryer for a moment before the end of the turn, by having the children around the outside shake the parachute and make some air.

**PROTECTOR TAG**

- 6 children (3 to 10 children will work fine) hold hands and form a circle.
- 1 child is deemed the protected child. The remaining children are the protectors of that child.
- The adult, who represents “challenge,” stands outside the circle.
- When the game begins, “challenge” tries to tag the protected child. Protectors rotate the circle so that challenge cannot tag him/her.
- Challenge wins if the group lets go of hands or the protected child is tagged. Rounds can last anywhere between 15 and 30 seconds.
- The larger the group the more difficult it is for challenge to tag the protected child.
- Children should be asked how fast they want the adult to move prior to the start of the game.

**TAPS 1 - “JUST FOR FUN”**

This can be played by simply getting into groups of 2 to 7 people and tapping a beach ball (or balloon) around, trying to keep it up in the air—no more rules than that! It’s a great idea to put on some beach ball-tapping music while you play (Jack Johnson’s “Better Together” is one of our favorites.) Tap when the music is on, stop when the music stops.

It is helpful to invite the children to play with a Playful Mind (be present & be accepting of your abilities, which means no need to apologize for “bad” taps), a Playful Body (be relaxed and feel all the sensations there are to experience), and a Playful Spirit (smile & breathe).

You can add rules in a progressive format, to make the game more challenging or competitive.

A helpful guideline for deciding which level is best for your group: The greater the level of trust in the group (within each child and between group members), the greater the tolerance for competition.

**“JUST FOR FUN” VARIATIONS**

You can make small rules to make the game more interesting, such as:

- **Other Hand Taps:** Try to tap with your “other” hand only
- **Body Taps:** Try to tap with your head or other body parts besides your hands
**Funny Noise Taps:** Each person picks a funny noise to make (boing, oink, whistle, etc.) each time they tap the ball

**Crab Taps:** Try to tap with your hands or your feet while in a “crab walk” position (hands and feet on the floor with belly up to the sky)

Have the group come up with additional ideas to make it interesting.

**TAPS 2 - “TEAM CHALLENGE”**

Start with Taps 1 and add these rules:
- No double taps (when one person taps the ball twice in a row)
- Count the taps to create a group record

**TAPS 3 - “BIGGER TEAM CHALLENGE”**

Start with Taps 2 and add these rules:
- Create multiple tapping circles and have each set team challenge records, then add records together for a total team score. Set a total team score goal to aim for, if it will help motivate them.

**TAPS 4 - “COMPETITION”**

Start with Taps 3 and add these rules:
- Play on two teams and then compare record number for a winner (This is best played with kids on one team and adults on the other, unless you are confident that the level of trust within the team is strong enough to support kids playing vs. kids while the experience is still joyful, connecting, safe, and engaging for all team members)

**TEAM JUGGLE**

- The children are asked to sit or stand in a circle and one member is given a fleece ball.
- He or she starts the game by tossing the ball to someone in the group, who in turn tosses the ball to another group member (before tossing the ball to somebody, the tosser should make eye contact and say the person’s name to make sure that they are ready to catch).
- This continues until each member of the group has touched the ball once & the ball is returned to the person who started the game.
- The group continues passing the ball throughout the circle following this same pattern. As the group gets comfortable, they can move the ball more quickly. If the group decides that they would like to really increase the level of challenge, additional balls can be added.
- There are no penalties for dropped balls. Just pick them up and keep them flying.
- When you are ready to bring the game to an end, have the person who added the balls gradually begin taking them out, rather than passing the balls around the circle again. This allows for a “cooling-down” and calming feeling at the end of the game.

**Variations:**
- After using names to signal a pass, use different topics to learn about teammates. Go around
the circle and have the children ask the question first, (i.e., What's your favorite movie), then play the game again but refer to the person you pass to by their movie, instead of their name. Other ideas for rounds of the game could be favorite sports, compliments, or famous people you'd like to meet. The team can also come up with ideas for new rounds.

**TEAM WARM-UP CIRCLE**

This game starts with the group standing in a circle around the parachute.

- Going around the circle, each member of the group is given the opportunity to teach and lead the group through a warm-up activity of their choice.
- Anything is possible. From traditional warm-up activities like jumping jacks and push ups, to non-traditional warm-ups like lion roars or gorilla chest pounding!
- This activity works well with background music.

