Cooperative Games

The following games are designed to elicit cooperation with partners or small groups to accomplish a goal.

- When the need or desired objective is to help children learn cooperation skills, there are many game experiences that can contribute to this objective.
- The use of process questions allows the teacher and groups to discuss benefits and learning experiences that occur during the games. The description of each cooperative activity on this CD is followed by process questions designed for class discussion after the game has been played. The ultimate question for each activity is whether students learned something that can be applied to other situations.
- Many games that can be played indoors or out are designed to enhance cooperation.
- Most of the cooperative games included also promote a moderate to vigorous physical activity level.
- Little or no equipment is needed for these games. What equipment is needed may be available in the classroom or may be borrowed from the physical education program.
- Many quality books have been written that showcase cooperative games. See the resources listed at the end of the following table.
## Cooperative Games

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### Resources


Busy Bee and Busy Balloons

Grade Level
K through second

Purpose
Listening, body part identification, distinguishing right from left

Equipment
One balloon per two people

Organization
All desks are aside, opening space in the middle of the floor; or all desks are in the center so that the perimeter of the room can be used. Players are scattered standing back to back with a partner.

Activity Description
1. Call out two body parts; the players quickly connect those body parts (e.g., elbow to elbow, knee to knee, hand to foot, left hand to right shoulder).
2. After two or three calls, announce “Busy bee”; the players quickly find a new partner and stand back to back waiting for the next call.
3. If there is an extra player, that individual may join two others to form a group of three who will work to find solutions to the tasks; or the extra person can buzz in and out among the other bees until “Busy bee” is called.
4. Play the game using a balloon per two players. Calls may be for the partners to balance the balloon between them using their noses or with their elbows, knees, and so on.
5. When “Busy balloons” is called, one player holds the balloon and the other finds a new partner with a balloon.
6. For a bigger challenge, you can ask students to walk three steps, march, or slide step while balancing the balloon between body parts. You can challenge them to hit the balloon up and catch it between two body parts.

Process Questions
1. Raise your elbow if you think you played well with your partners today.
2. Count how many partners you played with and hold up that many fingers. Wow, we had lots of friends today.
3. What was the secret to meeting the big challenges today?
Beanbag Freeze

Grade Level
K through second

Purpose
To travel in different locomotor patterns while balancing a beanbag on the head. Cooperation is added as players help those who drop their beanbag.

Equipment
One beanbag per player, music (optional)

Organization
If indoors, all desks are aside to open space in the middle of the floor, or all desks are in the center so that the perimeter of the room can be used. Players are scattered in self-space with a beanbag on their head. If outdoors, define travel boundaries.

Activity Description
1. Players place a beanbag on their head and walk around the playing area.
2. If the beanbag falls off the head, the player must freeze.
3. Another player, while maintaining balance of the beanbag, attempts to free the frozen player by picking up the dropped beanbag and placing it on that individual’s head. This helping action places the player back in the game.
4. If the beanbag falls off the helper’s head, she too must freeze. The result may be several people frozen and in need of help all in one place.
5. The teacher may need to point out frozen players who need help.
6. For bigger challenges, change the locomotor skill (skip, gallop, slide) or the direction of travel (backward, sideways).

Process Questions
1. How many of you helped someone today?
2. How did you feel when someone helped you?
3. How did you feel when you helped someone?
Balloon Keep-It-Up

Grade Level
K through third

Purpose
To work with a partner or small group to keep a balloon from falling to the floor

Equipment
One balloon per two players and a few extras in case some pop, one hula hoop per four children, music (optional)

Organization
If indoors, all desks are aside to open space in the middle of the floor, or all desks are in the center so that the perimeter of the room can be used. Players are scattered with a partner.

