



Cooperative Games*

What Are Cooperative Games?

Cooperative games emphasize participation, challenge, and fun rather than defeating someone. Cooperative games emphasize play rather than competition. Cooperative games are not new. Some of the classic games we participated in as children are classic because of the play emphasis. There may be competition involved, but the outcome of the competition is not losing and sitting out the rest of the game. Instead, it may involve switching teams so that everyone ends up on the winning team.

Outdoor Active Games

Sardines

This can be played anywhere, indoors or out. The goal is similar to “Hide and Seek,” except that “it” hides first. Everyone else then tries to find “it”. When someone finds “it,” they hid with “it” in the same spot. The game ends when everyone finds the hiding spot of “it.”

Blob Tag

In this variation of “tag,” the persons who are caught join hands with the “it” person to form a blob. As more people are caught, the blob becomes larger. It’s probably a good idea to limit the playing area so that the blob does not have to chase people through the neighborhood.

British Bulldog

The playing area is a rectangular open field with well-defined boundaries. One person stands in the middle and is the bulldog. Everyone else stands on one end outside the boundary. When ready, the bulldog yells, “British Bulldog, one, two, three.” Everyone must run from one end of the field to the other. The bulldog must grab people, lift them off the ground, and yell, “British bulldog, one, two, three.” Each caught persons then becomes a bulldog also. Eventually everyone will become a bulldog.

Variation: Instead of lifting people off the ground, the bulldog can simply hold on while yelling.

Caterpillar

The players lie on their stomachs, side to side, with their arms straight out in front. The person on the end begins to roll over the top of the row of bodies until he or she gets to the end. This can be done as a race, with two teams competing to get to a predetermined point.

—from *New Games*

Eeny-Einy-Over

Remember this classic game? All you need is a large building—a church works well—and a medium-size ball. The game begins with two teams, one on each side of the building. One team has the ball and throws it over the building while yelling “eeny-einy-over.” The throwing team then runs around the building and tries to tag members of the receiving team. Tagged people join the other team. The receiving team tries to avoid being tagged, of course, and also can throw the ball at members of the throwing team. Anyone who gets hit switches teams. Players are safe when they reach the other side of the building. The game ends when everyone is on the same team.

Variation: Players are safe only when they do a complete revolution of the building.

Flying Dutchman

The group forms a circle and holds hands, with one pair remaining outside the circle. Holding hands, the couple on the outside walks the perimeter of the circle. They choose a point in the circle to break the handhold of two people. When that happens, the outside couple runs around the circle in one direction while the couple whose handhold was broken runs in the opposite direction. The couple who loses the race back to the open spot is “it” for the next round.

—from *New Games*



Slaughter

The arena is a circle about 30 feet in diameter with a clearly defined boundary. Two holes about a foot wide are dug out at opposite sides of the circle (substitutes for the holes are appropriate). All players take off their shoes. Balls are placed in the holes. Each team, kneeling, forms a huddle around its own ball. At the signal, both teams try to move their ball into the other team's hole. As long as you're on your knees and within the boundaries of the circle, anything goes. The only other rule is that to neutralize the opponent, you can drag your opponent outside of the circle. If any part of the player's body crosses the line, that player is out.

—from *New Games*

Toss the Bird

This is a tag game with a twist. The "bird" can be a knotted towel or some other soft object suitable for throwing. You can have as many as you think are necessary. The point is that you can't be tagged if you are holding a bird. People can toss the bird(s) to each other to help "protect" each other from being caught. Obviously you will want to have fewer birds than you have people who are being chased. More than one person can be "it".

Rock/Paper/Scissors

This is the "football scrimmage" version of rock/paper/scissors. The end zones need to be clearly defined. To begin, each team huddles and decides which play to run—either rock, paper, or scissors. Then the two teams meet in the playing area. If your team's symbol wins, you chase the other team back to its end zone, trying to tag the team members before they get there. If you lose, you must dash to your own end zone before you're caught. Those people who get caught change to the other team. The game ends when everyone is on the same team.