**TEAM WARM-UP CIRCLE - GREENBAYS**

- In a circle, the children are asked to run briskly in place – during this time the leaders repeatedly chants “foot fire.”
- When the leader shouts “sky”, the children jump and reach as high as the can.
- When the leader yells, “hit it,” the children drop to the ground (almost in a push-up position) and pop right back onto their feet.
- Each child in the group should have a chance to lead for a short time following the lead of the group facilitator.
- Also, children can be given the opportunity to make up different commands other than sky, foot fire, and hit it.
- Everyone who participates should be out of breath. Especially you!
Cooperative Tag & Collecting Games

Squirrels and Nuts

The traditional story for Squirrels and Nuts goes a little something like this: the children are squirrels trying to collect nuts (cones) for the winter and are bringing them, one at a time, to their tree (safe area). The playful fox or foxes (adults) in the forest like to chase squirrels and try to tag them (using a foam ball rather than hands). If the fox tags a squirrel, the squirrel is frozen and must call for help from a fellow squirrel. Any other child, who is unfrozen, may tag the frozen child and bring him or her back into the game. The squirrels win if they collect all the nuts and get themselves back to the tree!

· In a large open space, the children are asked to mark and define a safe zone with the parachute or a circle of ropes. This could represent the safe area they have created to protect them from anything that challenges them in their lives.
· Spread the cones away from the safe zone. The cones represent anything that the children want in their lives; you can even ask them what they want or would like to achieve in life as you spread out the cones.
· The object of the game is for the children to gather all of the cones, one at a time, and bring them back to the safe zone. They must do this in order to overcome the obstacles that make it difficult for them to achieve their goals.
· The group leader represents the challenge in life, and tries to stop the children by tagging them when they are outside of the safe zone. If a child is tagged, they freeze (or sit down) & wait for a teammate to rescue them (by tagging them). Once rescued, they are free to continue playing.
· The game is over when all of the cones and children are gathered in the safe zone. This is a great team building game that allows the children to playfully express their fears and fantasies.

Remember: you can use any fantasy that the children want to play this game.

Junkyard Dog

This game is a fun, more complex variation of Squirrels and Nuts, which focuses on teamwork.

· Children are “junk collectors”, trying to get into the junk yard to collect different kinds of junk, possibly to build a tree house or any other project you want to bring up with the group. (you can discuss the different things they would need and if they have ever done this)
· The counselors are junk yard dogs trying to guard the junk yard, which they do by tagging kids in the junk yard and this freezes them.
· The children can be unfrozen by peers who tag them.
· In order to collect the junk, children must have the right number of collectors to carry it. i.e., One child can carry a cone, Two kids can carry a frisbee, Three kids can carry a ball, Four kids can carry a rope, Five kids can carry a hula hoop, and Six kids can carry a mat (or whatever equipment you have that is big enough for 6 kids to hold at once). Once they have the right number of collectors at an item, they can then pick it up and are safe to walk back to the safe area (wherever you designate that to be). If they have too many or too few kids, all can be tagged.
• Children cannot pick up an item and go find a partner(s)—if they move with the incorrect number of collectors, they are frozen.
• Once an item had been collected in the safe area, it cannot be reused or taken back out.
• Children cannot carry two items at a time—they are allowed to switch (but I usually don’t tell them ahead of time to switch because they can figure this out as a problem-solving element).
• Particularly with bigger items, it’s fun to follow the kids supporting them (cheering them on) as well as making sure they don’t drop it (by playfully tagging the item).
• Children win the game when they have collected all the junk and are safe in the safe area, adults can win if they freeze all the kids.

Notes:
This can be a challenging game because there is an opportunity for so much teamwork and problem-solving. You can vary the difficulty of the game by considering the following in your setup:
• To make it easier for the group, use fewer kinds of equipment or less of each kind. For example, if 6 kids are playing and you want to have 6 types of equipment, recommended amounts of each one are here: 1 large item (like a folding mat), 2-3 hula hoops, 3-4 ropes, 4-6 balls, 6-10 frisbees, 10-20 cones.
• Amounts of equipment can be varied for difficulty, size of group, and time for game. All equipment should be spread around your play area.

JURASSIC PARK

This, too, is a variation of Squirrels & Nuts, except...

