

YOUTH GROUP GAMES



GROUP
BUILDING
GAMES

J. ROGER DAVIS

YM360

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PUBLISHED BY YM360

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Youth Group Games: Group Building Games
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Published by youthministry360 in the United States of America.

ISBN-13: 9781935832980

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INTRODUCTION

In the decades that I've been involved in youth ministry, I have encountered people who think that recreation activities or playing games have little value. I believe this is because they haven't seen games used well as a part of a good ministry strategy. Over the years, I have seen games with a purpose help empower successful youth ministry events and be an incredible asset to weekly programming. However, this takes having a strategy. If you are not careful in your planning, games can quickly become just about competition or killing time. While competition can be a useful tool, the time spent on fields, inside gyms, or on stages should never turn into discovering the best athlete or highlighting the most popular students. Use them wisely, and games will serve your students, leaders, and small groups well and help foster a spirit of community and connection within your group.

You have taken a significant step in your planning and preparing by putting this resource in your hands. Remember to embrace the many different aspects of games in your planning, from traditional tournaments and group building games to water days or large groups games and all-play games to good old-fashioned face-offs. This book is just one in our line of games resources that can serve you and your students.

Each game you will find within the pages of this resource has been curated from years of experience leading camps, weekly gatherings, and special events. Every game has been field-tested by our summer teams. Testing is essential with it comes to games. There is little worse than when something is beautiful in your mind, perfect on paper, but a huge flop when your students start playing it. Rest assured, the games in this resource have been designed and used for hours with students at camps and events with great success. I am grateful for the creative minds and energetic leaders that I have served with over the years. Great people help make great games, and these are some of our favorites.

Each of the games found within this resource is tagged with specific categories so you can decide what fits your needs. Each game entry features simple instructions, along with various supplies you may need. I believe this is true with all games: often, the secret to success is how you adapt it to fit your unique group of students. Changing a rule or varying the supplies might result in a home run with your group. Don't become so rigid in getting the game right that you forget the games must have a purpose. It is also important to remember that games should be fun, especially youth group games!

There are two final notes before we move on. First, be aware that you may need to make appropriate adjustments or accommodations to the games if you have anyone with physical limitations so all students can participate. This is true of any game or activity you facilitate with people. The more you can create an inclusive experience, the better return you will get. Second, prioritize safety in all your games. Once people get in motion, things can go wrong quickly. Think ahead and make sure the playing area is safe and the rules are clear. It is good to remember that rules are not designed to limit fun but to serve to protect those participating. When a game is safe, everyone participating can enjoy it.

Cheering for you!



A WORD ABOUT GROUP BUILDING GAMES

It should not be a surprise to anyone using this resource, but for these games to be effective, they should build your group. By definition, that is what they are. With that mindset, try to avoid making these games overly competitive from an individual perspective. The real win is when group building games foster connection and community in your group. This also does not just happen because you picked up this book and decided to use some of these games. You need to be intentional as a leader. Work hard to make every student feel included and connected to the group. While you can't do everything to make your group feel connected, you can set the table and cook the meal.

Within the pages of this book, I am sharing 25 of my favorite group building games with you to help make your next event even more effective and intentional. Here are some thoughts to keep in mind as you plan and prepare:

- Names matter. We all want to be known, and these group building games give you a great opportunity to make sure students are known. That begins with using their names.
- Often, group building games are not high-energy experiences. This reality can sometimes feel like the lack of hype makes them not as fun as others. I would encourage you to think of them as "high synergy" games in your strategy. Going back to the original Greek, you will find the words "sun" for together and "ergon" for work, giving us "sunergos" for working together and in the mid 19th century translated to synergy. These games are designed to work together, producing a combined effect that is greater than the individual elements present before the games.

- The environment is another asset to be used in your game experiences. I encourage you to think beyond the game or element. Are there other things you can do in the room or on the field to bring some experiential elements to your games? Things like lights, music, flags, etc., can help create connection and excitement.
- Group building games can be as basic as using one tennis ball, but often they require a bit more up-front work from the leader. Don't be intimidated by that. I have found a little work can create elements that go a long way in achieving your goal. When your group always goes to a field or gym, and all they see are the dodgeballs you have used all the time, it makes it harder to diversify your game experiences. Creating various elements that are different than their norm can push your group beyond their comfort zone. When done right, these elements can be used for years and even cross over to different games.
- If doing a week of recreation, I like doing group building games on our first day of recreation. Part of that strategy is getting your groups as connected as possible as soon as possible. I want that payoff to show up once we get into small groups and bible studies. I like to think that recreation washes the feet of bible study. Additionally, with group building games sometimes having a slower pace, it allows your students not to be exhausted after day one.

