

JILL VIALET

WHY
PLAY
WORKS

BIG CHANGES START SMALL

Game Guide

Animal Farm

→ Supports Self-Management, Social Awareness/Empathy



GROUP SIZE

6+ players



AGE GROUP

K-3rd



EQUIPMENT

Cones or chalk for boundaries, if needed



TIME

5 minutes

Set Up

Designate a play area with safe boundaries and room for the group to move. An area about 20 × 20 feet should be big enough.

Before You Start

- In a circle, have children count off from 1 up to 3, 4, or 5 (depending on the size of group and complexity the group can handle).
- Assign an animal for each number, and tell players what animal they are: all 1s are dogs, 2s are ducks, and so on.
- Review with the players what sound each animal makes. They could be a dog (bark), a duck (quack), a cow (moo), a cat (meow), a sheep (baa), a lion (roar), or any other animal that makes a sound.
- Make sure each player remembers his or her animal and knows its sound.
- Review safety measures: while their eyes are closed, children walk slowly with hands out in front of them.
- Optional: assign one player to be the leader.

How to Play

- The leader starts the game. by calling out “Animal Farm, go!” or another start phrase.
- Players shut their eyes and keep them shut.
- Players make their animal sounds, and walk slowly around the area, with their hands up to act as a bumper to find their fellow matching animals.
- Once two “animals” are together, they stop moving and stay together. They continue to make their animal sounds, until the rest of their group finds them.
- The game is over when all players have found their group, or when the first group is complete and together.


Variation(s)

- Instead of numbers, give players pictures of different animals.
- Depending on the age and ability of your group, you can add more or fewer animals to make groups larger or smaller.
- After playing, have students find their animal groups later for group work during class.

Band Aid Tag

→ Supports Social Awareness/Empathy, Decision-Making, Problem-Solving

 **GROUP SIZE**
10–50 players

 **AGE GROUP**
K–5th

 **EQUIPMENT**
Cones or chalk for boundaries

 **TIME**
5 minutes

Set Up

- Designate a clear playing area.
- Designate a hospital outside the play area.

Before You Start

- Demonstrate safe and gentle tagging (butterfly tags) and appropriate tagging areas (arms, back, and shoulders).
- Review what to do when tagged.
- Make sure players know where the hospital is and how to be healed—they have to do 10 jumping jacks.

How to Play

- Everyone is It.
- If players are tagged, they must take one hand and put it either directly on the spot where they were tagged or across their body on their opposite shoulder. That hand is a band aid.

- They can continue to run around trying to tag others and avoid being tagged, but they must keep their band aid on. Now they only have one free hand for tagging.
- If they are tagged again, they must take the other hand and place it on the second spot where they were tagged. They can still run around avoiding tags with both band aids on but cannot tag others.
- If they are tagged a third time, they have to go to the hospital and do 10 jumping jacks to get back in the game. These players are now healed and can again use both hands for tagging.

Variation(s)

- Players can be treated at the hospital by counting to 20 or any number up to 500, counting by 1s, 5s, 10s, or using any counting method that is age appropriate.
- Players can go to the hospital at any time to remove any band aids. They do not have to wait until they are tagged the second or third time.
- Vary the activities in the hospital for healing: crunches, 10 seconds of a dance move, saying a self-affirmation, or telling someone something that is great about yourself.

Blob Tag

→ Supports Positive Relationships, Decision-Making, Teamwork



GROUP SIZE

10+ players



AGE GROUP

1st–6th



EQUIPMENT

Cones or chalk for boundaries



TIME

10–15 minutes

Set Up

- Establish game boundaries.

Before You Start

- Ask for two volunteers. Assign both of them to be It. They become The Blob and must link elbows.
- Demonstrate safe tagging (gentle tags) and appropriate tagging areas (arms, back, and shoulders).
- Explain the rules, boundaries, and the importance of safety and check for understanding.
- Spread out players within playing area.

How to Play

- When play begins, The Blob moves together, keeping elbows linked, and tries to tag the rest of the players.
- When players are tagged, they link elbows with the tagger, becoming part of The Blob.
- When a fourth player is tagged, The Blob can then separate into two separate blobs.

- Every time The Blob becomes four players it can split. Two players detach creating separate blobs.
- Play continues until all of the players become part of blobs.
- If players run out of bounds while trying to avoid The Blob, they must then connect with the nearest blob and continue to play.
- The last two players left outside of The Blob become the first blob for the next round.

Variation(s)

- If everyone is playing safely, the blob can stay connected and continue to grow bigger and bigger until all the players are tagged. Challenge the group to stay together when they move.
- If linking elbows is too challenging, consider linking hands.

Bob the Bunny

→ Supports Self-Management, Decision-Making, Problem-Solving



GROUP SIZE

10+ players



AGE GROUP

K-2nd



EQUIPMENT

Small object or ball, preferably a toy bunny



TIME

5-10 minutes

Before You Start

- Introduce the players to Bob the Bunny, a small object or ball, preferably a toy bunny.
- Gather the group of players in a circle. Have players place their hands behind their backs.
- Choose one player to be in the middle.

How to Play

- The player in the middle is trying to guess who on the outside of the circle is holding the bunny.
- To begin, the player in the middle closes his or her eyes while the group begins chanting in rhythm, “Bob the Bunny, Bob, Bob, the Bunny!”
- As the players are chanting, start passing the bunny around the circle, keeping the bunny behind everyone’s backs.
- Once the bunny is in motion, the player in the middle opens his or her eyes and gets three tries to guess who is holding the bunny. The group is still chanting and passing the bunny.

- If the player in the middle guesses correctly he or she changes places with the player caught holding the bunny.
- If the player in the middle does not guess correctly within three tries he or she becomes part of the circle and a new player is chosen to go in the middle.

Variation(s)

- Player in the middle chooses how many times to chant “Bob the Bunny” keeping his or her eyes closed the whole time.
- Play with multiple bunnies.