• The children are trying to collect balls or cones (Tyrannosaurus Rex eggs) and incinerate them before they hatch.
• The incinerator is a designated area to collect the T-rex eggs—either placed with a barrier around it that the children are not allowed to enter (the force field), or placed in their safe area.
• The adult (T-Rex) tries to tag the children. The T-Rex has one weakness – poor eyesight.
• If a child freezes, the T-rex cannot sense them and is unable to tag them. To avoid being tagged off base, a child can freeze and not be tagged. However, all bets are off if the T-Rex is able to make them flinch!
• If children collect all the eggs and get all teammates back to the safe area, they win the game!

OREO COOKIE CHALLENGE

This game is also a variation of Squirrels and Nuts.

The Story: The children are workers in the Oreo Cookie factory. During the night the machine that makes the cream for the cookies exploded and there are bits of cream all around the factory (represented by fleece balls).

• Children have to pick up all the cream before they can get back to work making the cookies. They do this by working in pairs, holding one piece of cream between two “cookies” (foam frisbees), held by two children. They are not allowed to touch the cream with their hands and
must negotiate pairing up and then picking up the cream. Once they have made a cookie, they want to bring the cream to the barrel (or any container to hold the balls) and place only the ball in the barrel.

· The adults, acting as Keebler Elves, do not want the Oreo Cookie factory to be up and running because they are rivals and so are trying to stop the children from cleaning up by tagging them (tag using foam balls, beach balls, or boppers).
· If two children have a completed cookie in their hands, they cannot be tagged until they drop off the cream. They are also safe at the designated safe area. (I purposely don’t mention that they don’t have to go directly to the barrel with the cream—they could safely walk around and unfreeze teammates).
· Adults can only tag kids children who are not carrying a completed cookie with a partner.
· Children can get unfrozen by calling for help and having a teammate tag them.
· Children win the game when they have collected all the cream and are back at the safe wall. Adults win if all children are frozen.

Variations: If a group can’t handle that much problem solving, you can create more structure and less need for negotiation by pairing the children up before the game starts and having them keep the same partners throughout the game. To make it more challenging, you can allow them to decide who they pair up with and can change throughout the game. To encourage teamwork, especially if there is an odd number of children, you can require that they change their partner each time they collect a piece of cream—they can go back to partners but only after working with a different one. This is more difficult for them and it’s helpful for adults to pay attention to frustration if it occurs.

**OYSTERS AND PEARLS**

This game is played like Squirrels and Nuts except that under some of the cones (oysters) are pieces of treasure (pearls). Fleece balls can be used for pearls but they can be seen through the cones. To make the pearls more difficult to find, you can use real coins or other objects you have. The object is for the children to find all of the treasure, make sure that the cones are all standing, and to return the entire group to the safe zone.

It is amazing that by subtly changing the rules, the fantasy, or adding a new dimension to the game, the activity becomes a brand new game. I’ve had children who don’t like playing Squirrels & Nuts but love playing Oysters and Pearls. Go figure!

**SHIPS THAT SINK IN THE NIGHT**

In this game, the team is trying to get across the ocean. They had three ships to travel on, but one sank in the middle of the night.

· Place two mats on the floor, or use ropes or any other clear way to distinguish the two remaining ships. They should be on opposite sides of the room or playing area, but keep some space between the ships and the far ends of the playing area.
· All the supplies that were on the middle ship are now floating on the ocean and the team must collect and store them. Place balls all around the ground between the two ships and some kind
of container that fits all the balls on one ship. This ship becomes the “catcher” ship. 
· The ONLY way a ball can be stored in the container is if a child--who is standing on the “thrower” ship--throws the ball to a child standing on the “catcher” ship, and the ball is directly caught. 
· Have the children divide evenly on the two ships, and they become the “catchers” and the “throwers.” 
· Adults, as sharks or pirates, can block balls as they fly through the air, and they can also tag any child who is off a ship. If tagged, the children are frozen and must be tagged by a teammate to be unfrozen. 
· When all the balls have been properly stored in the container and all children are safe on the ships, they win the game.

Variations: 
Less structure options include: letting the team decide how many catchers and throwers they want, or letting them change jobs throughout the game.

Notes: 
· I purposely give the instructions without clarifying several limits about what the kids can and cannot do, in order to encourage problem solving and communication within the group. For example, I don’t tell the catchers that they can or cannot throw the balls, just that in order to store them they must catch them from throwers—if they figure out to throw balls to the throwers, who can then throw them back, that is great! 
· It is also important to emphasize that even though the kids are on separate mats, they are still on the same team.

