

Playground Game Ideas

Bird's Nest

Number of players: 12 or more

Grade levels: 3rd grade and up

Equipment: Five hula hoops, or jump ropes, 20 beanbags, or a similar object

Set up: Arrange five hula hoops (bird's nests) in an X format. One in each corner of a square with one in the middle. Place an object like beanbags (the eggs) in the center "nest". If you have a large group like 25-30 kids you will need about 20 beanbags. Divide players into four teams and each team must line up behind their assigned "nest".

The goal of the game is for a team to get six eggs in their nest. When someone starts the game the first person on each team runs to the center nest to steal an egg. The player then returns to his line, gives the next student a high five to let them go and place the egg in their nest. Players continue stealing eggs from the center nest until all eggs are gone, at which point players can begin to steal eggs from each other's nests. Players cannot defend their nest. The game ends when one team has six eggs.

Blob Tag

Number of players: 6 or more

Grade levels: 1st grade and up

Equipment: None

Set up: Select two players to hold hands and be the "blob." The other players scatter throughout the playing area.

The "blob" chases other players attempting to tag them with their outside hands. Tagged players hold hands with the blob and become part of the growing blob. The blob can never break up, it just keeps getting larger and larger until everyone is caught and is part of the "blob." Great team work practice.

Capture the Flag

Number of players: An entire class

Grade levels: 3rd grade and up

Equipment: Cones, 6 hula hoops, 4 long ropes, 2 flags and football flag sets for each student (or something to show that a person has been caught/tagged out)

Set up: A playing area that is about 50' by 50' is ideal. A center line to divide the teams should be established. With the ropes, mark off the corners for the two jails and flag spots. Three hula hoops are randomly placed on each side.

Divide the players into two equal teams. The players are to line up facing each other at the center line. All players are to wear two football flags (or something that can be pulled to show they are out).

On a starting signal, each team can rush across the center line attempting to capture the other team's flag. To be successful, a player has to carry the opponent's flag back to his own side without getting one of his football flags pulled. A player who at anytime is on the opposing team's side and has his football flag pulled must go to that team's jail. A jailed player can be freed if a teammate makes it into the prison (without getting his flag pulled), takes the prisoner by the hand and walks him back across the center line.

The hula hoops represent safety circles where players can stop off and not be tagged. Only one player can be in a safety circle at any given time. The first team to have both flags on their side wins the game.

Circle Dodge Ball

Number of players: 6 or more

Grade levels: 1st grade and up

Equipment: Playground balls, minimum one, maybe up to three depending on how many students are playing

Set Up: Position students in a circle with one student in the middle.

The students on the circle will attempt to hit the student who is in the middle using a dodge ball. Students on the circle roll the ball (for younger kids) or may throw the ball at the middle student but may NOT hit the student above the waistline. If that does occur then they do not come out of the circle. After the middle student has been hit they then switch places with the student who threw the ball that hit them.

Variations: Add more balls to the circle or add more students to the middle.

Freeze Tag

Number of players: 6 or more

Grade levels: 1st grade and up

Equipment: None

Set up: Choose two players to be taggers (the freezers) and two players (the defrosters) to free others.

The taggers attempt to freeze all the players while, at the same time, the defrosters touch the frozen players and free them. The defrosters have to avoid the taggers as they can become frozen as well. Play is continuous until all the players are frozen. Optional

equipment may help identify who is who: taggers get foam noodles to tag with and defrosters have scarves to free with.

Hoop Scoot Tag

Number of players: 5 or more

Grade levels: 1st grade and up

Equipment: 2-9 hula-hoops and 1-3 tennis balls

Set up: Review the boundaries and the consequences for going outside them with students.

Scatter the hoops in the play area several feet apart. Select players to be “it” (the taggers) and give them a tennis ball to carry for identification. The taggers may not throw or tag others with the ball.

The object is for players to run from one hoop to another without being tagged by an “it”. Players are safe from being tagged while in the hula hoops. Only three players can stand in a hoop at a time, and for no longer than five seconds and if a player stands too long in a hoop an “it” can count the seconds. If after five seconds the player hasn’t left the hoop he or she is automatically caught. The person who was caught switches role with the “it” person who was waiting.

When an “it” tags a player the two switch roles and the tennis ball gets passed to the new “it” and the game continues.

Variations:

You can make the play area smaller, and have less hula-hoops to make it more difficult.

Movement Skills Relay

Number of players: 6 or more

Grade levels: 3rd grade and up

Equipment: Cones

Set up: Group the players into equal teams of 3-5 players. Each team starts by standing in a line behind a starting cone. A turn-a-round cone is placed about 40’-100’ in front of each team (distance will depend on the age of the players and space available).