Here are 25 great group building ideas for you to make your next event the best ever!

BLOCK IT

CATEGORY

Teamwork, communication building, problem solving

INSTRUCTIONS

In this group building game, it is hip to be square. You can have the group work together as a larger group or smaller group on "Block It." Give your group various puzzle pieces, and they will need to work together to create a complete square. You can have the group do this challenge in one of a few ways. The first is the easiest, where you have all the pieces for each created square separated. Once the group completes one puzzle, they move on to the next until they have completed all five. The second option is to play where you have all the puzzle pieces in a pile together. If you decide on this option, you have some way to distinguish the pieces with numbers on them or with each square painted a certain color. Once you start the challenge, the group can divide out the pieces and begin working on them simultaneously. A third and more challenging way to play is to have all of the puzzle pieces in a pile together and not identified. The group would have to use all the pieces to make five total squares. This is more challenging because the group will not know which pieces go with which puzzle square and work together to figure it out. Regardless of which way you play, groups will have to put all five patterns together to complete the challenge.

SUPPLIES

Various puzzle pieces (puzzle templates are included on page 38)

TIPS

Pieces can easily be made out of plywood to whatever dimensions you desire, or if you need to go smaller, you can make them out of card stock something laminated.

TRIANGLES

CATEGORY

Teamwork, problem solving

INSTRUCTIONS

In this challenge, your group will have to use their brains to solve a few problems. To begin, you will need to give the group six sticks that are equal in length. I suggest using sticks about 12–16 inches long and making sure they are thick enough, so they do not easily break. In the first challenge, the group needs to use ALL SIX sticks to make four triangles of equal size and shape (all three sides have the same length.) Groups will easily lay three sticks down and make one triangle and even a second triangle with the other three sticks, but what about FOUR triangles. Can your group figure it out?

The group has to look beyond the seen to the unseen and think in three dimensions to do this. If they use the sticks to form a tetrahedron, or what you would think of as a pyramid, it creates four equilateral triangles out of the face of the sticks. The pyramid will have six edges made out of their six sticks, creating a triangle as the base and three additional triangles on each pyramid face.

In the second part of the challenge, the group needs to now make EIGHT equilateral triangles out of the same six sticks. In this challenge, the triangles do not have to be the same size. It is also good to remind the group that the sticks cannot be broken into different sizes. You and I will know the triangles as the Star of David. It has eight equilateral triangles, consisting of six smaller triangles and two big triangles.

You and I will know the triangles as the Star of David. It has eight equilateral triangles, consisting of six smaller triangles and two big triangles.

HOOPIN'

SUPPLIES

Six sticks of equal length (triangle examples are included on page 38)

TIPS

Challenges like this allow the group to work together and learn to communicate ideas. These activities also allow leaders to observe the group's various personality traits that will help group dynamics and their leadership later.

CATEGORY

Teamwork, speed

INSTRUCTIONS

"Hoopin'" is a classic challenge with very few supplies to get your group connected and working together. Have your group stand in a circle facing inward. They should all hold hands, creating a locked group. Pick a player to start with a hula hoop on their wrist. The hoop will start at the first person and move around the circle back to the start. Once that happens, add a second hula hoop going the opposite direction. Your group will be working the hoops around, and eventually, they will have to cross. Once they get through the cross, they then make their way back to the second person. You can also add a third hoop or more if you want. Make sure all your hoops are different sizes for the pass-through. You can also split your group into two groups and race each other or just race against a clock to add to the challenge.

SUPPLIES

Various sized hula hoops

TIPS

You can also play it in a straight line with the hoop going down and back the entire line without anyone disconnecting their hands. I like the engagement that comes with the group seeing each other, but if you are limited on space, this is also an option.

Youth Group Games: Group Building Games

Game Master and Youth Minister are two titles that often go hand in hand. Whether you have the experience or not, approaching games for your events and retreats can often become an overwhelming task. Creativity can become stifled as other tasks, and to-dos overwhelm your plate. Youth Group Games was designed by J. Roger Davis, who has decades of games experience. These books are designed to help you have easy and effective games ready for the next time you put on a big event.

Group Building Games is one of five books within the Youth Group Games line, and it focuses on teamwork and group building activities. It is no simple task to come up with games that create a bonding experience among your group, and even harder to make those games engaging. The struggle to unite and encourage your students will become a thing of the past as you turn through the pages of Group Building Games.

“Group Building Games” is part of YM360’s youth group games line of resources and is ideal for:

- *Any large group setting*
- *Camp or retreat settings*
- *Mid-week youth service*



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Church & Ministry/Ministry Resources/Youth Ministry
ISBN-13: 9781935832980