WARRIORS, WIZARDS, AND MEDICS 
· This game is set up just like Squirrels & Nuts. 
· Again the object of this game is to get all of the cones and all of the team back to the safe zone.

Level 1: 
All children have the Wizard power, which allows them to collect cones, one at a time. All children then choose 1 of 2 roles. In addition to being Wizards, they can also be either warriors or medics.
· Only warriors are allowed to hit counselors (dragons) with foam or fleece balls and force them to freeze for 5 seconds; and only medics are able to rescue others when they are caught and frozen by a dragon.

Level 2: 
· All children choose 1 of the 3 roles: warriors, wizards, or medics. 
· Only warriors are allowed to hit counselors with foam or fleece balls and force them to freeze for 5 seconds; only wizards may collect cones; and only medics are able to rescue others when they are caught.
Variations:
· You can increase difficulty by having a “dungeon,” at a distant place from the safe area, where children go when they get tagged by dragons. They must be rescued by a medic, who tags the dungeon and declares, “Dungeon Free!”
· You can make the game more or less difficult with only one or two taggers.
· You can make a rule that children can change roles at designated times or that children must maintain their chosen role throughout the game.
Tag Games

CAREM SCAREM

- To set up, create a large ring that the game will be played inside using materials available to you (walls, folding mats, tables, benches, anything!). The ring should prevent the ball from leaving the play area. If you cannot create a perfect ring, then establish the boundary and the rules for how to respond if/when the ball goes out of bounds.
- In this game, each player is trying to win the game by getting all other players out. The ball can only be advanced around the playing area with players’ hands but cannot be picked up, held, or thrown in any way.
- Dribbling between hands by rolling it back and forth is the best way to move around, and shots can be made at other players by rolling or hitting the ball with an open hand toward others.
- Other players can protect themselves by moving away from the ball or by using their hands to guard their feet.
- A player is out if he/she is tagged from the knees down by the ball that is rolled or hit by another player. When out, the player goes to the outside of the ring and waits to return to the game until the person who got him/her out gets out.
- All players must stay on their feet during the game, as kneeling down makes it very difficult to be tagged.

PROTECTOR TAG

- 6 children (3 to 10 children will work fine) hold hands and form a circle.
- 1 child is deemed the protected child. The remaining children are the protectors of that child.
- The adult, who represents “challenge,” stands outside the circle.
- When the game begins, “challenge” tries to tag the protected child. Protectors rotate the circle so that challenge cannot tag him/her.
- Challenge wins if the group lets go of hands or the protected child is tagged. Rounds can last anywhere between 15 and 30 seconds.
- The larger the group the more difficult it is for challenge to tag the protected child.
- Children should be asked how fast they want the adult/challenge to move prior to the start of the game.

RELAY TAG

- You will need one ball and a tagging item (foam ball or bopper) to play this game, as well as enough space to run around with your group.
- The object of the game is for the group to work together to have all members unfrozen at the end of the playing time. The adults are trying to tag and freeze all players in the game.
- Children can get tagged at two times: (1) if the ball is ever in nobody’s hands (it’s on the floor), then everyone can be tagged, and (2) if one person is holding the ball, then they are the only person who can be tagged. If the person with the ball gets tagged, they are frozen and must drop the ball. (Then everyone can be tagged until someone picks up the ball.) Frozen players can only be unfrozen by being tagged by the person with the ball.
- Players are allowed to run with the ball if they want. The adult can also block the ball if it is thrown in the air. This is a great teamwork building game!!
SECRET SAFE ZONE

This game is an excellent way for children to use both their physical ability as well as intellectual ability to solve a group puzzle. The group needs to communicate with each other to determine the correct safe zone and help each other safely get there.