Activity Description
1. Players strike the balloon back and forth, taking turns, trying to keep it up in the air. They count the number of consecutive volleys their group can make.
2. Have players use only certain body parts to strike the balloon.
3. Have them attempt the same task in groups of three to six.
4. Have them try to keep two balloons going in the small group.
5. Ask them to attempt the same tasks but with joined hands.
6. Have one or two players hold a hoop while two others strike the balloon back and forth, attempting to get it through the hoop. The partners holding the hoop are allowed and encouraged to move the hoop if necessary to help the two who are striking the balloon. After a few minutes or after a certain score has been reached, the hoop holders and the balloon strikers change places.

Process Questions
1. How did you have to strike the balloon to make it easier for your partner to be able to return it?
2. Was it easier to keep it going with one other person or with a whole group? Why? What did you have to do differently with a bigger group?
3. When you were holding the hoop, did you help the people striking the balloon to get a high score? How?
Lily Pad

**Grade Level**
K through third

**Purpose**
To travel in different locomotor patterns and respond quickly when the music stops

**Equipment**
One hula hoop per four players, music

**Organization**
Hoops (representing lily pads) are scattered in an open play area, and players are in personal space.

**Activity Description**
Players are instructed that they are frogs and that they are to travel in the “pond” by swimming, jumping, hopping, or skipping. When the music stops, they must quickly get on a lily pad.

1. Remove a lily pad each round, and encourage the children to find ways to increase the number of frogs on the lily pad.
2. With only one to three pads left, it may be necessary to change the rules (i.e., only one body part has to be on the pad), and players may have to help support each other.
3. This game can be played with other themes, for example bird nests, space stations, or shipping ports.

**Process Questions**
1. If you were struggling while getting on a lily pad when the music stopped, how did it make you feel when someone helped you get on one?
2. Did you help anyone get onto a lily pad? If so, how did that make you feel?
Cooperative Musical Chairs or Hoops

Grade Level
K through fifth

Purpose
To find a way to share a chair or hoop so all can stay in the game

Equipment
One chair or hula hoop per person minus one, music

Organization
The chairs are facing in alternate directions as in the original game, or hoops are placed side by side.

Activity Description
1. In this game the chairs are eliminated each round, but the players are not.
2. As in the regular game, music is played and when it stops, all players quickly find a chair and have a seat. Since there is one less chair, someone has to share her chair.
3. Play continues and can go down to as few chairs as the teacher believes the players can successfully share (this may depend on age group, cooperation skills, and player size).
4. For the hoop variation, hoops are placed side by side on the ground or floor. The players skip around the hoops until the music stops and then jump into the hoops. After every round, a hoop is removed and the sharing begins. Hoops are much easier to share and to move than chairs, which improves the flow of the game.

Process Questions
1. If you did not have a chair when the music stopped, how did it make you feel when someone shared theirs? Do you think that is better than being “out” the way people are in the other version of Musical Chairs? Why or why not?
2. How did you help make the game work when there were only a few chairs left?
Fusion

**Grade Level**
First through fifth

**Purpose**
Players are challenged to perform a task with a partner or small group.

**Equipment**
Balls, hoops, books, balloons, chairs, other materials based on challenges created

**Organization**
Four chairs side by side in one area, otherwise open spaces in the classroom or outdoors

**Activity Description**
1. Challenge the players with these tasks or create others. Use the playground to make up safe challenges. These are examples of challenges:
   - Can you travel really tall with your partner?
   - Can you travel really low with your partner?
   - Can you and your partner connect and make a snake travel?
   - Can you and your partner join two more and make a longer snake move?
   - Can you and your partner pretend to be lumberjacks and cut wood?
   - Can one partner make a human chair for the other partner?
   - Can you join another group and make a chair for two people?
   - Can you and your partner walk one behind the other and make the exact same steps?
   - Can you and your partner use your bodies and make a circle on the floor?
   - Can you and your partner join hands and get up on the chairs, walk across all four, and get down off the chairs without becoming disconnected or losing your balance?
   - Can one partner make a tunnel out of his or her body and the other person crawl under it?
   - Can you and your partner join two more and make an obstacle course, and then invite four others to go through it?
   - Can you roll a hoop and your partner dive through it?
   - Can you and your partner join two more and make a “people sandwich”?
   - Can you and your partner sit on the ground, connect feet, and pretend to go on a bike ride?
   - Can you and your partner join three other groups and create a group log roll? Five lie on the floor and must roll together while one lies on top and is moved by the logs.
   - Can you and your partner make up a fun challenge to teach others?

