

# Top 10 Cooperative Games For Families

***Cooperative games are an excellent way to teach and practice peacemaking skills while having fun with family!***

## What Are Cooperative Games?

Cooperative games help children develop the essential skills of cooperation, communication, empathy, and conflict resolution by giving them an opportunity to work together toward a common goal. These games require the skills of everyone in the group, not of just one or two people. Contrast this with traditional games, in which there is direct competition between individuals or groups, and you'll see why cooperative games can play such a big role in teaching and reinforcing peacemaking skills.

## Why Use Cooperative Games to Teach Peace?

Peacemaking is about relationships. If you can help your children build and sustain supportive relationships, they will be able to practice and promote peacemaking more effectively. The best way to promote the ability to form such relationships is through practice, which can be difficult. Cooperative games are a way to practice the skills of relationships—skills such as communication, trust, problem solving, empathy, and cooperation—in a way that is fun, engaging, and real.

In addition, cooperative games provide an opportunity for children to become aware of and experience issues of power, privilege, and discrimination. This experience provides “teachable moments” that give you a chance to talk about difficult topics with your family in a safe way.

Cooperative games are also a fun way to improve communication skills, inspire cooperation, and build a strong sense of community.

***What if you played a game and everybody won?***

## Games in this toolkit...

1. **Group Juggle** (p. 2)
2. **Veggie Stew** (p. 3)
3. **Silent Line Up** (p. 4)
4. **The Big Wind Blows** (p. 5)
5. **Hand Tap** (p. 6)
6. **The Humming Game** (p. 7)
7. **Cup and String Game** (p. 8)
8. **Compliment Relay** (p. 9)
9. **Mirrors** (p. 10)
10. **Change Three Things** (p. 11)



# Group Juggle



**Purpose:** to get a new group of people to complete a task collaboratively; to learn names

**Skills:** cooperation, communication, coordination, inclusion

**Space:** enough space to form a close circle

**Supplies:** 3 or more soft balls or rolled-up socks

**Group Size:** 5-15 people

**Ages:** 9 and up

## Directions

Have the group stand in a circle. Remind the participants that they should use soft, underhand tosses only.

Explain that during the first round, each person must receive the ball exactly once. Explain that if the ball should drop, it is not a problem; simply pick it up and keep going. Tell the participants that once they have received the ball and tossed it to the next person, they should put their hands behind their back (so that everyone knows who has had a turn).

Start the game by taking a ball, choosing someone in the circle, and saying “here you go [name]” before tossing them the ball. Remember to put your hands behind your back after tossing the ball.

When the person catches the ball, they should say “thank you [name]” and then continue the game by throwing the ball to another person repeating the same phrases.

When everyone has received the ball once, have the last person toss the ball back to you.

Before continuing, ask the participants to point to both the person that they received the ball from and the person that they tossed the ball to. Explain that the group will continue the game in the same order, remembering to say “here you go [name]” and “thank you [name]”. This time around, however, you will be adding 2-3 more balls to the group and they will work to juggle them as long as possible.

The game continues until all the balls have fallen.

## Game Tip

Some younger children may have issues with coordination. If that is the case, challenge the group to complete the pattern with one ball first, then add a second or third. Younger children may also need to play with a larger ball that they can roll around the circle.

# Veggie Stew

**Purpose:** to learn names; to energize the group

**Skills:** concentration, gross motor movement, listening, memorization

**Space:** enough space to form a close but not circle

**Supplies:** name tags (optional)

**Group Size:** 10-15 people

**Ages:** 8 and up

## Directions

This game is like hot potato, only with people's names. Have the group stand in a circle with one person in the middle and choose someone in the circle to begin. That person should say their name first, and then say the name of someone else in the circle. For example, Naomi might begin by saying, "Naomi to Kate." Kate would then choose someone else in the circle and say, "Kate to Dalton," then "Dalton to Hannah," then "Hannah to Grace," and so on.

While this is happening, the person in the middle has the job of tagging someone *lightly on the shoulder* before the second person's name is said. If the "tagger" tags someone before they can say the second name, the person tagged comes into the middle of the circle, and the now ex-tagger takes their place in the circle. The ex-tagger continues by saying their own name and then another person's name in the circle.

If participants run backwards from the tagger to avoid being tagged, create a boundary for the circle, so that if someone crosses it trying to avoid a tag, then they are automatically "it." The game continues as long as people are having fun or until time runs out.

## Variation

This activity can be used in many different contexts. For example, if everyone knows everyone else's name, each person in the group could be named after a vegetable. Other ideas include numbers, favorite animals, or characters from television or the movies to test listening and memory skills.



# Silent Line Up

**Purpose:** to complete a task collaboratively using non-verbal communication

**Skills:** communication, problem solving, cooperation, leadership

**Space:** a large space with room to move around and make a straight line

**Supplies:** none

**Group Size:** 10-25 people

**Ages:** 9 and up

## Directions

Tell participants that they are going to line up, but that they will need to do it in a particular order.