· In an open space, spread out four to six areas (you can tie a few ropes together and spread them on the ground to create an area).
· Tell the group that all of these areas represent spaceships but only one is the actual working spaceship. The group must figure out which one is the real safe zone and get all of their members safely inside in order to be able to fly on the spaceship. (Each child is only required to have one foot inside the safe zone to be considered “inside”).
· Children begin the game by standing inside the zone that they think is safe.
· The group leader can tag any child who is not in the real safe zone. Children can get tagged while they are running between zones or standing in the wrong zone.
· When children get tagged, they must freeze right where they got tagged until they are rescued (tagged) by one of their teammates.
· The group wins when they all make it into the real safe zone.
· Prior to the start of the game, the group leader may write down on a slip of paper or tell an adult who is not playing which zone they selected as safe. This way the children know that the group leader is not changing his/her mind in the middle of the game.
Problem-Solving & Challenge Games

ISLAND TO ISLAND

· In this game, the team must get from one island to another, so you create two islands with mats, ropes, or any other clear (and safe) designation of the two “islands.” They should be far enough apart so children cannot jump or easily get from one island to the next.
· The challenge of the game is to get to the next island without touching the ground with any part of their bodies (clothes & shoes included!). If any team member touches the ground while crossing, ALL team members go back to the first island and start over.
· The team does have some tools to help them, such as frisbees, poly spots, cones, an extra rope, a gator-ball, (even a rubber chicken) or other equipment you might have. (This equipment doesn’t necessarily have to “make sense” because the children can figure out how to use it creatively).
· It is fun to have the children name the islands to know where they are coming from and going to.
· Once the whole group gets to the other island without touching the floor, they win! If time and interest allow, you can have them cross again, go on to a third island, or whatever suits your team.

Notes:
This can be a difficult and challenging game. Be aware of how difficult you make it. A simple formula is to use levels as you play.

- Closer mats + more equipment = easier level
- Farther mats OR less equipment = more difficult level
- Farther mats + less equipment = most difficult

Make sure you give enough time to play based on the level of difficulty, in order to give them enough time to finish.

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· Children begin the game by standing inside the zone that they think is safe.
· The group leader can tag any child who is not in the real safe zone. Children can get tagged while they are running between zones or standing in the wrong zone.
· When children get tagged, they must freeze right where they got tagged until they are rescued (tagged) by one of their teammates.
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**Variations:**
Less structure options include: letting the team decide how many catchers and throwers they want, or letting them change jobs throughout the game.

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· It is also important to emphasize that even though the kids are on separate mats, they are still on the same team.
SPACE INVADERS

In this game, the team is faced with a cluster of meteors that are headed toward earth, and their challenge is to knock all the meteors off their course or to destroy them, in order to save the planet.
· This game is set up just like Dodgeball – however all of the children are on the same team together on the same half of the play space.
· On the other half of the space, cones (meteors) are set-up. For example, a bunch of cones could be in outer space (a plastic trash barrel that is set up on top of a chair, or on a table, chairs, and the floor—multi-level is the key). Have the children help set-up the meteors prior to the game.
· The object is for the children to destroy or disrupt (knock down) all of the meteors. Children can only throw balls from their half of the playing area. They can cross over the centerline to retrieve balls and bring them back to their side.

Variations:
· For an added challenge, the group leader can be helping the natural forces of the meteors by protecting the cones with their bodies. If the group leader is hit with a ball, they must freeze (and not block) for count of 5.
· The game is often fun, and has a different feel when the team is challenged to set a time record (how fast they can knock down all cones), or to beat a time challenge (knock down as many as they can in 3 minutes or the length of a fun, active song).
· Give cones point values, and add up the score after knocking over as many as they can in a given time period.

WHO’S GOT MY KEYS

· In this game you’ll need keys on a ring that jingle (You may want to remove any personal items or electronic keys)
· The adult “owns” the keys and places them on the floor behind him/her while the group of kids starts the game at the opposite end of the room. The object of the game is to have the kids retrieve the keys and pass them to each of the group members before returning them to the floor behind the adult.
· The adult may turn around at any time, which signals the kids to Freeze. It is usually helpful to give an out-loud “warning” such as “1—2—3 Freeze” before actually turning around. With kids frozen, the adult can ask one person, “Do you have my keys?” The child only has to answer yes or no—but does not have to show his/her hands. If the answer is yes, the keys are returned to the starting point by the adult’s feet and the game restarts. If no, the game resumes and the kids continue to pass the keys to each other.