**Process Questions**
1. What was your most challenging task and what made it challenging?
2. Was it easier to work with just your partner than with larger groups? Why or why not?
3. What was the key to success in most of these challenges?
4. What did you learn about your partner or group members today?
Partner Mixer

**Grade Level**
First through fifth

**Purpose**
To have the players work with a variety of partners as well as memorize partners. After they have completed the game once, you can have the players work with a different partner throughout the day or week. This activity is great for reviewing. Ask a question, and players tell their partner the answer.

**Equipment**
None, music (optional)

**Organization**
Players are scattered in an open area or standing by desks.

**Activity Description**
Have players find a partner near them and shake hands. Tell them that this will be their handshake partner. Then give the following instructions:

1. Go on to a new partner and give them a high five. This will be your high five partner.
2. Return to your handshake partner.
3. Find a new partner and give them a knuckle tap. This will be your knuckle partner.
4. Go back to your high five partner.
5. Go to someone new and give them a low five.
6. Handshake partner.
7. Knuckle tap partner.
8. High five partner.
9. Now go back to your low five partner.

**Process Questions**
1. What are the benefits of working with different partners?
2. Why do you think it is important to not leave others out when selecting partners?
3. Can you name all of the partners you worked with today?
Cooperative Line-Up

Grade Level
Second through fifth

Purpose
To have the players work in a group and accomplish a goal

Equipment
None

Organization
Divide the class into two or three groups of about eight to 12 players for these tasks. Limited space is needed.

Activity Description
The following tasks are done without talking.

1. Line up in alphabetical order by name. (Add variety by using first, middle, or last name for three different versions.)
2. Line up by birth dates or just birth months.
3. Line up taller to shorter.
5. Line up by least to most siblings.
6. By length of hair.
7. By the time people go to bed on school nights.
8. Finally, line up like we are making a silly group picture.

Process Questions
1. What did you learn about others today?
2. What are some things we have in common?
3. What strategies did your group use to succeed?
4. Did any strategies not work and why not?
Partner Walking Tag and 2 + 2 Tag

Grade Level
Second through fifth

Purpose
To avoid being tagged by a partner and later to cooperate with a partner to avoid being tagged by two others

Equipment
Cones or poly spots to mark boundaries

Organization
Players are scattered in play area and start side by side with a partner.

Activity Description
1. One partner squats and the other remains standing.
2. On the signal “go,” only the person who is standing starts walking. After a 3-second count, the partner who is squatting stands and attempts to tag her partner.
3. Once tagged, that person becomes the tagger, but first must turn in a circle three times, allowing the partner time to walk away.
4. Only walking is allowed.
5. After a few minutes of play, change the game to 2 + 2 tag. The partners are now in groups of four. Partners join hands or elbows, and one pair squats while the other remains standing. The game is repeated, but it now requires a level of cooperation so that people can avoid being tagged and also be successful tagging.
6. Once tagged, the pair join hands and turn in a circle three times before they become taggers.

Process Questions
1. Was this game fun? What made it fun?
2. What strategies did you and your partner use to work together and avoid the taggers?
3. Did you and your partner communicate? How?
Balloon Frenzy Relay

Grade Level
Second through fifth

Purpose
To progress from a start line to a finish line following the pathway of one’s teammates’ balloons

Equipment
One balloon per person and a few extras in case some pop

Organization
Teams of three to five stand behind a designated start line. Teams do not have to have the same number of players.

Activity Description
1. Players start by blowing up the balloons. Each player can decide how big he wants to make the balloon. Players do not tie the balloons. If a player is not able to inflate a balloon, a teammate will need to assist.
2. One player releases his balloon, and the entire team jogs to where it lands.
3. The next player releases her balloon from the point where the first balloon landed. The first player picks up his balloon and reinflates it as he travels with the team.
4. This process continues until the group finally crosses the finish line. Once finished, they run back to the start line and may repeat if time allows.
5. This game will have groups traveling in all directions and guarantees laughter.