—from *New Games*

Walking Statues

Two teams start from opposite ends of the field. The leader stands in the center of the field. The goal is to reach the leader first. Teams can move only when the leader is facing the other team. If individuals are caught moving, they must go back to the start.

Indoor Games

Positive Reinforcement

One person is selected to leave the room and should be out of earshot. The rest of the group chooses some action it would like the absent person to perform. When ready, the group calls the person back in. The means of reinforcement is clapping. By clapping louder or softer, the group influences the subject to do whatever action the group wants.

—From *Games*

Continuous Story

The rules are simple. One person creates a story line and everybody in turn adds a few sentences until the story is complete or everybody gets tired.

Princess Uggawugga

The purpose of this game is to make your opponent laugh. In pairs, one person starts by saying, "Princess Uggawugga is dead, gone, and deceased." The other person responds by saying, "How and when did she die?" The game continues with one person asking questions and the other responding until someone laughs.

Word Whiskers

A word whisker is a time-filler word like "uh," "er," "um," "you know," "okay," etc. The object is to try to talk for thirty seconds without using a word whisker. Not talking for more than three seconds is also a word whisker.

—From *Games*



Botticelli

One person is “it”. “It” must think of the name of a fictitious character. This character is referred to by the initial of his or her last name (e.g., “Mr. F.”). The players, in turn, ask “it” yes or no questions to discover the name of “its” character. However, they must earn the opportunity to ask each question by asking “it” to name a character with the same initial in response to their questions. For example, “it” begins play with the statement, “I am thinking of a Mr. B.” A player then asks “it” a question such as, “Was Mr. B. a president?” If “it” cannot name a president whose name starts with B, the player has earned the right to ask “it” one yes or no question for a clue to the character’s identity. However, if “it” is able to name a Mr. B. who was a president, that person forfeits the opportunity to question “it.” The payer who correctly guesses the name of “its” character is the new “it.”

—From *Games*

Going to the Moon

This is a guessing/deductive game in which the first person establishes a word pattern for everyone else to figure out. He or she says, “I’m going to the moon and I’m going to take (name an object).” Everyone else follows by repeating the same phrase but naming a different object with the same pattern. Patterns could include words that start with the same letter as the speaking person’s name, words with double consonants, or words that begin with the last letter of the previous word.

—From *Games*

Ghost

The object of the game is to avoid completing a word. The first player names a letter and succeeding players continue to name letters in an order that spells a word, while attempting to avoid completing a word. If you do complete a word, you must take a letter from the word “ghost” in the same way as when you play “horse” in basketball.

Variation: letters can be added either after or before the previously named letters.

—From *Games*

Hawaiian Hand Clap

The players sit in a circle or a line and count off. Then they set up a 1-2-3-4 rhythm by slapping their knees, clapping their hands and snapping their fingers—first their right and then their left. Everyone does this in unison. Once the rhythm is established, the first player calls his or her own number on the first finger snap and someone else’s number on the second finger snap. On the next sequence of finger snaps, the person whose number was called must say his or her own number and someone else’s. Players who miss their turn, say the numbers too early, or say a nonexistent number must move to the end of the line. Everyone’s number will change as the players move up and down the line.

Variation: The people who miss can sit out instead of going to the end of the line.

Everyone else keeps the same number for the whole game so that players must remember which numbers are in and which are out.

Wampum Name Game

Materials: a foam sword or rolled newspaper wrapped in tape.

Seat everyone in a circle with feet facing in and one person in the middle. Holding the play sword or rolled newspaper, the middle person should be able to reach the feet of everyone in the circle. The game begins with one person saying the name of another. The middle person tries to hit the feet of the named player before the named player can say someone else’s name. The game continues until someone gets caught, at which point that person goes to the middle.

—From *The Bottomless Bag*



Initiative Games*

What are initiative games?

Initiative games are fun, cooperative, challenging games in which the group is confronted with a specific problem to solve. In Scouting we use initiative games for two reasons; The games demonstrate and teach leadership skills, which helps promote the growth of Scouts; and the games demonstrate a process of thinking about experiences that help Scouts learn and become responsible citizens.

Here are a few suggestions. Begin by clearly explaining the game. Make sure the rules are understood, including that everyone must complete the activity for the group to be successful.

