

Top Ten Games

Children need lots of opportunities to play games, indoors and outdoors. There are lots of traditional outdoor games such as 'duck, duck, goose' and children need time to play catching games, circle games, singing and dancing games, skipping games, target games and parachute games.

Hopscotch and chalked games

Draw a simple chalked hopscotch game on the ground. Throw a small pebble and try different ways of moving to collect it – hopping on single squares or jumping with two feet on double squares. Pick up the pebble, turn around and hop and jump back. There are lots of variations of this game. Other simple chalked games include traveling games, tracks and moving around chalked shapes.

Target games

Children love opportunities to knock things down and throw things into containers. These games offer the chance for exploring tallying and scoring too. Try beanbags onto chalked targets, balls into buckets, and home made skittles from bottles filled with sand or water. Make a tin can alley with clean, empty tins with no sharp edges. Stack the cans, three at the bottom, then two, then one on top. Use rolled up socks to knock the cans down.

Parachute games

There are lots of parachute games and many ideas in *The Little Book of Parachute Play* by Clare Beswick (2013, Featherstone). Use a small parachute or large duvet cover and make sure there are enough adults to keep the parachute moving. Begin with simple games such as keeping leaves moving in the air above the parachute, before moving on to games that involve moving around and being under the chute,

Musical cushions

Musical cushions is based on the traditional party games of 'musical chairs'. Place cushions or carpet squares in a row or a circle, making sure there is one for every child playing. Children move around the cushions or squares as music plays, and when it stops, sit down. Cushions are removed, one or two at a time, so that not every child has a cushion. Those who are 'out' help to play the music and the game continues until just one child is left.

What's the Time Mr Wolf?

Another, old traditional favourite with lots of variations. In one simple version, one child acts as Mr or Mrs Wolf and the other children stand some way away. The 'wolf' hides their eyes and the children chant 'what's the time Mrs Wolf?'. The wolf responds with a time, such as 'three o'clock' and the children take steps towards the wolf, saying '1,2,3'. The wolf turns around and the children chant again. The game goes on until the wolf says 'dinner time' and the children then race back to the starting line as the wolf chases. The first child caught becomes the wolf.

Snap

This is a very simple card game and a great start for children who have not played cards. Younger children will find children's picture snap cards easiest – matching an identical car or teddy image to another. Older children can move on to traditional playing cards. Deal all the cards out, take turns to lay one card, face up, on a pile. When two of the same cards are laid on top of one another, call out 'snap'. The first person to call out wins the cards in the pile. Continue until one person has all the cards.

Lotto

With young children, use a simple photo lotto game with four base boards and six pictures on each board. Turn the lotto cards over, one at a time, and match to the base boards. The winner covers all the pictures on their board first. Older children can play different versions of lotto, with shapes, colours, numbers and photos which are similar but not the same.

Snakes and Ladders

This is one example of the many board games available, such as ludo. Players take turns to throw the dice and move along the squares on a 100 square board. If they land on a square at the bottom of a ladder, they move to the top. If they land on the head of a snake, they slide down to the bottom of the ladder. The first player to reach 100 is the winner.

Dominoes

The original traditional dominoes game uses spots in a dice formation on double ended tiles. Double six starts and player take turns to match tiles – a six to a six, a one to a one, and so on. Children's versions with textures, colours, pictures and shapes can be popular with younger children.

Pairs

Play this game with a pack of cards or a set of picture snap cards. With younger children, use only 10 pairs of cards. Place all the cards face down, in row. Take turns to turn over two cards. If the cards are the same, the player keeps the pair. If the cards are not the same, they are turned face down again. The aim is to remember where the cards are. When all the pairs are found, the winner is the player with the most.