Process Questions
1. Was this game fun? If so, what made it fun? If not, why not?
2. Did your group find any strategies that helped you complete the task? If so, what were they?
Pass the Hoop

Grade Level
Third through fifth

Purpose
To work together to pass the hoop around a circle without breaking the circle (dropping hands)

Equipment
Two hula hoops per six to eight players

Organization
If indoors, all desks are aside to open space in the middle of the floor, or all desks are in the center so that the perimeter of the room can be used. If outdoors, minimal open space is needed. Players join hands in groups of six to eight players to form a circle.

Activity Description
1. Players all join hands. Two of the players disconnect hands, a hoop is placed over one arm, and the two then reconnect hands.
2. On the signal “go,” the players pass the hoop around the circle without dropping hands. They are successful when it returns to the start.
3. After one successful attempt, ask them to strategize a way to accomplish the task more quickly and then try it again.
4. Challenges: (1) Time the game and then repeat with the challenge to beat the previous time. (2) Add a second hoop, and have one hoop go clockwise and the other counterclockwise. The challenge occurs when the two hoops meet.

Process Questions
1. What strategy worked best for your group to be successful?
2. If you, as an individual, were struggling, did your team members help? How?
3. How does taking time to communicate help with games like this?
Long, Longer, Longest Jump

**Grade Level**
Third through fifth

**Purpose**
Players are challenged to collectively jump as far as possible.

**Equipment**
None

**Organization**
Outdoors, a hallway, or open space in the classroom. Players are organized into teams of three to five with ample space between and in front of each group.

**Activity Description**
1. A start line is established, and the first player stands behind the line and jumps as far as possible, taking off from two feet and landing on two feet.
2. Where that player landed becomes the start line for the next jumper, and the rotation continues. The idea is to see how far the group can jump collectively.
3. Players can be challenged to beat their own records.
4. Variations of this activity include running long jump (back away from the start and run, taking off on one foot but landing on two), backward standing long jump, and leaping (one foot to other foot).

**Process Questions**
1. How did players of different skill levels help your group to “measure up”?
2. Which variation was the most fun? Which was the most challenging and why?
Square Ball

Grade Level
Third through fifth

Purpose
Players are challenged to work cooperatively with a small group and move a ball from one base to another.

Equipment
A soccer or playground-type ball per four players (it is best if each ball is a different color) and a long rope and a base or cone per group of four

Organization
Bases are positioned in an outdoor open space approximately 15 yards (14 meters) apart forming a square. One ball is located at each base. A group of four players are given a long jump rope and asked to stand over a ball and form a square. The rope is placed behind the backs of three players while one player holds both ends of the rope.

Activity Description
1. The idea is to move as a unit and control the ball with the feet (as in soccer dribbling).
2. For success, the rope has to stay taut in the shape of a square.
3. Allow the groups to just practice moving before the game actually begins.
4. The game itself starts with a group at each base.
5. On the signal “go,” the group dribbles the ball to the next base, leaves the ball, and runs back to their original starting base to pick up the ball just left there by another group.
6. The game continues until each team has its original ball.

Process Questions
1. What was the biggest challenge in this activity?
2. Did your group overcome this challenge? How?
3. If you were to do this again, what would you change?
Blanketball

**Grade Level**
Third through fifth

**Purpose**
Players are challenged to work cooperatively with a small group and toss a beach ball up and down, and then later over a net or rope.

**Equipment**
A sturdy blanket per group of four to six players, one beach ball or lightweight plastic ball per group, and a net or rope per two groups

**Organization**
To start, members of each team have an open space and hold the blanket taut between them. The ball is placed in the center of the blanket. For the second part of the game, one team is on one side of the rope or net and the other team is on the opposite side. One ball is placed in the middle of one of the blankets. The net is held or attached to a pole or object so as to be positioned between the two groups.