Note: This is a great opportunity for the group to discuss strategy and to communicate while sharing, but also encourages a great deal of non-verbal awareness. Discussions of “straight” faces and implicating behavior/postures often come up and can be helpful for the group who needs more support before the game starts. Less discussion before and more processing afterward may happen with a more advanced group.
**WRECKING BALL**

Using paper cups, plastic cups, or cardboard blocks, the children are asked to build a structure. They are told ahead of time that they will have time to build the city of towers and structures, then they will make sure that everyone is safely out of the city they built, and then they be given a chance to knock it down with fleece wrecking balls, until it is completely knocked down. Finally, they will get to sort, stack, and get the building materials ready to be cleaned up and recycled. The adult can use ropes to make a line for the children to stand behind while tossing the wrecking balls. The further the line is from the structure, the more challenging the activity. The adult and children can decide whether the children should build one structure as a large group or build several structures in one area as smaller groups or pairs. When the children wreck what they built, the adult can retrieve the balls from across the rope line, until the structure is knocked down. This is a fun activity that gives children experiences of building, wrecking, and recycling! Remember that music can really add to and influence the feeling of this game.
Large Cooperative Games

**I DON’T KNOW WHAT TEAM I'M ON DODGEBALL**

This is an ultimate TEAM game, a very active and uniting way to celebrate the team’s strength.

- A playing area is split into two sides - one team per side.
- Both teams are given several balls (soft foam or fleece balls only). They are allowed to throw balls at players on other team.
- When a ball hits a person (in the air) they must change teams. When somebody on the other team catches a ball that a person throws, they must change teams. Players are never out of the game.
- When a person is changing teams, they raise their hand and walk across the centerline to their new team. Once they cross the line and are ready to resume playing for their new team, they put their hand down. Only once their hand is down, can they throw balls and can other players throw balls at them.
- The game ends when everybody is on the same, winning team.

**RELAY TAG**

- You will need one ball and a tagging item (foam ball or bopper) to play this game, as well as enough space to run around with your group.
- The object of the game is for the group to work together to have all members unfrozen at the end of the playing time. The adults are trying to tag and freeze all players in the game.
- Children can get tagged at two times: (1) if the ball is ever in nobody’s hands (it’s on the floor), then everyone can be tagged, and (2) if one person is holding the ball, then they are the only person who can be tagged. If the person with the ball gets tagged, they are frozen and must drop the ball. (Then everyone can be tagged until someone picks up the ball.) Frozen players can only be unfrozen by being tagged by the person with the ball.
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- The objective is for the children to destroy or disrupt (knock down) all of the meteors. Children can only throw balls from their half of the playing area. They can cross over the centerline to retrieve balls and bring them back to their side.

Variations:
- For an added challenge, the group leader can be helping the natural forces of the meteors by protecting the cones with their bodies. If the group leader is hit with a ball, they must freeze (and not block) for count of 5.
- The game is often fun, and has a different feel when the team is challenged to set a time record (how fast they can knock down all cones), or to beat a time challenge (knock down as many as they can in 3 minutes or the length of a fun, active song).
- Give cones point values, and add up the score after knocking over as many as they can in a given time period.

**ULTIMATE CHICKEN**

- This game is played just like Ultimate Frisbee (this explanation does you no good if you’ve never played Ultimate Frisbee so I’ll explain more).
- Two teams play on something like a soccer field. There is a goal line across both far ends of the field.
- Two teams vie against each other to cross over the other team’s goal line with the Rubber Chicken. Players can only take 2 steps when in possession of the famed Rubber Chicken. (You can also decide to adjust this to 1 step or no steps—or any number you decide, depending on how much space you have to play).
- The only way to move it is to toss it to another player on your team. The opposing team takes possession of the Rubber Chicken if it is dropped or intercepted in the air.
· The chicken cannot be taken out of the hands of someone on the other team.
· To make this game really collaborative, it should be played children versus adults. With young children, or in small groups, two adults should provide enough firepower to provide a formidable opponent.
· Substitute a ball or frisbee for a chicken & the whole game changes.
Part 3: Transition & Cool-Down Activities

Body Shakes

Standing around the circle, you can talk about the energy that we all have in our bodies that sometimes gets stuck. Children are each asked which part of their bodies they would like to shake and wake, in order to release that energy and get it moving. If a child suggests hands, the whole group shakes their hands while chanting, "hands shake, hands shake, hands shake, STOP!" If the next child suggests shoulders, the whole group shakes their shoulders while chanting, "shoulder shakes, shoulder shakes, shoulder shakes, STOP!" The game continues until each child has had a turn to suggest a type of "body shake." After each turn, we thank each child for his or her great suggestion.