Cookie Jar

→ Supports Self-Management, Decision-Making



GROUP SIZE

10+ players



AGE GROUP

K-2nd



EQUIPMENT

Cones, if needed for boundaries



TIME

5-10 minutes

Set-Up

Set up a rectangular play area with enough space in between for the group to run.

Before You Start

- Demonstrate safe and gentle tagging (butterfly tags) and appropriate tagging areas (arms, back, and shoulders).
- Line up players shoulder to shoulder along one of the boundary lines, making sure there is adequate space for the players to spread out.
- Practice the verbal cues so the whole group asks, “Cookie Monster, Cookie Monster, are you hungry?” in unison.
- Review boundaries and consequences for going out of bounds.
- Choose a Cookie Monster (or be the Cookie Monster for the first round). Explain that everyone else is a cookie. It is almost lunchtime and the monster may be hungry.

How to Play

- The players ask, “Cookie Monster, Cookie Monster, are you hungry?”
- If the reply is “no,” the player must remain in place and ask again until the reply is “yes.”
- If the reply is “yes,” the player must try to run across the play area without getting tagged by the Cookie Monster.
- If tagged, players become one of the Cookie Monster’s helpers for future rounds.
- Once all players have reached the safety of the other side, the next round begins in the same way.

Variation(s)

- Pick a couple of players to be the Cookie Monster.
- Modify for older kids who may not relate to Cookie Monster with “Boogie Monster.”

Elbow Tag

→ Supports Self-Management, Decision-Making



GROUP SIZE

20–30 players



AGE GROUP

3rd–6th



EQUIPMENT

No equipment needed



TIME

10 minutes

Set Up

Designate a playing area large enough to run in.

Before You Start

- Divide the group into partners.
- Partners should link arms at the elbows and have their free hand on their hips.
- Ask for two volunteers. Assign one of them to be It and the other to be the Runner.
- Demonstrate safe tagging (gentle tags) and appropriate tagging areas (arms, back, and shoulders).
- Have the players practice how to detach, and explain who becomes the Runner and who stays linked at the elbow.

How to Play

- The player who is It must try to tag the Runner.
- The Runner must find a pair of players and link arms at the elbow with one of them.

- The player on the other side of that pair detaches and is now the new Runner being chased by the It player.
- The new Runner must then find another pair with whom to attach, in turn detaching another player.
- If the Runner gets tagged before he or she can find someone with whom to link elbows, the Runner then becomes It and chases the other player.
- The Runner must link to another pair within five seconds.

Variation(s)

- The leader says “Switch” and the Runner becomes It.
- Let both the runner and the tagger link elbows, so both have a chance to change and more people get to play.

Four Square

→ Supports Self-Management, Positive Relationships,
Problem-Solving



GROUP SIZE

4+ players



AGE GROUP

1st–6th



EQUIPMENT

1 rubber playground ball



TIME

10 minutes

Set Up

- Draw a Four-Square court: 10-by-10-foot square, divided into four smaller squares of 5-by-5 feet each.
- Clockwise, label the squares with chalk: 1, 2, 3, 4.

Before You Start

- Explain that the object of the game is to hit the ball into another player's square.
- Demonstrate what flat underhand hits look like (open palms).
- Explain that if there is a disagreement about a play, 1 round of Rock, Paper, Scissors resolves the conflict.

How to Play

- The game begins when the player in square 1 serves the ball.
- To serve, the player bounces the ball, then hits it underhand into another player's square.
- The receiver lets the ball bounce once before hitting it into another player's square.

- Play continues until the ball bounces out of bounds, bounces twice before it is returned, is not allowed to bounce, or bounces on a line.
- The player who causes any of these goes to the end of the line, and a new player enters into square 4.
- When a square is left open, the person in the front advances to the next square, and the remaining players close the gap. For example, if square 1 is open, the player in square 2 would move to 1, square 3 moves to 2, and so on. New players always enter the game in square 4.


Variation(s)


- Categories. The replacement player names any category they want: animals, colors, sports, counting by 5s, and so on. Players must call out something that falls under that category when the ball comes to them. If there's a repeat or a player can't think of anything fast enough he or she goes to the end of the line. All of the normal rules still apply.
- Example: The server announces "Colors! Purple." The next player calls out "blue" and so on.

Gaga Ball

→ Supports Self-Management, Social Awareness/Empathy,
Decision-Making

 **GROUP SIZE**
4+ players

 **AGE GROUP**
2nd–6th

 **EQUIPMENT**
Dodge balls

 **TIME**
5–15 minutes

Set Up

Define an appropriate play space with clear boundaries. You will need enough space for players to move around trying to hit the ball or avoid a bouncing ball.

Before You Start

- Demonstrate paddle hands and how to hit the ball with an open hand.
- Demonstrate tagging with the ball from the knee down.

How to Play

- The object of the game is to be the last person left in the play area.
- All players start by standing on the boundary of the play area.
- One designated player walks to the center and throws the ball in the air.
- Players count three bounces before they run in and can try to hit the ball with their paddle hands.

- If a player hits the ball, he or she cannot touch it again until the ball hits something else—either another player hits it, the ball tags another player, or the ball touches a wall.
- If a player gets tagged by the ball below the knee, he or she becomes a part of the boundary and help keep the ball in the area.
- The game is over when there is one player left or time runs out.

Variation(s)

- Use multiple balls.
- Put tables/desks on their side and create a hexagon or an octagon.

Giants, Wizards, and Elves

→ Supports Positive Relationships, Problem-Solving, Teamwork



GROUP SIZE
10–30 players



AGE GROUP
3rd–6th



EQUIPMENT
Cones or chalk, if needed for boundaries



TIME
20 minutes or more

Set Up

- Define the playing area with cones in a rectangular shape.
- Divide the group into two teams.

