

# Games and children

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For every child the game of life starts with birth. Initially they recognise parents, the closest sounds and pictures, and start to explore their wider surroundings, first crawling, and then walking. The child then contacts peers and people of other ages. This period is the most important, as the child is included into society through 'the game'. In childhood it is a game, which is unrecognised by children – in adulthood this game is called life. From the view that life is a game, children's games can be selected and used as tools of education. The wish at home, "Mum come and play!" or to a teacher at school, "when can we play a game?" in itself suggests how the game is understood and what it means to children. In childhood the game is very important for social development.

## **What is a game?**

There are many views on what a game can be. It can be described by words like, uncertainty of result, directed by rules, involving seriousness, fun, happiness, and voluntary participation, etc. Time is also an important factor that can change the level of intensity that can be achieved in the game. The game can also gain its true value if the participants lose track of time. That doesn't mean that they lose control of time, but they are totally involved in the game and ignore other external factors. On one hand the game becomes an educational tool, on the other hand it is space for gaining experiences and adventure. Leaders as well as participants can find a great variety of meaning in every game. However, it is not the intention of this book to write about definitions of games, that is the task of specialists in the areas of psychology, pedagogy, and philosophy.

## **Games and competition**

Games are very important for pre-schoolers, but they are not adequately ready for competition. During early primary school years children begin to compare their abilities with others. Competition and games also offer this opportunity. Older children (8–9 yrs) are still not psychologically ready to participate in organized competitive sport even though they possess social comparison. Children's cognitive reasoning abilities are limited and they do not develop mature understanding of the competitive process until later (10–12 yrs). Winner or losing influences the child's behaviour towards themselves. Children judge themselves compared to others and start to look at their peers as potential rivals. If they are losers many times they can start questioning their ability and their interest in activities. Today's trend in pedagogy suggests that small children do not compete at all. However, there is always some comparison amongst a group of children meeting together. It is very important for children to learn how to win and lose, and not create an environment where losing is not possible, especially as most sports have competitive rules. The positive influence of sport is recognised in terms of

## 28. Pantry



### Objective

Flexibility, concentration, tactics

### Material

20 wooden blocks/stones;  
blindfold/scarf

### Introduction/Motivation

*Under a huge maple tree lives a squirrel. During the summer she is collecting food for winter, so she has something to eat when everywhere around has lots of snow. However, little mice steal the nuts she has saved in a dark hole. The little squirrel tries to guard the nuts, but the little mice are very clever and sometimes they manage to steal some.*

### Logistics

One player is the squirrel who is trying to protect its nuts. He/she is blindfolded, with hands on knees/squatting above a pile of 20 nuts (stones/blocks). The rest of the group (mice) are at a base 10–15m away. On a signal the mice try to steal the stones from the guard squirrel. The guard cannot move

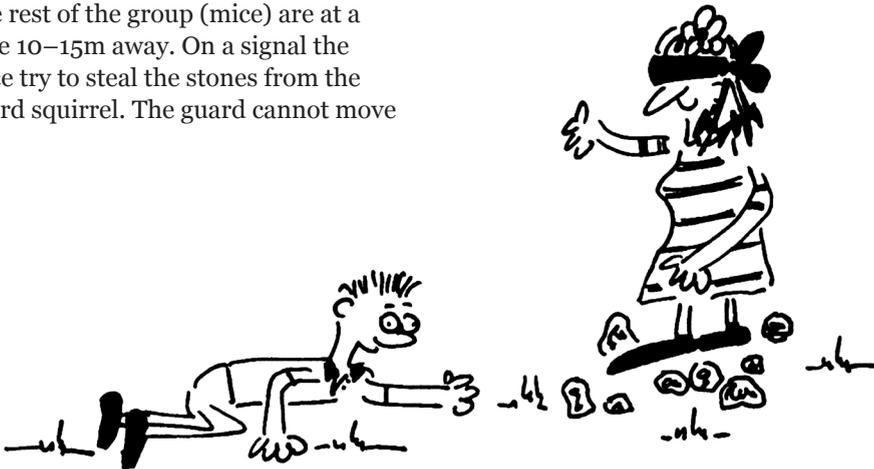
from his/her position, but can move arms to protect the nuts. If a mouse is touched in any way the mouse is out. Each mouse can collect one nut at a time, running back to the base and depositing the nut before returning. The game can focus on the number of collected nuts by each individual or the number saved by the squirrel in a certain time.