If you are the facilitator, don't offer ideas for solving the problem. Stand back and let the group work and play with it even if the group has a difficult time. Don't interfere unless something is unsafe or the group has fallen apart.

Reflect on the activity. Spend a few minutes afterward talking about what the participants learned. This is most effective when you use the principles of reflection. Talk about how effectively and efficiently they accomplished the task and how well they got along with each other. Ask open-ended questions to help the group talk about the issues. Don't be judgmental. In asking questions, first help the participants focus on what happened, then ask them to decide if what happened was good or bad. Finally, ask them to set some goals for the future.

The best impact that initiative games can have on your Scouting program is for you to use the initiative games leadership style and the reflective methods in your program. While initiative games are fun and meaningful lessons can be learned, a lasting impact will be achieved only by using the principles behind the games in the complete scouting program. As a leader, you help your members learn to make decisions and solve problem in

everything you do in Scouting. Learn the skills you need and do it. As someone once said: "Train them and trust them!" Use reflection during and after activities and experience to help learn. Get in the habit of thinking and sharing together as a group.

If a game is too easy or if you have other motives, you can vary the skills of the participants by not allowing some to talk, by blindfolding, by not allowing the use of various limbs, etc. You also can create a story line to go with the game.

See the reference list if you are interested in getting more games. Happy playing!

Trust Circle

The group forms a tight circle with six to 10 people standing shoulder to shoulder with arms out and palms up. One person stands in the middle with arms folded over chest and eyes closed. This person then falls in any direction, keeping the body stiff. The group's responsibility is to catch the falling person and push the person gently upright.

There should always be more than one person catching. After a few tries, the center person can direct the group to take a step backward and try again.

People Pendulum

Form two parallel lines with at least 10 people in each line. Each person in one line faces someone in the other line with about two feet between them. The two people standing side by side in the center of one line place a sturdy pole on their outside shoulders, with their counterparts in the line across from them shouldering the other end of the poles. In other words, there will be two poles, one shouldered by each facing pair in the center. These poles should be strong enough to support group members how stand on them.

One group member is hoisted onto each pole. They face each other and hold hands or wrists. When they are ready, they let go of each other and fall back into the arms of the remaining people in the row on each side. It is important that the people falling stay very



stiff and either hold onto their pant legs or fold their arms across their chest. It also is important that the catchers catch the people in “trust-fall style,” alternating arms down the row with the people across from them and standing very close together. Another method is to grasp wrists with the person across from you. It is important when using this method that the catchers give a little as they catch the person.

After catching the people, you can push them back up. It is important that you learn this activity slowly and do it in a safe place. A soft lawn is best. Begin with smaller people and work your way up.

—from *The Second Cooperative Sports and Games*

Group Juggling

Materials: tennis balls or bean bags, or have each person take off one shoe.

Begin with everyone in a circle and one object to be thrown. The first person throws the object across the circle to someone who then throws the object to someone else. Everyone should catch and throw the object just once, remembering whom then received from and to whom they threw. The first person to throw should receive the ball last. Begin the sequence again, continually adding objects so that the group is juggling as many objects as possible.

People Pass

There are two ways of doing this activity. The first is to have everyone lie down on their back, alternating the direction of their feet, and with their heads in a straight line. In other words, even-numbered people will have feet facing west and odd-numbered people will have feet facing east. When you look down the center of the row, you should see a straight line of heads. After everyone gets lined up, they should put their arms straight up in the air with their hands flat (palms up). One person will then stand at one end of the line with the body stiff and arms either folded across the chest or holding onto pant legs.

You will lower the person, back first, onto the row of arms and they will gently pass the body to the other end. Someone should catch the person as he or she comes off the end.

The second way is to split into two standing rows of people, facing forward in a double line. Again, everyone puts their arms up with palms flat. You will need several people to help hoist the person to the top to be passed at this height.

—from *The New Games Book*

Everybody Up

This activity begins with everybody in pairs and gradually expands to include everyone at once. Each pair sits on the ground facing each other, with each person’s feet against the other’s feet and holding hands. The goal is to pull each other to a standing position.

