

Some Selected Station Games

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Used as an evening program or a T.C.A. (Total Camp Activity), cooperative and competitive games provide excellent play opportunities for campers and staff alike. The importance of play should not underestimated, for as noted child psychologist David Elkind has pointed out, "Play in young children is never frivolous and just 'having a good time.' In early childhood, and perhaps throughout life, play is also a way in which we learn." Both personal initiative and teamwork are stressed, along with sportsmanship, communication, and progression (rather than performance). And yes, the games are a lot of fun, too.

These games have been designed to be played with @ 30 participants, ages 6 and up, except where noted otherwise. The games themselves are most effectively conducted in the camp setting by arranging a circuit (circle) of stations, manned by Program and Support personnel, around which the cabin groups will travel. Six to seven stations would easily provide enough activity for one hour, but it is always better to have more program than time.

Enjoy these and innovate your own. Watch the kids; they are the most fearless inventors and creators of all. Take a look at your own people resources and raw materials and go from there. If it sounds silly enough, it may just work.

1. Geronimo! (Parachute Games)

There are a number of parachute games readily available, and these can be enjoyed by all, regardless of age, size, and gender differences. The parachute is fun because no one loses; everyone wins. Some of our favorite games are:

- **Gumball Machine:** A good get-started game, gets everyone in a cooperative, happy mood. Picking the parachute off the ground, participants begin waving it rapidly up and down, causing waves and ripples. As they do this, the leader throws in a number of different shaped and colored balls, the objective simply being to get them bouncing high, without bouncing out or going down the hole in the middle. Final objective would be to get them all down the "chute," or hole.
- **Upset the Fruit Basket:** Leader has all participants stand still, holding parachute tautly, at about belly-button level. He/she then begins walking around outside circle, assigning names of fruits to each player, after emphasizing to them that they must remember these names. He/she says,

"Apple, cherry, banana, grape," touching each player as they are assigned. The objective is for the group to lift the chute as high as possible, at which time the leader calls out the name of a fruit (or fruits). These people must run under the chute, exchanging places with one another, before the chute falls. Emphasize that the object is not to catch anyone underneath, but to let them change places. If leader says "Upset the Fruit Basket" or "Fruit Salad," all players must change places. Other categories can also be used, such as persons' names, cabin numbers, etc.

- **Mushroom:** A cooperative exercise. Leader tells participants that on a hot day, one of the coolest places to be is not in the pool or in the shade of a tree, but in a mushroom. "It's just a little known secret, because people have always been too big to fit in there. But now, we can find out just how it feels!" Procedure is for participants to lift the chute as high as possible, and then pull it down behind them, sitting on its edge as they do. Done effectively, this will trap air in the chute, and create a big bubble. Sit under it for awhile, and talk. Best to practice the lifting-real-high part a couple times.
- **Jaws:** A great closer. With deadly seriousness, announce that it is time for Jaws. All participants are told to hold the parachute at chest level, and step backward until it is tight. No one can look under it! The leader places his open hand, fingers together, on his head, pointing it upward like a fin. This fin will be seen as it moves under the water (parachute). "I am the shark," the leader announces, "and if I get you!...then you're a shark, too!" the leader begins moving under the shoot, and as he grabs an unsuspecting victim in the tummy, he should make as loud and bloodcurdling a sound as he can. Game ends once everyone has been transformed into a shark (at which point the parachute is usually a twisted mess anyway).

2. Close Encounter

Close Encounter is better labeled a challenge than a game, since there are only winners: those that are willing to try. Close Encounter is an event which can also be incorporated easily into a pioneer program, particularly one which does not have the asset of a ropes course.

A telephone pole or smooth, long log is placed in a horizontal position, no more than eight inches off the ground. Old tires are an excellent support on the ends since they provide some resilience, and the pole can be quickly lashed to these. Old camper mattresses, thick straw covered with sheets, or a like surface should be provided on the ground along either side of the mattress, in the unlikely event that someone should take an all-out tumble from the pole.

First, have the participants cross the pole, using it simply as a balance beam.

This may be a monumental task in itself for some of the younger campers. Help those who need it.

Then, explain the objective: cooperation through communication. One of the best ways we have found to explain this concept is to retell the story of Robin Hood and Little John, and their fateful meeting upon a log over a creek. Rather than cooperate, and both cross the log, they fought over the privilege, and one of them wound up getting drenched. Emphasize that there is a better solution, and that is to cross the log together, merely exchanging places in the middle.