**Activity Description**
1. For the first part of the activity, small groups practice tossing the ball up and catching it in the blanket.
2. After a few minutes of practice, one group works with a second group; the two groups try to pass the ball back and forth across the net using the blankets.
3. Points are accumulated collectively for every successful throw and catch.
4. Rotate groups so that all have a chance to play together.

**Process Questions**
1. What did your group members have to do to be successful at this activity?
2. What are some different ways people helped in your success?
3. If you play it again, what can you do to be even better at the game?
Cooperative Balloon Basketball

**Grade Level**
Third through fifth

**Purpose**
Players are challenged to work cooperatively and score as many hoops as possible in a time limit.

**Equipment**
Ten to 12 hoops, one balloon per two players with a few extras ready in case some pop

**Organization**
If in the classroom, desks are moved to provide open space. The hoops are scattered randomly around the playing area. Partners are scattered in the same area as the hoops.

**Activity Description**
1. On the signal “go,” players start striking the balloon back and forth nonstop, moving toward a hoop.
2. When they get to a hoop, one player picks it up, taps the balloon through it, and then places it back on the floor. Partners score a point each time they pass the balloon through a hoop.
3. Players continue to move toward different hoops and keep the balloon going.
4. If the balloon hits the floor, 2 points are subtracted from the score.
5. The idea is to score as many hoops in the time period (2 minutes) as possible and then repeat to attempt to beat that score.
6. Strive for an entire class score.

**Process Questions**
1. What did you and your partner have to do to be successful at this game?
2. What was the most challenging part of the game?
3. If you play it again, what can you and your partner do to be better at the game?
Human Knots

Grade Level
Third through fifth

Purpose
Players are challenged to work cooperatively with a small group to accomplish a task.

Equipment
None

Organization
Players stand in a circle of 6 to 10.

Activity Description
1. Players are to join hands with two different people.
2. The players they join hands with cannot be directly next to them.
3. Once everyone is joined, the challenge is to untie the knot and end up in a circle without disconnecting hands at any point.
4. If hands disconnect, the challenge starts over.

Process Questions
1. What was the biggest challenge in this activity?
2. Did your group overcome this challenge? How?
3. Did you have an idea that helped the team? How did it make you feel when they listened to you?
4. If we play this again, what would your team do differently?
Group Juggle

Grade Level
Third through fifth

Purpose
Players are challenged to work cooperatively to accomplish a task. Throwing and catching skills are required. This game is also good for learning names.

Equipment
Five small balls, beanbags, or a mixture of the two per group. It is best if the throwing objects are brightly colored and different in color. Beanbags work best because they do not roll when not caught.

Organization
Players are to make one or more circles of 8 to 12 and spread out about arm’s-length apart.

Activity Description
1. The game begins with players establishing a throwing pattern that will be used throughout the game.
2. One player in each circle is designated as the starter; the starter has one ball in hand and the other five balls directly behind him.
3. All players place hands in front of their body to show that they are ready to catch.
4. The starter calls the name of any player that is not an adjacent player and throws the ball underhand to that player.
5. The receiver catches the toss and then passes to another player and calls his name. After passing, the thrower places her arms behind her back. This is only to establish the pattern.
6. This continues across the circle until a pass pattern has been created. The last thrower returns the ball to the starter. The group needs to be sure that the last catcher is not one of the two adjacent to the starter.
7. Once the pattern is established, the game continues: Players always call the name of the same person and throw to that person, and always receive from the same person as established in the original pattern.
8. After the pattern is established and repeated, the starter adds another ball. The challenge is to discover how many balls the group can “juggle.”
9. Anyone who misses a ball yells “Freeze,” collects the ball, and then announces “Continue.”

Process Questions
1. Did you enjoy this game?
2. What was the most challenging part of the game?
3. Do you think your group could add even more balls?
Beach Ball Challenges

Grade Level
Third through fifth

Purpose
Cooperation and problem solving

Equipment
One beach ball per two players

Organization
Players are scattered with a partner in the playing area, or a specific start and end line are designated.