When two people accomplish this task, continue to try it with more until everyone is in one group. It has been suggested that with more than eight people it is impossible to do in a circle, but that it is possible to do with another configuration.

Variation: The goal is the same except that in this version participants sit back to back. All other rules apply.

Hog Call

Materials: one blindfold for each person

This is a good warm-up activity. There are several variations, but all of them involve blindfolded individuals yelling a name or animal sound to find their group or partner. In one variation, everyone privately receives the name of an animal. The goal is to find everyone else who has the same name by milling about “mooing” or “oinking” or whatever it is that their animal does. Another variation has half the group line up on one end of an open area and half line up on the other. Each person is given half of an opposing word or phrase, like “salt and pepper” or “light and dark.” The folks on the other side of the field get the other half of the phrase. When everyone is ready, each side walks



toward the other and tries to ding their particular partner by yelling their particular word.

Have You Done This?

Each player thinks of something about himself or herself that does not apply to anyone else in the group. Each individual shares their idea. If someone else shares that characteristic, that person must find a new one. Play continues until everyone has shared something unique about themselves.

—From *Games*

Questions

This is a get-acquainted activity in which each individual has a predetermined time period during which anyone in the group can ask that person any question about any subject (within the bounds of good taste).

—from *Games*

Cookie Machine

The group forms two parallel lines of people standing shoulder to shoulder. Each line should face the other about two feet apart. Players put their arms out in front of them with their elbows bent and palms up. The arms of the person in each of the two lines should alternate with those across from them. You've just built a cookie machine.

One person stands at one end of the cookie machine and announces a preference for a type of cookie; for example, chocolate chip. The cookie machine then bounces the "chocolate chip cookie" (who keep his or her body stiff and arms straight out) from one end of the other while chanting "chocolate chip, chocolate chip." When the cookie gets to the middle, it ought to be turned over so it doesn't burn. Some people might feel more comfortable with their arms over their chest.

—from *More New Games*

Radioactive Field I

Materials: three boards (pieces of plywood work fine) about a foot square

The goal is to transfer the entire group across an open, flat area using three protective shields without touching the ground with any body part. Boards must not be thrown across the open area.

Radioactive Field II

The goal is to transfer the entire group across an open field using one pair of magic boots. No body part can touch the ground except for feet wearing the magic boots. The boots cannot be thrown across the field. They can be carried. Each foot on each person can only wear a boot safely for one trip across. After that foot is used, it cannot be used for any more trips.

Blind Square

Materials: one length of rope 50-100 feet long; blindfolds

The group begins by forming a circle and putting the blindfolds on. Then each person picks up the rope, which has been tied into a circle. Everyone should be standing on the outside of the rope. The object is for the blindfolded group to form a square, triangle, pentagon, or any shape the players want to try.

Line Up

Materials: blindfolds

Blindfold everyone in the group. Whisper to each person a number from one to the number of persons in the group. After you are done, tell the players they must line up by consecutive numbers without talking. Everyone should begin to move slowly around each other, putting palms up facing outward to protect themselves from collisions.

Variations: Line up by height, weight, age, Social Security number, etc. Or try this: Number all participants as above, but designate one player as the "fooler." Do this by tapping a person on the shoulder without assigning a number. That person then opens his or her eyes (or removes a blindfold) and begins operating as the "fooler." As the players attempt to align themselves, the



“fooler” tries to mess up their attempts by giving (nonverbal) wrong information. Each person, to combat the “fooler”, has one hypodermic needle (a finger) filled with “truth serum”. If players think they are being fooled, they point their finger at the supposed culprit, and if their finger is pointed at the “fooler” when they say, “Squirt,” the “fooler” is obliged to moan, “You got me.” The group is then awarded one minute of pure honesty. If a player uses his or her “needle” and misses the “fooler,” all the player’s serum is lost for the remainder of the game.

—from *The Bottomless Bag*

Human Ladder

Materials: one smooth dowel rod, at least three feet long and 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 inches in diameter for each two participants.