Have one half of the group start on one end, the remaining half on the other. Demonstrate the crossing. (The crossing can be executed by having the two persons meet face to face, then turning slightly to face opposite sides of the log. Leaning back slightly, keeping chests together, and placing their feet between one another's as they progress, any equally matched pair can complete the crossing, regardless of age, gender, or size). Help the pairs to cross over. Allow some footfalls. The victory is in the trying, not the perfect execution, although some will achieve that, also.

3. Hindenburg Disaster (Balloon Volleyball)

Again, the vehicle here is cooperation rather than competition. A large garbage bag (30 gallons or more) is filled with inflated balloons, and then tied or taped closed. This is ball to be used, and can be hit over a conventional volleyball net, or even a simple rope or set of sheets pinned together.

The group is divided into two teams, but, it is emphasized, these teams are not competing against one another, but rather cooperating. It is announced that you want to set a new camp "garbageball" record. The previous garbageball record (whether real or imaginary) is such-and-such a number of total hits, but you think that this group can easily break that number.

The only rules are that there can be no more than four hits per side, and no one can hit the ball twice in a row. If it is hit more than four times, or if it touches the ground, then the group must start over.

Encourage both teams to count the hits out loud, and to surpass the record by as many hits as possible. Try also using two garbageballs at once.

4. All Aboard!

This is a cooperative game in the New Games tradition. Secure a piece of wood or cardboard, approximately 3' x 3'. This is a good size for 16 people. A good

rule is to have a little over 1/2 square foot per person.

The object is to get all participants 'aboard.' This means that there are no body parts touching any surface other than the wood or cardboard square.

Participants can hold one another, stack one another, etc., doing whatever it takes to meet the challenge.

Invent a story to set the scene, such as one about a shipwreck, and stress the urgency to get all survivors aboard the raft. Have at least one spotter in case of falls. If there is more than one group, All Aboard could be done as a timed competition.

5. Kamikaze

More than an obstacle course, Kamikaze allows for teamwork and imaginative play. A standard obstacle course is set up, with two paths running parallel to one another, so that two teams can compete at once. Use old tires (every size, obtained free of charge from garages and junk yards), hurdles, cones, steps, bed frames, etc. to construct the course, keeping in mind the ages and abilities of the campers.

Divide the group into two equal teams. Explain to the campers that they are now kamikaze pilots, and that it is their mission to carry a bomb into the enemy bunker, and then sacrifice their lives by self-destructing it there. The counselors provide the 'bombs,' (blow up balloons, which they hand to campers), and campers must travel in pairs to the bunker. If the bomb accidentally blows up on the way, the two kamikazes must return and get a new one.

Once they successfully reach the bunker, the two campers place the balloon between them, and then hug tightly to "detonate" it (a staff member may need to help them hug tightly enough). After detonating, the two miraculously survive, and return to 'headquarters.' (Staff members should do a sample run for the kids to see).

Water balloons are also fun to 'detonate.'

6. Lizard's Tail

Played in the tradition of Capture the Flag, and Everybody's It Tag.

In this event, it's every man and woman for him or herself. Each participant is given a strip of cloth (6-8 inches long), sock, or similar item, which is placed in the back pocket or waistband of players' shorts or pants.

Boundaries are defined, as are the rules, which are simply these: The last person with an unsnatched 'tail' wins. You can snatch as many or as few tails as you wish. You cannot hold your tail or guard it, nor can you run out of bounds. Just about anything else is acceptable.

The resulting free-for-all is amusing to watch, which is fortunate since those whose tails have been snatched are eliminated and forced to sit out. To keep the game moving at an even quicker pace, create a smaller field than you might normally use, and allow sideline judges the freedom to snatch any tails that come within arm's reach.

Play more than once if interest is high.

7. Attention K-Mart Shoppers! (Shopping Cart Relay)

This is a competitive relay in which participants must race, with shopping carts, to a designated area, where a number of goods are stacked. The shopper must choose only one item, and then return to the next player waiting in line, who will perform similarly.

Be certain that there are sufficient items for each player to get at least one in the cart, and try to vary sizes, shapes, and types of items.

Shopping carts can usually be borrowed with little difficulty from the store which the camp most frequently does business with, usually upon the condition that they will be returned the following day, in their original condition.

8. Schmertz Bombardment

The schmertz is a New Games plaything, which goes by a slightly different name in that circle. Basically, a schmertz is a small, soft ball of any type (usually a tennis ball, which has been stuffed into the toe of a sock or stocking, and then held in place with one over hand knot, tied in the ankle of the sock. The resultant toy can be thrown easily by its tail, and actually travels to great altitudes and distances with accuracy, looking in flight somewhat like a tadpole or comet. Although a hundred games could easily be concocted, this one was our first:

Mark off a large playing field, the size you might use for a campers' game of soccer or field hockey. Divide this field across the middle, and then on either end, (approx. 4 foot onto the field from where one might normally place goals), spread out a single sheet, and weight its four sides with bats or long boards. The

object is for the team on one side to throw its schmertzes onto the sheet on the opposite end of the field, while the team on that end attempts like objective, but in the opposite direction.

