

Parenting the Preschooler

 **Working for Wisconsin Families**

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Cooperative Games

Have you ever heard people say "...but it's only a game..." to deny the incredible impact that games and sports have upon the development of children's social attitudes and behaviors. They seem to say that there is no connection between what children learn as they play games together in the morning and how they behave at home later in the day. Not true!

There is a mutual relationship between what children practice playing and how they treat their family members. Playing games is a natural and highly motivating way of teaching and learning social behavior. But, games and sports need to be selected thoughtfully.

Since play is the ideal medium for social learning, it makes sense to select activities which encourage good social development. If we choose games of mutual acceptance, encouragement, fun and sharing, we will certainly help youngsters develop such qualities as kindness, consideration and respect for others. Considerable research has shown this to be so.

In one study, researchers measured how much cooperative behavior was shown by preschoolers in free play. It was found that after a fourteen-week program of cooperative games, they cooperated with each other three times as much during free play and twice as much in their classroom as they had before the program.

Cooperative games have rules encouraging participants to help each other work towards a common goal. Everyone participates and children see other players as partners. These games create lots of joy and excitement, and help youngsters feel good about themselves and others.

Competitive games, on the other hand, tend to create fear of failure which encourages players to drop out and become spectators. Other players are seen as opponents and there is little reason to help each other.

In traditional musical chairs, for example, the rules encourage children to push and shove each other out of the way as they desperately try to claim a chair and avoid being eliminated. All children but one have lost by the end of the game. In cooperative musical chairs they are encouraged to sit together and share chairs; no children are eliminated. The end of the game is punctuated by hysterical laughter as all the children help each other balance on one chair.

Children overwhelmingly prefer cooperative games once they have experienced them. Many children, however, have probably never played true cooperative games. The games are easy to integrate into any children's program.

Games are more, much more, than simply a way to occupy children's spare time. We know that cooperative games have the power to help children to be the happy, peaceful, friendly and

cooperative people they want to be. Teachers and parents using these activities have regularly reported seeing more laughter and smiles, less fighting, arguing and hitting and more children spontaneously helping each other.

Cooperative Games for You to Try

Incorporations:

(Walking around activity) Players quickly form and re-form groups. They may stand side by side or link arms. The leader tells them to look at their shoes and find others wearing similar shoes... or find others wearing one of the same colors that they are wearing, same hair color, eye color, etc... "Think of how many brothers and sisters you have, pets you have (dog, cat, both, none), your favorite flavor ice cream, etc... and find others giving the same answers as you."

Cooperative Musical Chairs:

This has the same rules as in the traditional game except that it is permissible for people to sit in each others lap while sharing the same chair. (Before beginning, show how this is done. One person sits in their chair, legs straight ahead of them with their feet flat on the floor. The next person sits mainly on the first person's knees and so on. The weight is evenly distributed and you could have 100 people sharing a chair in this manner.) Use lively and fun music.

Lap Ball Roll:

Form a circle. Sit down on the floor with feet towards the center of the circle, bodies touching. Place a ball on someone's lap. The object of the game is to move the ball around the circle as quickly as possible without using hands. The ball moves from one person's lap to another. Variations: Add more balls, add different size balls, add signals such as "Stop" or "Go" and reverse directions at the sound of a whistle.

Spider Web:

Seated in a tight circle with the leader holding a ball of yarn, you make a partial statement for all,

such as, "My favorite game is; I feel scared when; My favorite food is; When I grow up I want to, etc..." The leader responds first, then gently tosses the ball of yarn to a player across the circle who catches it, answers the questions and tosses it to another player. Each person catching it holds onto the string so that by the time everyone has caught the yarn and answered the question, an interesting and colorful "spider web" has been created in the center of the circle. The leader may then ask a second question and invite them to reverse the process, winding up the ball of yarn.

Half-A-Heart:

Cut a number of Valentine hearts for exactly half the number of players. Tear each one in half, jaggedly not precisely, and give one half of the paper heart to each child. You might invite them to walk or dance to music as you invite them to find their heart partner.

Frozen Bean Bag:

Participants each have a bean bag balanced on their head as they dance to music. A player must "freeze" whenever the bean bag falls from his or her head. Another player may carefully retrieve the bag off the floor and replace it so the frozen player can join the dancing again.

Everybody's It Tag:

This is the world's fastest game! When tagged by another player, you squat down on your heels. You may stop the game when only a few players are left standing.

Towel Volleyball:

Each player has a partner, each pair with a towel which they use to catch balloons, balls, stuffed toys, etc. and send them on.

Source:

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