Before You Start

- Demonstrate the movement and sound for each character:
 - The giants stand with hands raised overhead and make the sound “Aaargh!”
 - The wizards stand with one arm extended forward as if they are holding a wand and makes the sound “Hissssss!”
- The elves squat down, put their hands around their ears, and make the sound “Hehehehehe!”
- Have the whole group practice each of the characters’ movement and sound.
- Explain which character wins in a stand-off: giant over wizard, wizard over elf, and elf over giant.
- Demonstrate safe and gentle tagging (butterfly tags) and appropriate tagging areas (arms, back, and shoulders).

How to Play

- Each team huddles up on its side and chooses a first and second character.
- Each team moves to the middle line, walking shoulder-to-shoulder.
- Then the leader calls out, “One, two, three! What’s it gonna be?”
- Teams flash their first choice.
- The team that flashes the dominant character chases the other team back to its line, trying to tag as many players as possible before they get to their line
- Anyone tagged becomes part of the opposite team.
- If both teams choose the same first choice, the teams wait for the leader to again call out the signal, and the teams flash their second choice. If they choose the same second choice, the teams regroup and pick two new choices.
- Play continues until all players are on the same team.

Variation(s)

- Use three different objects, movements, and sounds. Possible options include Lions, Tigers, and Bears; or Rock, Paper, and Scissors.

Hula Hoop Challenge

→ Supports Positive Relationships, Problem-Solving, Teamwork

 **GROUP SIZE**
10–30 players

 **AGE GROUP**
2nd–6th

 **EQUIPMENT**
1–2 hula hoops

 **TIME**
5–10 minutes

Set Up

- The group forms a circle, holding hands.
- Demonstrate how to get your body through the hula hoop while staying connected in the circle, still holding hands.

Before You Start

- Two players unclasp their hands so you can place the hula hoop between them. Then they grasp hands again, with the hoop between them, and their hands through the hoop.

How to Play

- The object of the game is to get the hula hoop all the way around the circle without anyone letting go of their teammates' hands.
- Encourage the group to cheer each other on.
- Once the task is accomplished, have the group discuss successes and challenges and try again if time permits.

Variation(s)

- Time the group to see how quickly the players can do the activity.
- Play with eyes shut.
- Divide the group in two circles and have them compete.

Hungry Fox

→ Supports Self-Management, Decision-Making, Teamwork



GROUP SIZE

7–30 players



AGE GROUP

K–2nd



EQUIPMENT

Chalk, cones



TIME

10–20 minutes

Set Up

Designate a large rectangular play area with clear boundaries and enough room for children to skip, jog, or run. On one end of the rectangle have a line of chalk or cones that will be the designated safe zone.

Before You Start

- Demonstrate safe and gentle tagging (butterfly tags) and appropriate tagging areas (arms, back, and shoulders).
- Ask players to practice butterfly tagging on their own upper back, shoulders, and arms so they know where safe touch is.
- Ask players: “Do we hit, grab, push, or pull when using butterfly tags?” Make sure all answers to the questions are “no.”
- Practice with the players starting the game. Players must ask “Hungry Fox, Hungry Fox, what time is it?”
- Demonstrate what happens when players get tagged. Tagged players freeze and become the Hungry Fox’s helpers.
- Show the players the safe line that they need to pass where the Hungry Fox cannot tag them.

- Review the boundaries, the safe zone, and the consequence for going outside them (players become a Hungry Fox helper).

How to Play

- The object of the game is to avoid being tagged by the Hungry Fox.
- Players stand shoulder to shoulder on the starting line in the safe zone.
- One player or the leader begins the game in the middle of the boundaries as the Hungry Fox.
- Players ask, “Hungry Fox, Hungry Fox, what time is it?”
- Whatever time (from 1 o’clock to 12 o’clock) the Hungry Fox says, is the number of steps players take out of the safe zone, toward the fox.
- If the Hungry Fox says “It’s lunchtime” players must run back to their safe zone without getting tagged.
- Tagged players become one of Hungry Fox’s helpers and tag the other players.
- The last player untagged in the safe zone becomes the Hungry Fox for the next round!

Mid-Game Questions

[Use this as an opportunity to reteach safe tagging.]

- Where do we tag our classmates?
- How are we tagging our classmates, using what kind of light fingers do we use?

Variation(s)


- Modify movement and speed of play, especially if a large group is playing. Hop like bunnies, skip, zombie walk, tiptoe, and so on. Younger players often do better with hops than steps.
- To increase safety, when the first person is tagged, he or she becomes the new Hungry Fox for the next round.

I Love My Neighbor

→ Supports Positive Relationships, Social Awareness/Empathy

 **GROUP SIZE**
5+ players

 **AGE GROUP**
K-5th

 **EQUIPMENT**
One less chair, cone, or place marker than the participants playing

 **TIME**
10 minutes

Set Up

Position chairs, cones, or place markers to form a circle.

Before You Start

- Prompt players to think about what they will say if they get to be in the middle (activities they like to do, foods they like to eat, movies they like to watch, and so on).
- Briefly talk about the need for awareness of others (being aware of your surroundings and other people moving in the same space) and review Rock, Paper, Scissors, in case there is a tie.

How to Play

- Players stand in a circle where the cone/place marker marks their spot. One player will not have a cone. That person stands in the center of the circle.

- The player standing in the center begins the game by saying, “I love my neighbor who . . .” The player completes the sentence with a fact about themselves. For example, “I love my neighbor who likes to play basketball!” or “I love my neighbor who has brothers and sisters!” The sentence can be anything that the player likes, but must be true for that person.
- Then all players on the circle who have that in common leave their spot and run to any empty spot that is not right next to them.
- The last player who cannot find an open spot changes places with the person in the center and begins a new round of the game by saying, “I love my neighbor who . . .”