On a starting signal, the first player in each team moves as quickly as possible down the field, around the cone and back to the starting line where he tags the next teammate in line. That player does the same and so on. A team sits down when all of its players have finished. The first team to finish wins. Some of the movements that the game leader can call are:

Running, running forward halfway and backwards on the return, crab walk, bear walk (running on all fours), Gorilla walk, skipping, imaginary jump rope, galloping, backwards

skipping, hop on one foot one way and on the other foot the other way, jump down and run back, slide down and leap back, and any combination of these. Other relays that kids love are Leap Frog Relay and Wheelbarrow Relay.

Never Out

Number of players: 9 or more

Grade levels: 1st grade and up

Equipment: One playground ball

Set up: This game is an active version of kickball. One person is the pitcher, one team is “up” to kick, and another team is in the outfield fielding balls. Kids line up to kick the ball and the pitcher rolls the ball until the kid kicks it. They will then run the bases non-stop while other students continue to kick. They run until they are back at home base and get back in line. The pitcher pitches ball after ball fast because the point of the game is to just keep the kids running. After all students have made it through the line and kicked once or twice (whatever the coach decides) the teams switch sides.

Sharks and Fish

Number of players: 6 or more

Grade levels: 1st grade and up

Equipment: None

Set up: Mark the boundaries of play. Choose one student to be the shark in the middle of the ocean and all the other students, the fish, line up on along one side.

Then when signaled, all of the fish try to run to the other side to safety. The shark tries to tag students. When a fish is tagged they become sharks and then can also help tag students. The last student/students to be tagged are sharks next round.

Modification: Tagged students become seaweed, as in Ships Across the Ocean.

Ships Across the Ocean

Number of players: 5 or more

Grade levels: 1st grade and up

Equipment: None

Set up: Line the kids up at one end of the gym or field, and pick two or three kids to come to the middle as “taggers.” The kids on the line start the game by yelling “Ships across the ocean, ships across the sea, captain, captain you can’t catch me”. The tagger yells out a color pertaining to what kids are wearing and then all the other kids have to run to the other end of the playing area while the taggers try to run after them and tag them. Kids that are tagged can either become new taggers or sit down as “seaweed” and they can tag players in a seated position. The game continues until all the kids have been tagged.

Switch

Number of players: 5 or more

Grade levels: 1st grade and up

Equipment: A four-square court or four cones to form a square and one cone in the middle.

Set up: Five players may play at a time and each player occupies a corner or the middle. Play begins when the person in the middle says "Switch", then all players must find a new corner/cone to occupy. No player can go to the center cone. If two players arrive at the corner at the same time a quick rock-paper-scissors is played, winner stays. The next person in line becomes the person in the middle and the next round begins.

Variations: Add more areas the players can run to; or use four different colored hula hoops. Have the player in the middle call out a color that signals the players to run/switch. The caller runs to the color which s/he called aloud. All other players have to switch hula hoops but may not run to the color that was called out.

Ultimate Football

Number of players: 10 or more

Grade levels: 3 grade and up

Equipment: A football and cones

Set up: Obtain a football to begin the game. Any football will do, as there are no footballs made specifically for playing ultimate football. Assemble two teams to begin the game. Each team consists of three to five players.

Establish the end zone or scoring areas for each team. There is no set field size in ultimate football. However, the end zones need to be at least 5 yards in depth and the playing field between the two end zones must be at least 40 yards in length. The end zone is the line on the field and each team must cross with the football to score a point. Therefore, in total you need around 50 yards of playing surface. You can use a smaller field but it can limit the effectiveness of the game.

Play rock, paper and scissors with the winner receiving the football first.

Start with all the players on the offensive team behind their goal line. The players then take 5 steps and pass the football. The defensive players may not make contact with any offensive player. A dropped or intercepted pass results in the other team getting the football at that spot on the field.

Catch the pass and take only 5 steps or hold the football for 5 seconds. Once a player catches a pass, the offensive player tries to advance the football down the field and over the goal line. The player can only take 5 steps or hold the football for five second before they have to score or pass the ball to a teammate.

After a score the ball gets turned over to the other team and play resumes.

What time is it Mr. Fox?

Number of players: 6 or more
Grade levels: 1st grade and up
Equipment: None

Set up: Mr. Fox starts out at one end of a field, room, or designated area with his back to the group. The group at the other end then yells out "What time is it Mr. Fox?" Mr. Fox then calls out a time (1 o'clock - 12 o'clock). The group then takes that many steps. When the group gets to where the fox is, but not past him, and asks the time, the fox can yell "Midnight!" They then turn and chase the group. Those that he catches are to sit out. The last one left becomes the fox.