The first time the group tries it, challenge participants to line up in order of their birth dates (month and day).

One end of the line should be marked January 1<sup>st</sup> and the other end December 31<sup>st</sup>.

In order to make the game more challenging, have people line up in silence. If they are successful, future line-ups could be based on topics like shoe size, height, number of brothers and sisters, and number of years in school.

## Game Tip

This game is particularly useful for transitions, either before or after other games, since it requires participants to work in silence and at the end the group – hopefully – is lined up and ready to move on to the next activity.



# The Big Wind Blows

**Purpose:** to demonstrate the similarities in a group; to learn something new about each other

**Skills:** gross motor movement, quick thinking, identifying similarities and differences, observation

**Space:** enough space to form a close circle

**Supplies:** chairs or tape (optional)

**Group Size:** 10-25 people

**Ages:** 5 and up

## Directions

Arrange chairs in a circle, but make sure that there is one less chair than the number of people. If there are not chairs, stand in the middle and give each person a strip of tape that they should put on the floor by their right big toe. Everyone in the group should either sit in a seat or stand near their tape. The person in the center of the circle begins by saying, "The Big Wind Blows for anyone who..." and adds something that is true about them. Examples could include "...has a little sister," "...is wearing socks," "...likes purple," and so on.

Anyone who shares that trait must then walk slowly from their spot to another spot in the circle, moving at least two spaces over from their original spot. This will leave one person in the middle without a spot in the circle, who then repeats the process: "The Big Wind blows for anyone who..." If that person chooses, they may also say "Breadbasket," meaning that *everyone* must get up and find a new seat.



When playing with young children, using the phrase "I like people who..." is simpler and more affirming than "The Big Wind Blows..." Younger children may also want to stay in the middle and be "it." Remind them that lots of players should get a chance to be in the middle. The game ends when time has run out, when players are ready for the next activity, or when everyone has had a turn.

# Hand Tap

**Purpose:** to participate in a challenging group activity

**Skills:** cooperation, concentration, coordination

**Space:** a space large enough for the group that is playing the game

**Supplies:** large table (optional)

**Group Size:** 10-25 people

**Ages:** 10 and up

## Directions

Gather the group and tell them to form a close circle either kneeling on the floor or sitting around a table large enough to hold the whole group.

Tell them to place their hands in front on them, with their palms down on the floor or on the table.



Have each person raise their right hand and place it over the left hand of the person to their right (so that each person's left and right hands are separated by the right hand of the person on their left and the left hand of the person on their right). It should look similar to the picture above on the right.

Explain that this is a tapping game. The goal is to tap hands in the order that hands are placed on the table or floor. For example, if Hannah began by tapping her left hand, it would be followed by Dalton's right, Grace's left, and then Hannah's right.

Play a few rounds, and then introduce a new element to the game. Explain that anyone may *reverse the order* of the taps by double-tapping. In other words, if Hannah taps her left hand, then Dalton taps his right, Grace can send the order back to Dalton by tapping her left hand twice. If this happens and Hannah raises her right hand by mistake, her right hand is out. (She must take it off the table or put it behind her back.) This continues until all but two players have been eliminated or until time runs out.

## Game Tip

After players have been eliminated, invite them to start another round or have them help to officiate the game.



# The Humming Game

**Purpose:** to use non-verbal communication and teamwork to complete a task

**Skills:** cooperation, non-verbal communication, risk-taking, problem solving, encouragement

**Space:** enough space for people to sit comfortably

**Supplies:** none

**Group Size:** 10-25 people

**Ages:** 8 and up

## Directions

In this game, one person will be asked to perform a simple task. The challenge is that they will not know the task – and they need to determine the task by the volume of the group’s humming.

Have a volunteer step out of the room, and while they are outside, tell the group that they have two decisions to make: the task for the volunteer to perform and a song that everyone knows that they can hum. The task can be pretty much anything – putting a chair on a table, writing their name on the board, recycling a piece of scrap paper. Be creative! (The only restriction, aside from obvious issues of appropriateness, is that tasks should involve some object or person in the room, as opposed to dancing or doing a handstand, since it is easier to guide a person to *something*.) The song should be something that everyone in the group knows. The best songs are short (without a lot of verses) and tend to be from childhood, like “Happy Birthday,” “Twinkle Twinkle,” or “The Alphabet Song.” Ask for a volunteer to go first.

After the group has decided on a song and a task, invite the volunteer to stand in the center of the room and begin humming at a medium volume. As they start to walk around the room, hum louder as they get closer to the task and softer as they get farther away. It may take a while, especially during the first round, but the feeling of accomplishment when they finally complete the task is unsurpassable.

## Game Tip

This game is addictive! And it is an exceptional demonstration of the kind of satisfaction that a shared investment in success can lead to. The volunteer and the group have very different roles, but they are both working toward the same thing. Groups of all ages will want to play this again and again.