Knockout

→ Supports Self-Management



GROUP SIZE

5–15 players



AGE GROUP

3rd–6th



EQUIPMENT

2 basketballs, basketball hoop, cone



TIME

10–15 minutes

Set Up

Place one cone a few feet behind the foul line, facing the basket.

Before You Start

- Review how to shoot the basketball.
- Review start and stop signals.

How to Play

- Players form one line at the cone.
- The first two players in line start with a ball.
- The object of the game is for the player who gets to the court second to score before the player who was already there.
- On the start signal, Player 1 proceeds to the foul line and takes his or her first shot.
 - As soon as Player 1 attempts his or her first shot, Player 2 can shoot from the foul line.
 - If players miss their first shot from the foul line, they can rebound and shoot from anywhere on the court. Players continue to shoot until one of them makes a basket.

- Both players are trying to be the first to make a basket.
- If Player 2 makes a basket before Player 1, Player 1 is knocked out.
 - Both players pass their balls to the front of the line.
 - Player 2 returns to the end of the line.
 - Player 1 waits until the next game.
- If Player 1 makes a basket before Player 2, Player 2 continues to shoot.
 - Player 1, passes the ball to the first person in line and goes to the end of the line.
 - The next player, Player 3, shoots from the foul line, now trying to make a shot before Player 2.
- This rotation continues until there is only one player left.
- Once players score or are knocked out, they pass the ball to the next person in line as quickly as possible. Passing quickly allows the next shooter the greatest chance of eliminating another player.
- Players may not touch the other player's ball at any time.

Land, Sea, Air

→ Supports Decision-Making



GROUP SIZE

4–60 players



AGE GROUP

K–6th



EQUIPMENT

A line or an imaginary line



TIME

1–10 minutes

Set Up

Either mark a line on the floor or just create a space where players can stand with enough space between them so they don't knock into each other.

Before You Start

For younger players, this game benefits from a quick, playful story. Once you understand how to play this game, think of a story that will help you bring this game to life for your players.

How to Play

- The leader calls out commands, such as “land,” “air,” “sea,” in no particular order.
- Players must do what the commands represent.
- When the leader calls “sea,” the players jump over the line into the sea.

- When the leader calls “air,” the players jump straight up and land back in the same spot (not crossing over into the other area).
- When the leader calls a command that matches the players’ position, the players remain standing on the ground—doing nothing. Example: calling out “land” when the players are all standing on land already.
- The leader’s goal is to confuse the players by mixing up all the commands in any order the leader chooses.
- When a player makes a mistake, they do a fun task to get back into the game. Examples: five seconds of dancing, telling yourself “I’m awesome” while fist-pumping up in the air, getting a High Five from the leader, or anything else you want. Be creative!

Mid-Game Questions

- What do you need to do to last as long as possible in this game?

Closing Questions

- What kind of skills are we practicing in this game?
- When would be a good time to play this game and why?

Variation(s)

- The leader speeds up the command delivery.
- The group plays until there is one player left, then the last one standing becomes the leader of the next round.

- The leader can make up a variety of commands, based on the age and ability of the players. Examples:
 - Bridge—one foot in the land, and one foot in the sea
 - Tornado—spin in a circle one time
 - Swimmer—jump into the sea and do a swimmer’s crawl arm movement
 - Farmer—jump onto land pretend to hoe
 - Bird—jump into air with arms outstretched like a bird
- The leader could use this game as a transition for moving students into the next classroom activity: the players who make a wrong movement are then last to get a drink, get a snack, start homework, and so on.

Mountains and Valleys

→ Supports Self-Management, Social Awareness/Empathy, Decision-Making, Teamwork



GROUP SIZE

10–30 players



AGE GROUP

K–5th



EQUIPMENT

20–30 cones



TIME

5–10 minutes

Set Up

Place cones randomly inside the boundaries of the game. Some cones should be right-side-up. Some cones should be upside-down or on their side.

Before You Start

- Remind players to be careful not to run into each other.
- Remind players that the game begins and ends with the sound of your whistle.

How to Play

- Divide players into two teams: the Mountains and the Valleys.
- The Mountain Team turns cones into mountains by turning them right-side-up.
- The Valley Team turns cones into valleys by turning them upside-down.

- Cones must be moved gently with hands only. Feet should never touch the cones.
- Play continues for about one minute, and then the leader blows a whistle.
- Count how many cones are Mountains and how many are Valleys.
- After a few rounds, teams switch roles.

Variation(s)

- When playing inside, have players place the cones on top of desks, chairs, and tables.

Night at the Museum

→ Supports Self-Management, Decision-Making



GROUP SIZE

5+ players



AGE GROUP

K-6th



EQUIPMENT

Cones



TIME

10-15 minutes

Set Up

Clear the play space of obstacles and mark clear boundaries.

Before You Start

- Talk to players about statues:
 - They don't move.
 - They don't touch each other.
 - They don't make noise.
 - But we all know they come alive and move around the museum at night, right?
- Remind players to be safe and be aware of where their friends are around them.
- Have players practice appropriate statue poses.
- Explain that the night guard will hold a pretend flashlight and look for moving statues (a cone, marker, anything they can pretend is a flashlight).

How to Play

- The object of the game is to move without letting the night guard see you. On the start word, all players become a statue and can't let the night guard catch them moving.
- The night guard will move slowly around the room, pointing his or her flashlight at the statues. If the night guard shines the flashlight on a player and that player moves or laughs, he or she becomes a night guard.
- If playing this indoors/in a classroom, encourage players to be sneaky when they're moving around. You do not want the night guard to hear you moving!

Variation(s)

- For older players, this game can be combined with other games, such as silent ball, for an added challenge.

One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish

→ Supports Self-Management, Positive Relationships, Problem-Solving, Teamwork



GROUP SIZE
10–35 players



AGE GROUP
1st–6th



EQUIPMENT
Small object like a stuffed animal fish



TIME
10–15 minutes

Set Up

Create a visible starting line.