Breathing Variations

1. Balloon Breathing (Derived from Becky Bailey's Conscious Discipline)

Children are asked to place both hands on top of their heads and as they breathe in, to raise their hands in the shape of a filled balloon above their heads. As they breathe out, they push their hands down toward their heads as if they are emptying the balloon. Repeat this movement and breath several times.

2. Bird Breathing

While the children are either sitting or standing, with enough between them that they can raise their arms to the side without bumping others, they are invited to imagine they are birds with beautiful, strong wings. Starting with hands down by their sides, they are guided to breathe in deeply as they raise their arms above their heads, and then slowly breathe out as they swoop their wings down to their sides (or to the ground if they are seated). Arms rise again as they inhale and arms push down through the air at their sides as they exhale. Repeat 3-4 times until the children are breathing more calmly.

3. Elephant Breathing

The children stand with their feet wide apart. Tell them that they are now big, strong elephants. Holding their hands together with their arms dangling straight down in front of their body like an imaginary elephant trunk, inhale through the nose as they raise their arms/trunk high up over their head expanding their chest. Then exhale out the mouth while swinging the arms/trunk down and through the legs. Arms rise again on the inhale and on the exhale swing down and through. Repeat 3-4 times.
4. FLOWER AND BUBBLE WAND BREATHING

While sitting in a circle, the children are instructed to pick an imaginary flower from the ground and hold it on one hand. They are also asked to pick up a bubble wand—that they might blow soap bubbles with—with their other hand. They are guided to smell the flower in their hand as they breathe in deeply through their noses and then blow out bubbles through the wand as they breathe out slowly and deeply through their mouths. Repeat this breath several times until the children’s breathing has slowed and their bodies are more relaxed.

5. WARRIOR BREATHING

While sitting in a circle, the children are instructed to place both of their hands in front of their faces, palms facing and as close as they can be, without actually touching palms together. They are guided to breath in deeply through their noses and then breath out deeply through their mouths. During the in breath children are instructed to spread their arms wide and during the out breath, children are instructed to gradually bring their hands close together but not touching.

6. HUG BREATHING

Children are asked to space out, either in a circle or where they have space to spread their arms to the sides without touching anyone else. As they breathe in, they are guided to open their arms wide to the sides, stretching out. Then as they breathe out, they are guided to wrap their arms around their bodies—giving themselves a hug and a little squeeze. Breathe in and open arms again, breathe out and hug it out. Repeat 3-4 times until everyone feels grounded and calm.

HIGH-LOW

This is an opportunity for the children to give feedback about their group experience. They are invited to share what they enjoyed most and what, if anything, they enjoyed least. All children should be given the opportunity to share. This is a good time for the adults to share something positive they noticed about each child’s participation in the group.

HOT, HOT HANDS (Rubbing, Rubbing, Rubbing, Warm)

Sitting in a circle the facilitator asks the group if they are ready to get warmed-up! He or she guides the children to quickly rub the palms of their hands together. The faster they rub, the warmer their hands will become (rub, rub…rub-rub…rub-rub… waarrmm). You can tell the children that the warmth that they feel in their hands is happy energy or love, which they can share with other parts of their body through touch. Guide them to use their hot hands on different parts of their body to help them warm-up and get ready to play together.

SHARING WATER & SNACK

While sitting in a circle, the adult pours a cup of water (or juice) and hands it to the child sitting right next to her/him. The adult then asks the children to pass the cup around the circle until it
COOL-DOWNS

reaches the last child in the circle. This continues until everybody has a drink. You can do the same thing with a snack. You might be surprised at how calming, empowering, and unifying it is for children to simple sit in a circle and share a drink and/or a snack. The children are invited to make toasts to celebrate anything they choose to celebrate.

**SHOUT-OUTS**

This is somewhat similar to High–Low. Children are given the opportunity to share something that someone did during the group that they appreciated. Each child is given a chance to give a shout-out to someone in the group. Some children may want to shout-out themselves, which is fine. At the end of the activity, the adults may want to give each child a shout-out, which will ensure that all the children are recognized.