The rules are that you can only throw underhand, you can only have two schmertzes in your hands at any given time, you cannot cross the center line, and you cannot touch a schmertz in the air (which means, of course, no blocking). Once a schmertz hits the ground it can be retrieved and thrown again. After it hits a sheet (and has been counted by a judge), it can be picked up off the sheet.

Judges are needed by each sheet, and along the center dividing line. There is the option to have the two teams competing against one another, or against some 'record total,' real or imaginary. We have always played the latter way, as there are less hard feelings that way, and less of a temptation on the part of the campers to cheat.

9. Stitch in Time (Thread the Needle)

We used this game originally in one of our Get Acquainted / Be Humiliated sessions during Staff Orientation, but then thought it might be something that the campers would enjoy.

This is a relay. The two teams line up single file facing forward. The first person in each line is given a spool of string with a metal spoon attached to one end (plastic breaks too easily). On the word "go," this person drops the spoon down his/her shirt and out and the bottom, and then passes it to the next person who does the same. This continues, with the first person supplying more and more string, and all players between helping to feed it through their clothes. Once it reaches the end, players start it back through, and the lead person rewinds the string as it comes in (stress the importance of pulling and rewinding the string, as this will prevent any knots or tangles). The first team to successfully return the spoon, with string wound, wins. For added fun, place spoons in freezer a day prior to this game.

10. Wall of China (Go - Tag)

Wall of China Tag is an active game best played with older campers, since younger campers really do not seem to grasp it. If given properly and demonstrated, the instructions should be quickly understood, but if given improperly, the instructions could last forever.

Line all players up, shoulder to shoulder, facing one direction. Now, you the

leader alternate the direction of every other player (face them the opposite way). This is the wall. The Chaser and Chasee will start on one side of the wall. The Chasee can run around the wall, but the Chaser cannot. So if the Chasee goes around the wall, the Chaser does not follow, but rather tags a person in the wall who is facing that direction, who then leaves the wall and becomes the new Chaser. The old Chaser takes his/her place in wall after tagging. Just remember, no Chaser can go around the wall. Once Chaser catches Chasee, they switch roles, and begin game all over again.

Staff enjoys this, but definitely no more than thirty in one game.

11. The Black Hole

Cooperation is again the objective here. This is another activity which could easily be incorporated into a program where no ropes course exists, since it is simple to set-up, and is super-low risk.

Obtain a standard size tire with as large an opening as possible from a garage or junkyard. Using four lengths of rope, tie this tire between two trees so that it is suspended upright, the opening like a porthole. The tire should be at least four feet off the ground, and the ropes should form an X shape (two tied high either side, two low either side).

Provide a milk crate as a tool, and one or two mattresses as precautions.

The objective is to get all participants through the hole, from one side to the other. Participants on either side can help, but the last person must get through on his/her own (can only be helped down).

In Cowstails and Cobras this is called Rebirth, but we like our name better (it's easier to explain to the kids).

12. Circle the Circle

Ask the group to form a hand-in-hand circle. Place two large hula-hoops together between two people (resting on their grasped hands). see how quickly the participants can cause the hoops to travel around the circle (over people) in opposite directions, through each other (hoop through hoop) and back to the originating point. Use fairly large hoops for this activity, but be sure that one will fit through the other.

It's interesting to see what the group's response is when you ask, "Who won?" after both hoops have circled the circle. It takes some thought to realize that

the entire group was working as a team. No losers. No winners. (Rohnke, Karl, Silver Bullets).

13. Human Mixmaster

Here's a confusing game that sorts itself out in a very interesting way.

1. Instruct everyone to stand in a circle. The object of the game is simple; simultaneously all players must walk directly across the diameter of the circle and reform into a circle. The circle should be exactly the same as before, but with players facing the opposite direction.
2. After players have done this once or twice, have them keep their hands at their sides and not bump into anyone as they walk. Strategies will start to emerge. Some people will walk slowly while others will walk quickly to get across.
3. If a player does accidentally bump into someone else, he/she must say "beep!" There will probably be quite a few "beeps" as people cross.
4. Finally, everyone must execute the move across the circle with eyes closed.

(Gregson, Bob, The Incredible Indoor Game Book)

The station games rotation described above was used as a
TCA (Total Camp Activity) at Camp Allegheny
in the summer of 1989.

For more game ideas, see also the **Staff Training Games** section of
*The Salvation Army Eastern Territory Camp Staff Orientation
and Training Manual*.