The group lines up in two rows with each row facing the other. Each pair of persons (one from each row) facing each other will hold a dowel. The object is to have one person standing at the end who will crawl across the horizontal ladder formed by the dowels. The group can hold the dowels in any manner desired—high, low, or forming a turn. The only restriction is to not hold the dowels above shoulder height.

Caution: make sure the dowels you have will support your group member’s weight.

—from *The Bottomless Bag*

Blind Tent Pitch

Materials: one tent with all equipment needed to set it up; blindfolds

The goal is to set up the tent with everybody in the group blindfolded.

Knots

A group of six to 12 people forms a circle. Each person puts their right hand into the center of the circle and clasps hands with one other person who is not standing next to him or her. Then everyone puts their left hand into the circle and clasps hands, again making sure that person is not standing next to them. They

should be holding two different people’s hands. The goal is to untangle the knot without letting go of anyone’s hand.

All Aboard

Materials: an old towel or rag or a preconstructed platform about 2 feet by 2 feet

The goal is to get everyone in the group to stand on the towel or platform without touching the ground around it. You can start with the towel unfolded and gradually increase the challenge by folding it smaller and smaller. The only restriction is that you may not “stack” more than one person on another.

Quicksand

Materials: an old towel or rag or a preconstructed platform about 2 feet by 2 feet; Frisbee-size disks to step on

Place the platform or towel about six giant stapes away from a boundary line. The goal is to get everyone from behind the line across the open area onto the platform without touching the ground. The disks can be used to cross the area, but once they are put on the ground they cannot be moved. Also, someone’s foot must be on the disk at all times until the last person crosses.

Reversing Pyramid

Have 10 people form a 4-3-2-1 horizontal pyramid (arranged like bowling pins). Tell them to reverse the apex and the base of the pyramid by moving only three people.

—from *The Bottomless Bag*

Gimme a Leg to Stand On

The goal of this activity is to get your group to have a minimum of contact points with the ground. In other words, you want to find out how few legs and arms you must use to maintain a balance point for, say, five seconds.

—from *The Bottomless Bag*



Popsicle Push-Up

This is a variation of the standard one-person push-up. The easiest way to teach it is to start doing a four-person push-up. The first person lies down on his or her stomach. The second person lies down perpendicular to the first, with feet and ankles over the lower back of the first. The third and fourth people do the same thing, with the first person's feet over the lower back of the fourth so that the torsos form a square.

The challenge is to have all four people do a push-up at the same time. When they have done this, the goal is to add more people until you are doing a push-up with everyone in the group involved. (It is possible with some creative thinking.)

Variation: A challenging alternative is to tell the group at the beginning that the goal is to get everybody off the ground with only their hands touching, without telling them about any possible solutions like the four-person variation.

The Great Egg Drop

The goal is to build a structure that will prevent an egg from breaking when it is dropped from a height of 8 feet. The only materials allowed are 20 straws and 30 inches of 1/2-inch masking tape. Try to do it with as few materials as possible.

—from *The Bottomless Bag*

Two by Four

Have eight people line up shoulder to shoulder, alternating male and female, with everyone facing the same direction. The object is to get all the females on one end and all the males on the other. If you prefer you can use some other identification to distinguish alternate people.

These are the rule: First, the goal is to solve the problem in the fewest possible moves, with a maximum of four moves. It's probably a good idea not to tell the players the maximum until they have had some success in solving the problem. Second, all moves are

made in pairs. A pair is you and anyone standing next to you. Third, when a pair moves out of the middle of the group, the empty spot they left must be filled by another pair. Fourth, pairs may not pivot or turn around. Fifth, there should be no gaps in the solution of the problem.

—from *Silver Bullets*

Diminishing Load

The object is to move the group across an open area. To cross the area, a person must be carried. The carrier must return and be carried. If a carried person touches the ground, the carrier(s) and the carried person must return.

Prouty's Landing

Materials: one rope large enough and long enough to accomplish the swing and something to serve as a platform

The object is to get everyone in the group onto a 3-foot by 3-foot platform from a point about 20 feet away by swinging on a rope. The platform should be set about 10 feet away from the point from which the plumb line of the rope swings.

—from *Silver Bullets*

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