Before You Start

- Players line up on the starting line.
- The leader places an object a good distance from the starting line—at least 15 feet or more.

How to Play

- The object of the game is for the players to work as a team to get the object back to the starting line without the leader guessing who has it.
- The leader stands behind the object facing the players.
- The leader turns with his or her back to the players and says, “One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish.”
- Players move while the leader is saying the phrase.

- When the leader finishes “. . . Blue Fish,” the leader turns around and all the players freeze.
- If anyone is still moving when the leader turns around, the whole group must go back to the starting line.
- If no players are caught moving, the leader turns around again and says “One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish,” and the players can move closer to the object.
- Once the players get close enough for one of them to take the object, all players pretend they have it, with their hands behind their backs.
- Players still may only move during the phrase—now going backward—but once the object has been taken, the leader takes three guesses during each freeze, trying to find out who has it.
- If the leader guesses correctly, the object is returned, and the players start over back at the starting line.
- If the leader guesses incorrectly, he or she turns around, says the phrase, and the players keep moving toward the finish line.
- This play rotation continues until either the object holder is correctly identified, or the group gets the object back to the safety line and a new round begins.

Variation(s)

- Set a minimum number of players who must touch the object before it crosses the line.
- Require that all students touch the object at least once before it crosses the line.
- Increase the distance between the object and the starting line.

Over Under

→ Supports Positive Relationships, Social Awareness/Empathy, Decision-Making, Problem Solving



GROUP SIZE

10–30 players



AGE GROUP

2nd–5th



EQUIPMENT

1 ball per team (teams of 8–10 players)



TIME

10 minutes

Set Up

Designate a start and finish line.

Before You Start

- Have players line up behind each other in groups of 8 to 10, spreading out an arm's length apart.
- Demonstrate how to pass the ball over someone's head then under and through someone's legs.
- Give the player in front of the line a ball.

How to Play

- The object of the game is for players to pass back the ball either over their head or under their legs, alternating methods with each person.
- When the last person in line gets the ball, he or she goes to the front of the line and starts passing the ball back again.

- The line should be moving forward with each person going to the front of the line.
- Play until the players reach a finishing point or until a specific number of turns.

Variation(s)

- Have players shut their eyes while they are passing and receiving.
- Play with a basketball where the players must take a shot at a basket before returning to the front of the line.
- Add dribbling challenges such as left or right hand only or pivoting before passing.
- Play with a soccer ball with similar challenges.
- Vary the way players move from the back to the front of the line.

Poop Deck

→ Supports Self-Management, Problem-Solving



GROUP SIZE

10+ players



EQUIPMENT

Chalk



AGE GROUP

K–2nd



TIME

5–10 minutes

Set Up

- Create a large rectangle split into three equal sections using chalk or cones.
- Designate or label the sections: Poop Deck, Quarter Deck, and Main Deck.

Before You Start

- Line players up on the sideline. Make sure all players have room to move safely between the decks.
- Make sure all players know where each deck is located.
- Review the importance of awareness and honesty.

How to Play

- Players line up with their toes behind the sideline.
- The Caller stands at the end line and shouts either “Poop Deck!” or “Quarter Deck!” or “Main Deck!”
- All players run to the called area.

- The last player to cross over the line sings the Awesome Song and gets back into the game.
- The Caller judges whether a player did not make it.

Variation(s)

- The last player to cross over the line becomes a Caller's assistant, calling together until the next round.
- The last player in becomes the new Caller for the next round before rejoining the other players.
- Create new commands, incorporating other skills like walking, skipping, hopping.

Ro-Sham-Bo Rockstar

→ Supports Positive Relationships



GROUP SIZE

10–100 players



AGE GROUP

1st–6th



EQUIPMENT

No equipment needed



TIME

10 minutes

Set Up

Define the boundaries of the play space.

Before You Start

Review the rules to Ro-Sham-Bo (also known as Rock, Paper, Scissors).

How to Play

- Divide players into pairs.
- Players introduce themselves to each other.
- Partners play a round of Ro-Sham-Bo (or enough rounds to break a tie).
- The unsuccessful partner becomes the winner's fan.
- The fan follows the winning partner, cheering and supporting the partner.
- The winner moves on to play another winning player, with the fans behind the winners, cheering them on.

- Each round, the winner advances to play again, collecting fans.
- The game continues until the last round of two players, each with a group of fans.
- The winner of this last round is the Ro-Sham-Bo Rockstar.

Sequence Touch

→ Supports Self-Management



GROUP SIZE

5–60 players



AGE GROUP

K–5th



EQUIPMENT

Optional cones, chalk, line



TIME

1–5 minutes

Set Up

Create a home base using cones, chalk, or an imaginary space where players will always start and finish each task.

Before You Start

- Designate an area with objects that many players can run to and tag (basketball hoop, fence, grass, slide, jungle gym).
- Review ways to be safe while running:
 - Demonstrate how to avoid others when running toward the object to tag.
 - Remind players to keep their heads up.
 - Players do not have to always go straight. They can move side to side to avoid other players.
- Show players where the return location is after they tag all of the objects.

How to Play

- The object of the game is for players to remember and tag all of the objects that are listed as quickly as they can and return to the designated area (home base).
- When the leader says the start word, everyone must go tag the objects before returning to the same spot within 10 seconds. Objects will be based on whatever is available in the location.
- Helpful tip: have players repeat the instructions back to you before you say the start word.

Variation(s)

- Use as a Transition Activity: choose a style of moving appropriate for your space (walking, tiptoeing) and change the final destination (“your desk with your math book out”).
- Don’t have a time limit.
- Have players touch the objects with different parts of their bodies.
- Have players touch a category of object (“something red that is not clothing”).
- Have players perform an action (“give two High Fives,” “give a double High Five to someone wearing red”).
- Modify the movements. Players could skip, hop, or run like an animal.
- Add basketballs or soccer balls to make this game a great skill-building activity for dribbling.