**TEAMWORK CHEER**

The group is asked to form a circle and join hands (think football huddle). The counselor invites the group to look around the circle – making eye contact with everyone on the team. It is a time to notice and celebrate the friendship of the group. Together, the group counts to three – and on “three” – they lift their hands in the air and shout “TEAMWORK.” They then bring their hands down again, count to three and shout “TEAMWORK!” again. Three or four times in a row usually does the trick.
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

The following is a script, which you can use just by reading to the group. Try reading it aloud a couple times before you use it with your children so that you are comfortable with what it says. You can read this word for word if you'd like, just not the titles like, “introduction” and “feet and toes” for instance. Be mindful of your pacing and tone of voice. To prevent rushing and keeping a steady voice, be sure to breathe comfortably so that you feel calm in your own body as you speak.

(INTRODUCTION)

Did you know that our bodies are designed to heal itself? This exercise can help us to tap into this healing system, and notice when we are holding tension so that we can start learning how to let it go. So today I'd like to invite you to try this exercise called muscle relaxation. Think of it as a little gift to yourself today. What’s great about this exercise is that you can take it with you wherever you go and use it whenever you want without anyone really noticing. These exercises will work best if you try to stay focused on my voice and do what I say even if it seems kind of silly.

Ready to try?

Okay, first get as comfortable as you can by either lying down or sitting in your chair. If it helps you relax, feel free to close your eyes. You can also leave them open if you prefer. Remember to follow my instructions as much as you can and pay attention to the experience of your body throughout.

(FEET AND TOES)

Bring your attention to your right foot. Now squish all of your toes together, make them really tight....even tighter if you can....hold it for 1...2..3...aaannd relax. Bring your attention to your left foot now...squish all of your toes together...curl them in really, really tight...even tighter...now hold it for 1..2..3...aaannd relax. Notice if your feet feel any different than before.

(LEGS)

Bring your attention to your legs...squeeze the muscles in your upper legs...even more...lift your knee caps, tighten your calf muscles, even tighten your butt muscles...even tighter if you can...now hold that tension for 1..2..3..aannd relax. Notice if your legs feel any different than before. (You have the option of doing one leg at a time)
(BELLY AND CHEST)

Now let’s take a slow, deep breath into the chest as we pull our bellies in at the same time...even more...now let your chest start to puff out like a pigeon...that's right...a little more if you can...now hold it in for 1...2...3...then open your mouth and let the breath gush out aaaaahhhhh...and let your belly relax back to normal and your chest too. Now do this again...take a slow, deep breath into the chest as we pull our bellies in at the same time...even more...letting your chest puff out like a pigeon...that's right...a little more if you can...now hold it in for 1...2...3...then open your mouth and let the breath gush out aaaaahhhhh...and let your belly relax back to normal and your chest too. Now let’s take another slow, deep breath but this time try to breathe into your belly. That’s it, keep expanding your belly like a big Buddha belly...hold it for 1...2...3...and let it out aahhhhh. Now let your breathing return to a natural rhythm & notice any difference.

(ARMS AND HANDS)

Bring your attention to your left hand...imagine that you are holding a lemon and squeezing it tightly...really try to squeeze all of the juice out of the lemon...a little bit more so that your arm gets tight too...now hold that for 1...2...3... now drop the lemon and relax. Take another lemon in your right hand now. Try to squeeze this one even harder than the first one. That’s right, a little harder if you can...hold it now for 1...2...3...now drop the lemon and relax. Let your arms and hands and fingers completely rest now.

(SHOULDERS)

Now take your shoulders and start lifting them up to your ears...a little higher...try to touch your shoulders...now squeeze them a little tighter and hold for 1...2...3... anddd relax. Let go of any tension now. (You have the option of doing one shoulder at a time)

(FACE)

Bring your attention now to your mouth...lips...nose...and eyes...now squeeze everything as tight as you can...that's it, even tighter like you are trying to make a little, tiny prune face...good, now hold that for 1...2...3...anddd let it go. Allow your eyes to rest softly in their sockets now, and your face to soften and let go of any tension.

Let your entire body now rest and relax from your feet and toes, up through your legs, into your belly and chest, out to your arms and hands and shoulders, and all the muscles of your face completely free of tension. Rest now in the flow of your breath...comfortably and ease fully.

There are times when our bodies will be tense. It’s nice to know that there are things we can do relax our bodies when our bodies need some relaxing. You are the boss of your body. You can help make your body feel strong, relaxed and comfortable. ★
Interested in reading more about the publications specifically mentioned in the manual?


Other references that have helped educate us:


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