A variation is to allow each child who is tagged to become an honorary fox and help catch people.

Kindergarten Games

Little Brown Bear

Number of players: Unlimited
Grade Levels: K-2nd grades
Equipment: None

Set up: Establish a playing area that is rectangular in shape with sidelines that are 30'-50' apart. Select one player to stand in the middle and start as the "Little Brown Bear." The other players are to line up on a sideline and face the Little Brown Bear.

The game begins when the Little Brown Bear calls out: "Who's afraid of the Little Brown Bear?" The other players respond "Not I." The Little Brown Bear then says: "Then I want you to 'skip' to the other side!" The players then must skip to the other sideline (where they are safe) while the Little Brown Bear attempts to tag them. Tagged players become helpers and join the Little Brown Bear in the middle. Helpers (and the Little Brown Bear) must travel the same way as the fleeing players. The Little Brown Bear should call out a different way to travel each time (galloping, running, hopping, spinning, tip toeing, going backwards, heel toe walking, pretend hula hoop walking, high knee marching, robot walking, etc.). The game ends when all the players have been caught.

Man from Mars

Number of players: Unlimited
Grade Levels: K-2nd grades
Equipment: None

Set up: Select one player (the “Man from Mars”) to stand in the middle of the playing area facing the lined players (the “earthlings”).

The game begins with the earthlings chanting: “Man from Mars, Man from Mars, will you take us to the stars?” The Man from Mars then replies, “Only if you are wearing____(a color is said).” The earthlings with that colored clothing may walk safely to the other side. Those without that color run to the side and try to avoid getting tagged. Tagged players join the Man from Mars in the center of the playing area.

Red Light - Green Light

Number of Players: an entire class

Grade Levels: K-2nd grades

Equipment: None

Set up: Select one player to be the “traffic light;” he/she is to stand 30’-60’ away from the other players who are lined up facing him.

The game begins with the traffic light player turning his back to the line players and yelling out “Green Light.” The line players can walk or run toward the traffic light player; however, at any time, the traffic light player can yell out “Red Light,” and turn around. The line players must stop immediately. Any player caught still moving must go back to the starting line. Players not caught are allowed to stay where they are. Play continues in this fashion until one of the players finally touches the traffic light. The winning player becomes the new “Traffic Light” for the next round.

Sunday

Number of players: Unlimited

Suggested Grade Levels: K-3rd grades

Equipment: None

Set up: Use a playing area that has two parallel lines about 30’-60’ apart is idea. Assign one player to be the tagger and to stand in the middle. The other players start by standing on one of the sidelines.

The line players must run across to the other sideline every time the tagger calls out “Sunday”. The tagger will attempt to catch as many players as possible. If caught, a player joins the tagger in the middle and becomes his helper. The tagger can also call out any other day of the week. If a line player starts running prematurely on any day except Sunday, he has to join the tagger in the middle. The game ends when all the line players have been caught.

Everyday Games

Four Square

Number of players: 4 or more

Grade levels: 3rd grade and up

Equipment: Playground ball and four square court, or chalk to mark a court

Each player occupies one of the squares. The squares each have a rank order. The square with the highest rank the A square, followed by square B, square C and lastly square D.

To start the game, the kid in square A serves a playground ball by bouncing it in the square once and then hitting it towards one of the other squares. The receiving player then hits the ball to any other player, and play continues until one of the following things occur:

1. A player does not hit the ball before it bounces twice
2. A player hits the ball out of bounds (it must land in someone's square first)
3. A player is hit by the ball before it bounces once in their square.

Once a player is 'out', they move back to the lowest ranking square. The other players then move up to fill the vacancies. If there are more players than squares, that person goes to the back of the line, and the person at the front of the line gets to move onto the lowest square and play.

Hopscotch

Number of players: 2 or more

Grade levels: 1st grade and up

Equipment: A marker such as a stone, beanbag, bottle cap, shell, etc. and a hopscotch court, or chalk to mark a court

The first player stands behind the starting line to toss her or his marker in square 1. Hop over square 1 to square 2 and then continue hopping to square 9, turn around, and hop back again. Pause in square 2 to pick up the marker, hop in square 1, and out. Then continue by tossing the stone in square 2. All hopping is done on one foot unless the hopscotch design is such that two squares are side-by-side. Then two feet can be placed down with one in each square. A player must always hop over any square where a marker has been placed.

A player does not move on to the next number if the marker fails to land inside the proper square, the hopper steps on a line, the hopper loses balance when bending over to pick up the marker and puts a second hand or foot down, the hopper goes into a square where a marker is, or if a player puts two feet down in a single box. Players should take turns, always starting where they left off, until someone has successfully navigated all the spaces.

Resources:

www.playworks.org