Shipwreck

→ Supports Self-Management, Social Awareness/Empathy



GROUP SIZE

5+ players



AGE GROUP

Pre-K–6th



EQUIPMENT

Cones or chalk, if needed for boundaries



TIME

5+ minutes

Set Up

- Designate an appropriate play area with clear boundaries: outside, in a gym, or in a classroom.

Before You Start

- Players line up on a clearly marked line in the middle of the playing area.
- Make sure everyone knows the commands and understands the activity they prompt.
- Start with a few commands and increase the number of commands you use as players are able to remember them.
- The object of the game is to be the last crew member standing.
- The leader explains that he or she is the captain of the ship and will give commands to the crew.
- The crew is sailing treacherous seas and must work together and follow the captain's commands to survive.

- If crew members do not follow the commands correctly or is the last to follow the command, they must go to the brig (waiting area).

How to Play

- The captain calls out commands, and the crew must obey or be thrown in the brig.
 - **Roll call.** The crew lines up at the midline of the playing area, feet together, toes on the line, salute, and say, "Aye-aye, Captain!" The crew holds the salute until the captain salutes and says, "At ease."
 - **Crow's nest.** Players act as if they're climbing up a ladder to the crow's nest, at the top of the main mast, to serve as lookouts.
 - **Swab the deck.** Players act like they're mopping the deck while chanting, "Swab, swab, swab the deck!"
 - **Shark attack.** The Captain becomes a shark and tries to tag the crew. Those tagged go to the brig.
 - **Break time.** Active crew members run to the brig and tag as many people as possible. Those who are tagged come back in and play. Make sure everyone gets let out of the brig during break time.
 - **Sailor overboard.** Crew members get into groups of three. Two crew members grab hands forming a life raft and the third gets into the middle while acting out using a spy-glass to find the sailor in the water.
 - **Drop anchor.** Crew members lie on their backs with legs up and act like an anchor.

- **Pirate crew.** Crew members close one eye, put up a hook finger, hobble around like they have a peg leg, and say “Aaargh!”
- **Row to shore.** Crew members make lines of four. Players act as if they are rowing, while singing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat.”
- **Chow time.** Five crew members make a small circle. All of them bend slightly toward the center, then mime eating handfuls of food while saying, “Um num num num num!!!”
- Players will inevitably be without a group on different rounds. You can either send them to the brig to perform a designated exercise (jumping jacks, pushups, star jumps), have them become swimmers who swim around the room until they hear the next direction, or wait until break time when another player will rescue them with a High Five.

Variation(s)

- Create and add new rules, especially ones that require players to form groups of two, three, four, five, and more!
- For newer players, pick two or three rules on which to focus.

Sprout Ball

→ Supports Self-Management, Social Awareness/Empathy



GROUP SIZE
5–30 players



AGE GROUP
2nd–6th



EQUIPMENT
Soft playground balls



TIME
5–15 minutes

Set Up

Set up an appropriate boundary for the play area.

Before You Start

- Review appropriate places to hit with the dodgeball (below the waist or it doesn't count) and dodgeball throwing safety (throw gently). This game can also be played as Sprout Tag without using balls.

How to Play

- The players start at the edges of the boundaries in their own space.
- The object of the game is to be the last player standing.
- The ball is thrown into the air and bounces three times. On the third bounce the players can leave their spot and try to pick up the ball.
- Once players grab the ball, they can only take three steps and can only hold onto the ball for five seconds.

- The player with the ball throws at any player, trying to tag him or her from the waist down.
- If the other player is tagged, he or she become a “seed” by crouching down or taking a knee. Students with limited mobility can put their hands on their knees or use another adaptation.
- If the player is not tagged but catches the ball, the player who threw the ball becomes a seed instead.
- Seeds should point at the player who tagged him or her and keep an eye on this player.
- Seeds can “sprout” up and keep playing when the person who tagged him or her is tagged.
- The game is over when all of the players have been tagged by the same player or time runs out.

Variation(s)

- Use multiple balls. Or, play Sprout Tag without any balls.
- Once players have been tagged and are sitting down, if a ball comes close enough to grab, they can try to free themselves by throwing the ball at standing players.

Steal the Bacon

→ Supports Decision-Making, Teamwork



GROUP SIZE

10+ players



AGE GROUP

3rd–6th



EQUIPMENT

Bean bags



TIME

10–15 minutes

Set Up

- Designate a play area with clear boundaries and a goal line for each team.
- Play area can be indoors or outdoors such as a basketball court, field, or other large rectangular area.

Before You Start

- Demonstrate safe and gentle tagging (butterfly tags) and appropriate tagging areas (arms, back, and shoulders).
- Check for understanding by having participants repeat the rules back to you.
- Keep in mind that younger grade levels may have difficulty remembering their numbers.

How to Play

- Divide participants into two to four teams, depending on group size.

- Give each player a number, say 1 to 5; assign the same numbers, 1 to 5, to the other team.
- Place the bacon (bean bag or other small item) in the middle of the playing area.
- The leader calls out a number, and each player with that number runs to pick up the bacon.
- The player who gets the bacon first, runs back to his or her goal line, while the opposing player tries to tag his player before he or she brings home the bacon.
- The round ends once a player with the bacon is tagged or reaches the goal line.
- At the end of the round, each player gives the other player a High Five before returning back to their respective team.

Variation(s)

- Use addition/subtraction, multiplication/division to call out the numbers, such as the players with the number that is equal to two plus three.
- Call more than one number at a time, and/or require players to pass the bacon once before they score.
- Place two pieces of bacon in a hula hoop in the center and make sure teams know which ball and which goal is theirs.
- Soccer style. Use a soccer ball as the bacon. The objective is to be the first team to kick the ball into a goal at the finish line. The leader can use one ball or one ball for each team.
- Basketball style. Use a basketball ball as the bacon. The objective is to be the first team to score a basket in a nearby hoop. The leader can use one ball or one ball for each team.