### Possible modifications

Mark a circle with rope (diameter 3–5 m). Into this circle place 30 small objects. Also 3–5 guards are in the circle blindfolded guarding the objects. The rest of the group is trying to steal the objects from the playing area and take them back to a base.

### Safety

General safety rules apply.



## 5. Forest monster



### Objective

Agility, creativity, courage

### Material

Dressing up clothes, variety of objects (up to 10)

### Introduction/Motivation

*In a deep forest where it is dark all day and the sun doesn't shine lives a mysterious monster. No-one has seen it or knows whether the monster is good or bad. They say that the monster sits in the forest and looks after all the magic things around them. No-one can get close but the things the monster looks after have magic power.*

### Logistics

Choose suitable terrain that has many obstacles, e.g. trees,

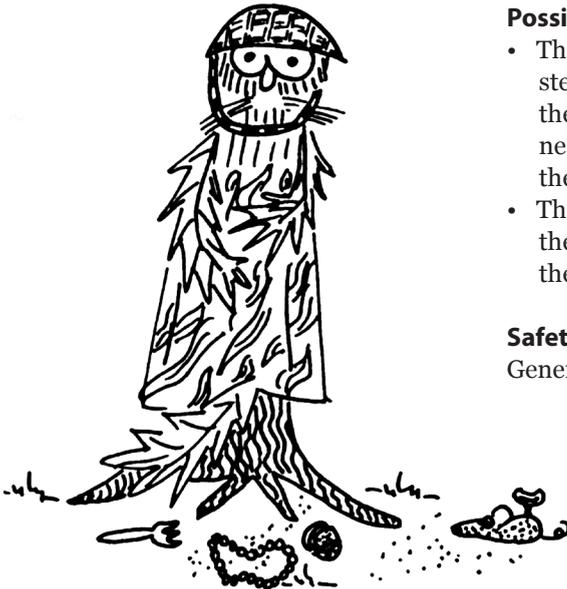
stream, small hills, fallen logs or tree stumps etc. The playing area is 200m by 200m with well marked boundaries. One leader is dressed as the monster and spreads around him/herself up to 10 different objects. The leader should place him/herself in an area where there are many trees or places to hide. At the starting signal the players try to find the forest monster and try to identify and remember all the 'magic' objects. The players cannot be seen by the monster. If the monster sees a player and calls their name, they have to return to the starting point (they can either be out of the game or then allowed back into the playing area). After 10 to 30 minutes the leader stops the game. The players then write down the objects they have remembered.

### Possible modifications

- There can be more than one monster in the forest where each of them has only 3 or 4 objects placed nearby. Adjust the time limit to suit the group and terrain
- The monster places the objects further away but within eyesight and the children try to steal the objects

### Safety

General safety rules apply.



# 10. Long worm



## Objective

Speed, agility, reaction time

## Material

Wooden bench/log/ tree trunk, 2–3 m string

## Introduction/Motivation

*As it was raining the worms came up from the ground onto the field. At that moment the blackbirds swooped down to the field from a nearby tree. The worms sensed danger and quickly hid in their underground holes. The blackbirds tried to pull out some of the slower worms.*

## Logistics

Ideally use a wooden bench 2.5 m long (can use two wooden blocks or a tree trunk). Place the string under the wooden bench so it can be seen at each

end. Two players sit on each end of the bench facing away from each other. At the starting signal, they stand up, run clockwise around the bench back to their place, sit down again, reach for their end of the string and try to pull it out from under the bench. The winner is the one who pulls out the string.

## Possible modifications

- Can be done as an elimination game
- Change the style of running around the bench; backwards, on fours, jumping frogs etc

## Safety

General safety rules apply.

