

Living B.I.G. Through Games

For goodness sakes, we're in church. The children shouldn't be playing games, they should be learning about God, and Jesus, and the Bible. Games don't have a place here, do they?

Games offer excitement, challenge, and a natural platform for skill and content acquisition. The safe setting of a game offers children the opportunity to use their ingenuity and confront childhood concerns. Games encourage children to participate, explore, communicate, challenge themselves, develop healthy attitudes, and build confidence in their abilities. Besides, games are just plain fun! Studies suggest that active children have higher self-esteem and a greater independence, and experience less stress. Games nurture the whole child-body, intellect, emotion, and spirit—allowing learning and child development to take place in a spontaneous natural manner.

Remember, some children simply need to move, and games provide a natural outlet for this movement.

Dealing With Competition

Games should be fun. Through games children will learn about fair play, teamwork, personal success, and having fun. But we spend a great deal of time in Sunday school teaching the children that we should work together and that God loves everyone equally. So what do you do about games where one team sees itself as a “loser”? Try to find as many cooperative games as you can competitive games. Children will never go through life not having to compete. But a variety of games will provide the difference physical, social, and cognitive abilities of the children who are playing.

Cooperative games teach children to value the efforts of one another, assist and encourage one another, understand that working together is important and enjoyable, and learn that games are fun without the competitive challenge. For younger children no-lose games are generally better choices.

Competitive games allow children to test themselves against their peers, set goals, and test and challenge themselves. These games present lessons in handling victory or loss in a sense of fun. As a teacher, if your class is highly competitive, your better choices will be cooperative games as well.

Choosing Game Leaders

When choosing game leaders, look for children who model and value fair play. The right leader in a game can tone down rivalries; avoid acceptance rejection concepts, and praise accomplishments, efforts, and responsible behavior. The right game leader will demonstrate enthusiasm, teamwork, cooperation, respect for the other players, and the joy of playing.

Setting the Rules

When you are choosing the games, remember the age level of children who will be

playing. Some children are just beginning to develop their large motor skills, and the game needs to require little more than running, jumping, hopping, and so forth. Too many directions will make it impossible to play. For an older group of children, keep in mind that they are just beginning to develop their many social and emotional skills. In the excitement of a game, children may forget basic rules of conduct, safety concerns and social niceties. Gentle reminders and role modeling are necessary tools for the game leader. Keep the rules simple and easy to understand.

Providing a Safe Play Area

Obviously most churches have limited space to play games unless you have gathered in a fellowship hall or an outdoor play area. If the game may lend itself to noise, your best bet would be to go outside, weather permitting.

Wherever you go to play the games, make sure that the area is safe. There should be no sharp objects within the play area. Push all chairs, tables, and furniture back against the wall, if the game is active. Go over the game rules carefully before commencing play, reinforcing the fact that the children are not to heckle other participants and that what's fair or not will be established before the game begins.

From the beginning of time children have played games. Throughout the ages and around the world, games have changed very little. Many games originated from an imitation of adult behaviors. Down through time, the only alterations have been those that reflect our modern times. Games are even generally passed on by parents, grandparents, and often by other children.

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