Superstar

→ Supports Self-Management, Positive Relationships, Social Awareness/Empathy, Teamwork



GROUP SIZE

6–30 players



AGE GROUP

2nd+



EQUIPMENT

None



TIME

10–15 minutes

Set Up

None.

Before You Start

- Have the whole group gather in a circle.
- Divide players into pairs.
- Demonstrate with a volunteer examples of commonalities that meet the criteria.
 - “I wouldn’t tell my partner that I have brown hair because they can see that. I wouldn’t say that I am in elementary school because my partner already knows that. I might say, my favorite food is pizza. What’s yours? What do you like to do in your spare time?”

How to Play

- Each group will have one to two minutes to find out how many things the group members have in common that:

- They didn't already know and
- Are not visible
- When the time is up have players get into a circle, standing next to their partner.
- One by one, each pair will share one thing both have in common.
- After sharing this commonality, if others in the group also share that commonality they all will put their hands in the air, lunge forward, and yell "SUPERSTAR!"
- The next pair then shares a commonality and the process continues until all pairs have shared.

Variation(s)

- Have players switch partners and do a round where they have to find out what they have in common around a specific topic (sports, school, and so on).
- Have players do a round where they can't speak and can only act out ideas.

Switch

→ Supports Self-Management



GROUP SIZE

5–30 players



AGE GROUP

Pre-K–5th



EQUIPMENT

5 cones



TIME

10 minutes

Set Up

Create a square with four cones on each corner and one in the middle of the square. You can also use a four square court, pointing out the four corners and the center intersection.

Before You Start

Review how to play Rock, Paper, Scissors.

How to Play

- Players line up close to the playing area.
- The first five players in line each stand at a cone (at each corner and in the middle).
- Play begins when the player in the middle yells “Switch.”
- All five players, including the player in the middle, walk quickly to find a new corner cone to occupy. Players may not stay at their cone or return to the same cone.
- If two players come to a cone at the same time, they use Rock, Paper, Scissors to determine who will stay at the cone.

- If a player does not get to a corner cone, he or she returns to the game line.
- The next player in the line goes to the middle cone and begins the next round.

Variation(s)

- Add cones—say halfway between the corners—to make a bigger play area for more than five players.
- Use four different colored hula hoops. Have the player in the middle call out a color, the caller runs to that color hula hoop. All other players have to switch hula hoops but cannot run to the color that was called out.
- Have players pick a different way to move each round (tip toes, bunny hop, etc.).

Three Lines Basketball

→ Supports Self-Management, Decision-Making, Teamwork



GROUP SIZE

10+ players



AGE GROUP

3rd–6th



EQUIPMENT

Basketball, cones for lines



TIME

10–15 minutes

Set Up

Place three cones on the center line of a basketball court.

Before You Start

- Demonstrate how to dribble with one hand.
- Explain and demonstrate traveling (taking more than two steps without dribbling).
- Explain and demonstrate passing techniques (bounce and chest passes).
- Demonstrate shooting techniques.
- Demonstrate how to defend another player without making contact, shuffling one's feet with arms up or wide.
- Explain that the ball changes teams after going out of bounds.

How to Play

- Players stand in three single-file lines, one behind each cone.

- The first player in each line steps onto the court to form a team of three (starting as defense).
- The second player in each line steps onto the other side of the court to form another team of three (starting as offense).
- The two teams play a round of half-court basketball, each trying to score a basket before the other team.
- When a point is scored, the scoring team stays on the court as the defenders and the next three in line step on the court as a team. This oncoming team plays offense.
- The team that did not score returns to the end of the lines.
- If a point is not scored after a set time, players waiting in line count down from 10.
- If neither team has scored a point by the end of the count-down, both teams leave the court and join their respective lines; two new teams step onto the court.
- If a team wins three times in a row, it earns three claps and returns to the end of the lines.

Variation(s)

- Players cannot dribble. In order to move the ball, they must pass.
- When players on defense rebound the ball, they must pass it one time before they can shoot the ball.
- Each player on a team must touch the ball a certain number of times before a team can shoot.

Toxic Waste Dump

→ Supports Positive Relationships, Social Awareness/Empathy, Problem-Solving, Teamwork



GROUP SIZE

10–30 players



AGE GROUP

3rd–6th



EQUIPMENT

Cardboard, jump rope, paper, carpet squares, or anything that players can easily stand on and carry



TIME

10 minutes or more

Set Up

- Make a clearly marked start and finish line.
- Have all materials set out and ready for use.

Before You Start

- The team should come up with a strategy on how to get all of their teammates across the playing area safely without stepping in toxic sludge.
- Brainstorm strategies and give examples if needed.

How to Play

- The object of the game is to get all players from one side of the playing area to the other side without touching the toxic sludge.

- Players can only be in the toxic sludge if they are standing on an item provided.
- If players step off and into the sludge, they must return to the other side of town.
- If an item is placed into the toxic sludge without being constantly touched by a player, it is lost and the whole team must return back to the other side of town.

Variation(s)

- Everyone works together to race against a clock.
- Split the group into teams and see which team can complete the task first.
- Choose the amount of items based on the experience level of the group.
- Players figure out their plan before they start then remain silent during the game.
- Randomly blindfold or silence a few members of the group.

Triangle Tag

→ Supports Self-Management, Positive Relationships, Social Awareness/Empathy, Decision-Making, Problem-Solving, Teamwork



GROUP SIZE

4–80 players



AGE GROUP

2nd–5th



EQUIPMENT

None



TIME

5 minutes

Set Up

Designate a clear playing area.

Before You Start

- Divide players into groups of four with three of the four holding hands in a triangle.
- Help players choose one of the three players holding hands to be the Runner, the person to be tagged.
- Demonstrate safe and gentle tagging (butterfly tags) and appropriate tagging areas (arms, back, and shoulders).

