



ACTIVE FAMILY GAMES FOR THE HOLIDAY SEASON

If you are looking for fun things to do with children ages 8 and up, try some of these games. They require minimal equipment and can be played indoors or outside. Plus, they're a great alternative to screen time.

ESCAPE BALL

Play Area: Open area, indoors or outdoors

Equipment Needed: Beach ball (if playing indoors) or kickball (if playing outdoors)

Number of Players: 5 or more

Object of Game: One player ("It") tries to help the ball escape by rolling it between another player's legs.

Description:

Form a circle with one player in the center. This player is "It." Players in the circle formation stand facing inward with their feet spaced apart and as close to the players next to them as possible. They should keep their hands on their knees until the activity begins.

The "It" person has the ball and tries to roll it through the legs of any player in the circle. "It" can only roll the ball with his/her hands and cannot use feet. "It" should fake his/her intent, using feints and changes of direction. Players in the circle must stop the ball from going between their legs by bending over from the waist and using only their hands/arms to block. They may not use their feet or legs to block the ball. Any player that allows the ball to go through their legs becomes the new "It." If the ball escapes the circle between players (instead of through legs), the "It" must retrieve the ball and continue playing as "It."

Variations:

- Larger groups can form a circle with players standing with feet spaced apart *and* touching the feet of the person next to them. They cannot move their feet or legs during the game. (This variation prevents the ball from escaping between players.)
- When a ball goes through a player's legs, s/he remains in the game but can now only use one arm to defend against the ball. When the ball goes through a second time, s/he becomes the new "It."
- When the ball goes through a player's legs, s/he is "out," but stays in position with arms folded. Any player that knocks a ball through those legs is also "out."

MIME CATCH

Play Area: Open area, indoors or outdoors

Equipment Needed: Small soft or foam ball

Number of Players: 4 or more

Object of Game: Players must communicate without speaking how to toss a ball to all players.

Description:

Form a circle. The youngest player is the leader. The leader non-verbally communicates how the ball should move around the circle. No talking is allowed by any player. The other players must successfully move the ball around the circle to everyone else. If they do it incorrectly, the leader must try again to nonverbally explain what to do and they should restart play. If anyone doesn't catch the ball, play should also restart. The leader changes to the next oldest player once the ball has successfully made it to every player in the circle. Continue choosing a new leader by age. Each new leader should choose a new way to toss/catch.

Examples of Ways to Toss and Catch:

- Underhand toss and catch
- Overhand toss and catch
- Walk the ball across the circle to the person you want to have it
- Sit down and toss and catch
- Close one eye and toss and catch
- Stick out your tongue while you toss
- Throw and catch with your non-dominant hand
- Spin around 3 times before throwing
- Do a silly dance after you throw
- Throw and catch while standing on one leg

Variation:

- Include no laughing, in addition to no talking.

FOUR CORNERS

Play Area: Indoor room (or see variation for outdoor area)

Equipment Needed: Music source

Number of Players: 5 or more

Object of Game: One player (“It”) guesses (without looking) which corner has the most number of players in it.

Description:

Turn on music (to cover the sounds of players’ footsteps). Determine a name for each corner, either by what is there (corner by window, door, chair, etc.) or by number (1-4, and label corners) and communicate the names to all players. The oldest player is “It.” Have the “It” player shut his/her eyes and count to 10. While “It” counts to 10, the rest of the players quietly walk to the four different corners of the room. When the “It” has gotten to 10, s/he then guesses which corner of the room has the greatest number of people in it, with eyes still shut. If correct, the “It” chooses a new “It.” If incorrect, continue play until correct or 5 attempts have been made.

Note:

If playing with 5 players, instruct players that they cannot create a tie between all corners by having one person in each corner.

Variations:

- Instead of guessing which corner has the most players, the “It” chooses a corner and anyone in that corner is out of the game and sits down. The “It” counts to ten again and players move to new corners. Anyone in the named corner sits down. The game continues in this fashion until one player remains and then becomes the new “It.”
- This can be played outside using four landmarks instead of corners. For example: the oak tree, chalk X on the driveway, the patio and the flowerpot.