# Cup and String Game



**Purpose:** to work together in a group to complete a task

**Skills:** cooperation, problem solving, negotiation, coordination, self-control, communication

**Space:** tabletop space for multiple teams

**Supplies:** six paper or plastic cups per team, medium-sized rubber bands, spool of string or twine

**Group Size:** teams of 2-4 people

**Ages:** 8 and up

## Directions

Before playing, prepare enough rubber band tools for the group. Split the group into teams; plan four players per tool, one for each string. (Depending on the number of people in the whole group, it is also possible for pairs to play together or to use four players with an observer or two.)

This game is easier to demonstrate than to explain, so use four volunteers and invite the rest of the group to gather around the group to watch.

Place six cups and the rubber band tool on the table – or floor space – in the middle of the volunteers. Give each volunteer a string and explain that they must use the tool to stack the cups into a tower.

Have the group try to move one cup, and point out how each member of the group must adjust the tension they place on the string in order for it to work effectively. After the group moves one cup, have them stop.

Explain that each group will first try to stack the cups into a tower before being given additional challenges. Space groups evenly around the room and distribute supplies.

## Variations

Each group will finish at a different pace. Be prepared to have additional challenges ready. It is also possible to spread the variations out over time, so that each time a group plays they will have a new challenge. Some variations include the following:

- **Stack cups in a tower.**
- **Stack cups in a pyramid: three on bottom, two in the middle, one on top.**
- **Have group create a unique structure, then recreate it using the rubber band tool.**
- **Stack cups without talking.**

## Game Tip

Make the rubber band “tools” before playing. Cut four arm-length pieces of string and tie them to a rubber band, spaced evenly.

# Compliment Relay

**Purpose:** to practice verbal communication to share compliments with each other

**Skills:** verbal communication, kindness, empathy

**Space:** enough space for people to sit comfortably in a circle (or at desks)

**Supplies:** none

**Group Size:** 5-20 people

**Ages:** 5 and up

## Directions

Tell players that they are going to play a game in which they will be sharing compliments. If needed, explain what a compliment is or give some examples: “I like the way you \_\_\_\_\_,” “Thank you for \_\_\_\_\_,” or “You’re really good at \_\_\_\_\_.” Begin the game with players sitting in a circle.



The object is to pass compliments around the circle. One person will give a compliment to the person sitting next to them, who will say, “Thank you,” and pass another compliment on to the next person, and so on. Remind players that compliments are *sincere*. Model a good compliment by starting the relay in a counter-clockwise direction.

The game ends when the relay has gone around the circle one time. To play a second round, say, “I’m going to count to 10 and everyone needs to find a new seat in the circle.” Challenge the group by telling them that everyone must say something different.

## Game Tip

If the group is large, consider breaking them into smaller groups. The game is easier and more fun when it moves faster.

**Purpose:** to practice careful observation

**Skills:** non-verbal communication, creativity, coordination, empathy, concentration, leadership

**Space:** enough space for pairs to spread out

**Supplies:** none

**Group Size:** 10-25 people, in pairs

**Ages:** 6 and up

## Directions

Put people into pairs. Explain that they will play two rounds. In each round, one person will be the leader and one person will be the follower. Have pairs choose the leader for the first round. Explain that the leader will have 60 seconds, during which they should move slowly and deliberately and during which their partner must mimic the movements, as if they are a mirror image. Players may make faces, wave their arms or legs, turn side to side, stand on one foot, re-tie a shoe, or anything they can imagine (within reason). It should be a silent activity, and leaders should move slowly and smoothly enough so that their “mirror images” can follow along in sync. After 60 seconds, have players switch roles.

## Variation

After each person has had a chance to be the leader and the follower, give groups a minute during which neither person is designated the leader.



# Change Three Things



**Purpose:** to practice careful observation; to give players a chance to be the center of attention

**Skills:** observation, concentration, creativity

**Space:** medium to large space for the whole group to sit or stand comfortably

**Supplies:** none

**Group Size:** 10-25 people

**Ages:** 6 and up

## Directions

This is a game that can be played easily without moving chairs or desks. Explain that one volunteer will stand up in front of the group. They will slowly turn around once or twice, during which time the group should observe them carefully looking for obvious and seemingly insignificant details about the person's appearance.

After a couple of turns, the volunteer should leave the room and take about a minute to change three things about their appearance. Some suggestions include tucking or untucking a shirt, removing glasses or pieces of jewelry, untying a shoe, or anything else (within reason).

After they have changed three things, they return to the group. Tell the group that if they think they see something that has changed to raise their hands. Have the volunteer call on anyone with their hand up. After each change has been guessed – or after the volunteer has stumped the group – choose another volunteer.

## Variation

Play the game in pairs. Each person has thirty seconds to observe their partner, at which time they both must turn around and take a minute to change three things. After a minute, have pairs face each other again. Have them shout out a changes as fast as they can or have them alternate guesses.

## Game Tip

If playing as a whole class or a group, this game can easily be broken up or continued over a long period of time.

## Game Tip

With younger children, begin by having them change one thing and work up to three.