Activity Description
Players are given a beach ball and challenged to complete several tasks that include traveling from one place to another and performing a stunt.

Travel Challenges
1. Carry the ball between you using just your chest or stomach.
2. Carry the ball back to back.
3. Carry the ball side to side.
4. Carry the ball using just your heads.
5. Have students repeat any of the previous challenges, but change locomotor pattern (hop, slide, gallop, or skip).
6. Have them repeat any of the challenges using an obstacle course.
7. Have players progress from the start to the finish line passing the ball with their feet only. Tell them, “You are to lie on your back to pass the ball to your partner. Once your partner has possession of the ball, you can move around your partner and lie on your back to receive the next pass. The ball must never touch the floor. If it does, you must start over.”

Stunts
1. Have students start on the floor in a kneeling position and lift the ball with their heads as they stand.
2. Have them repeat from a lying position.
3. Have them repeat with the ball back to back.
4. Ask, “Can you and your partner create a stunt and challenge others?”

Process Questions
1. What strategies did you and your partner use to be successful in these challenges?
2. Were any of them frustrating? If so, what made them frustrating?
3. What was the most challenging task that you and your partner accomplished? What made it challenging? How did you feel when you accomplished it?
Throw In the Towel

Grade Level
Third through fifth

Purpose
To cooperate with a small group

Equipment
One towel per two players and one playground ball per four players

Organization
Teams of four are scattered in the playing area. Each team of four subdivides into two pairs. Pairs hold the corners of their towel with two hands and are positioned a few steps away from the other pair in their group. The ball is placed on one towel.

Activity Description
1. One pair works together to pass the ball back and forth with the other pair.
2. The challenge is to see how many consecutive throws and catches they can accomplish.
3. Increase the distance after players make 10 total catches.

Process Questions
1. Was this activity more difficult at first than you expected? If so, why?
2. What strategies did you and your partner or your group use for success?
3. Did you learn anything in this activity that you can apply to other situations?
Triangle Tag

Grade Level
Third through fifth

Purpose
To cooperate as a group to protect an individual who has been designated as the one another player must attempt to tag

Equipment
None

Organization
Players are scattered in groups of four, and each player in the group is given a letter—A, B, C, or D. Players A, B, and C join hands, and player D stands between players B and C and opposite player A outside of the triangle that has been formed.

Activity Description
1. Player D is to attempt to tag player A. Players B and C are to work together to protect player A and prevent the tag. The triangle group does not run from the tagger but uses quick slide movements and fakes to keep the tagger from touching player A. In essence, players B and C create a shield of protection for player A.
2. On the signal “go,” the game begins.
3. Player D cannot reach across player B or C.
4. Player D is successful if he touches player A anywhere but on the hands or arms.
5. After 30 seconds, change roles. Players can create a rotation pattern that allows everyone to be a protector twice, the chaser once, and the player to be chased.

Process Questions
1. What was the most challenging role in this game? Why?
2. How did your teammate help you in this game?
3. How did you contribute to this game?
Double Bubble

**Grade Level**
Third through fifth

**Purpose**
Players must find ways to move together. The challenge increases as the group size doubles.

**Equipment**
None

**Organization**
Scattered in play area with partners standing side by side.

**Activity Description**
1. Partners decide on a way they want to travel so that contact is maintained but other elements of movement are used to add variety (e.g., skipping while clapping hands with partner, hopping while bumping free elbows). The idea is to communicate and come up with a fun and safe movement idea.
2. While teams of two are traveling, the teacher calls out “Double bubble,” and the group must double and make a new decision on how they can move.
3. This double grouping continues until the entire class is making a decision on how to move together safely.
4. The game ends when the teacher announces “Pop.”

**Process Questions**
1. What did you learn about others today?
2. How did the challenge increase with numbers? How did your groups contribute to meeting the challenges?
3. If you shared an idea, did you feel listened to? If yes, how did this make you feel? If no, how did it make you feel?