How to Play

- The player outside the circle is the Tagger, trying to tag the Runner.

- The other two players holding hands in the triangle will help to protect the designated Runner by moving in different directions.
- The tagger cannot go inside, over, or under the triangle, and cannot lean on the arms of the players holding hands.
- Once the Tagger has tagged the Runner or time runs out, the positions change.
- Keep an eye on the play and make sure groups are changing positions.

Ultimate Kickball

→ Supports Positive Relationships, Decision-Making, Teamwork



GROUP SIZE

10+ players



AGE GROUP

1st–4th



EQUIPMENT

Kickball, bases/cones



TIME

15–20 minutes

Set Up

- This game can be played on a regular kickball field or by using four cones for bases in a large area.
- Bases should be large enough to fit multiple players.

Before You Start

- Remind players to play in a position (spread out) and to call the ball.
- Encourage passing the ball by throwing it to teammates rather than running it.
- Remind players to tag softly with the ball.
- Review the order of the bases and running in a counter-clockwise direction.

How to Play

- Divide the group into two teams: a kicking team and a fielding team.

- The pitcher controls play of the game. Play begins when the ball is rolled to the kicker, and play stops when the pitcher has the ball.
- The pitcher will roll the ball to home base and the kicker.
- The kicker will kick the ball and run the bases in order. One point is scored for each runner that rounds all bases and reaches home base safely.
- There are no foul balls.
- Players can kick the ball backward only if there is a backstop or wall behind home plate.
- There can be more than one runner on a base at any time.
- Runners may choose to stay on one base if it is unsafe to run.
- Runners can pass each other at any time.
- Runners must return to the previous base if the pitcher has the ball before they are halfway to the next base.
- Runners cannot continue running the bases and should return to their team if their fly ball is caught before it bounces or if they are tagged while not on a base.
- Teams switch after everyone on the kicking team has kicked once.

Variation(s)

Note: this version of kickball works well because it allows the advanced players to run fast through the bases and it allows beginners to take their time and learn the game.

Whistle Mixer

→ Supports Social Awareness/Empathy



GROUP SIZE

5+ players



AGE GROUP

Pre-K–6th



EQUIPMENT

Cones or chalk, if needed for boundaries, whistle



TIME

5 minutes

Set Up

Designate a play area with clear, visible boundaries.

Before You Start

- Players need to be scattered within a playing area. Have them walk around without touching each other. Feel free to have them skip, hop, or jump.
- Have a practice round so players can get the idea before they are put under any pressure.

How to Play

- The leader will blow a whistle a different number of times.
- When the leader blows the whistle, the players must form groups with the same number of players as whistle blows. So if the leader blows the whistle four times, the players must group themselves in groups of four.

- Players can be directed to hold hands or perform a number of physical movements once they form their group.
- Have players who were not able to form with a group step out and do a short activity like jumping jacks or the “I’m Awesome” dance, after which they may rejoin the game.
- For the next round, groups should spread out before regrouping so the same players are not near to each other again.

Variation(s)

- Pre-K: when the leader blows the whistle, players must find a partner as quickly as possible. Remind players to let go of their partner’s hand before blowing the whistle again. Repeat, asking them to find a new partner each time.
- You can challenge the more advanced players by requiring them to perform a specific task when the whistle is blown before they can form groups.
- Indoor modifications: instead of using a whistle, clap or snap to reduce the noise indoors.

Who Stole the Cookies?

→ Supports Positive Relationships, Social Awareness/Empathy



GROUP SIZE

5+ players



AGE GROUP

Pre-K–1st



EQUIPMENT

1 ball



TIME

5 minutes

Set Up

None.

Before You Start

- Have the players stand or sit in a circle.
- Practice rolling the ball to players and sitting down after they rolled.
- Practice singing one round of the song.

How to Play

- The Song:
 - Group: Who stole the cookies from the cookie jar? [insert Leader's name] stole the cookies from the cookie jar!
 - Leader: Who me?
 - Group: Yes you!
 - Leader: Couldn't be!
 - Group: Then who?

- The leader will then roll the ball to a player in the circle (saying their name) and sit down.
- After the leader has said the player's name, the group repeats the same song but with the new player responding.
- Continue to roll the ball to everyone in the group and repeat the song for each player.
- The game is over when all the players have had a turn and are sitting in the circle.

Wolves and Bunnies

→ Supports Positive Relationships, Problem-Solving, Teamwork



GROUP SIZE

10–50 players



AGE GROUP

3rd+



EQUIPMENT

1 ball (playground, dodgeball, football, etc.)



TIME

10 minutes

Set Up

Set up boundaries. Space should be large enough to accommodate the group with space to move.

Before You Start

Demonstrate safe and gentle tagging (butterfly tags) and appropriate tagging areas (arms, back, and shoulders).

How to Play

- The object of the game is for the wolves to tag all of the bunnies.
- Wolves can only tag bunnies with butterfly tags, not by throwing the ball.
- Bunnies can move all around the play area.
- Wolves can also move all around the play area as long as they do not have the ball in their hands.
- If the wolf has the ball, he or she cannot take any steps and can only pivot on one foot.

- However, wolves can tag bunnies only if they have the ball in their hands.
- Wolves without the ball should strategically move around the play space trying to get closer to the bunnies so that a wolf with the ball can throw it to them when they are close enough to tag the bunnies.
- When a bunny is tagged, they immediately turn into a wolf.
- Play continues until there are only a small number of bunnies left.
- Remaining bunnies will turn into the first set of wolves for the next round.

Variation(s)

- Use different examples of predator and prey.
- Add extra balls or balls of different sizes.



For the full version of Why Play Works, visit
<https://amzn.to/3sToDkZ>

To learn more about Playworks, visit
playworks.org