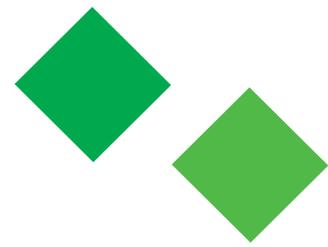




# COOPERATION GAMES

A FUN AND EDUCATIONAL COLLECTION OF DIFFERENT TYPES  
OF COOPERATION GAMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH



**Cooperation is one of the key values and principles of peace-learning. If cooperation were the single most dominant form of behaviour at all levels of society – ranging from the family to communities and to whole nation-states – humanity would be a big step closer to global peace.**

Peace-learning considers the world, not as a zero-sum game, where any gain by party A is only achieved through an according loss of party B, but as a positive-sum game, where every party can come out as a winner. Cooperation fosters inclusion and has the great potential of creating something new, whereas excessive competition leads to aggressive behaviour and exclusion.

Although competition is part of our nature, we tend to forget that cooperation is too, and that our greatest achievements are often the result of a cooperative process in society. If we can learn to compete, we can also learn to collaborate and to see the world as a place of solidarity. Peace-learning gives full consideration to this idea, and therefore consciously reduces destructive forms of competition, promoting instead cooperation and the desire to succeed together.

Cooperation is a specific process, by which a group of individuals reaches a result or situation where there are no losers: everyone wins.

The key for effective cooperation is to consent that the collective result of the group is more than the sum of inputs given by every individual member: by cooperating, a group operates a multiplication of ideas and talents, instead of a simple addition. The core notion is that skills are complementary: cooperation not only enhances a compensation of different weaknesses, but also allows creating new ideas collectively, by sharing views, knowledge and techniques with one another. This creates a positive interdependence instead of a negative interdependence (competition) among the group and reinforces the respect and recognition of others' competencies. Active participation of each member of the group is recommended if the result is to be optimised: every person has something unique to contribute.

In the end, cooperation fosters healthy human relations by conveying a simple message: we do better together!

A good way to experience the virtues of cooperation is by playing games. Cooperative games are an excellent activity for informal learning, following the famous precept of 'learning by doing'. They are useful in any situation or context, fostering interactions between members of a group in a playful atmosphere. Games also combine serious learning with fun.

The collection of games presented here aims to inspire you: each game proposed can of course be modified and adapted as much as needed, and you can also combine them! When choosing a game, it might be useful to consider the following factors:

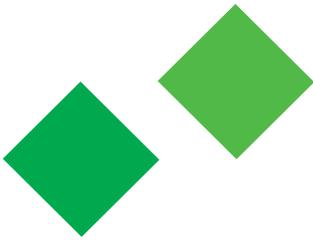
> *Context*: are you indoors or outdoors? Is it a formal or informal setting? How many persons will participate? Etc.

> *Target group*: how old are the participants? Are there both girls and boys? Is there any cultural, religious or private matter that would exclude any specific game? Etc.

> *Mood*: In what mood is the group? Do they feel like doing something mentally or physically challenging? Etc.

Each game is presented with some indications about the ideal number of participants (8-15 pax) and the approximate timeframe needed (10-15min). If a debriefing is an important (debriefing!) or very important (debriefing!!!) component of the game itself, it is also mentioned. The last indication in the box points out the games with a high level of intimacy (most often through touch). They require specific attention and are not suitable in all situations and with all groups.

You and your team are of course encouraged to invent your own games, specifically designed to fit your group and your own creative ideas. Tips are provided for each type of games to support you in this process.



## **The blind and the lame**

A blind man and a lame man were living together. One day, a group of robbers unexpectedly appeared.

The lame man warned the blind man, who put his friend on his back and ran away.

If they had managed to save each other's life, it was thanks to their perfect collaboration: each man's skills had been used to the full.

*Huai Nanzi (II century BC)*

## **The debriefing: a specific aspect of cooperative games**

The focus on the debriefing is what gives a specific value to cooperative games. It is a moment where participants reflect on what they just experienced, at an individual level, and share with others the feelings and impressions which they would like to express. This exchange is often a good way of realising the depth of the activity, and it shows the impact of emotional involvement. In general, a reflective discussion after any game strongly reinforces the learning process and enhances the appropriation by the participants.

It is essential to take as much time as necessary for the debriefing. Every person should be empowered to express herself and open up as much as she needs, without being pressured by a time factor. The group is then solicited to propose respectful suggestions that can help those participants who have expressed difficulties.

*Examples of questions to lead the process:*

*How did you feel during this exercise?*

*Was it easy or difficult?*

*Were you afraid of anything?*

*What happened during this exercise/in your group?*

*What was the group dynamic?*

*What was your role within the group?*

*What did you like/dislike?*

*What did you learn?*

*Etc.*



# HARMONISERS

**Harmonisers are cooperative energisers > short and uncomplicated games that warm up the atmosphere > to be played anytime and anywhere.**

## Knot game

8-15 pax\* > 10-15 min. > Intimacy!

Participants stand in a very tight circle, facing each other. They close their eyes and stretch their arms to the middle, where every hand needs to grab another hand. If there are many people, the facilitator might have to help that the 2-4 last hands find each other. Then the participants open their eyes and try to slowly untangle the created knot without ever letting go of the hands they had grabbed. The game is finished when all participants stand in a well-shaped circle, everybody holding the hands of his/her neighbour.

## Blind counting

5-12 pax > 5-10 min.

Participants stand in a circle and close their eyes. Their task is to count to 20, but without following any predefined order of who will say the next number. If two persons say the same number at the same time, the facilitator starts again with number one.

## Human chairs

8-30 pax > 5-10 min. > Intimacy!!!

Participants stand in a very close (!) circle and turn to the right in order to have one participant in the front and another participant in the back. On command of the facilitator, everybody sits down slowly on the knees of the person behind him or her. Once everybody sits stably, the group tries to walk forward. It is very useful to coordinate this by singing "right foot and left foot and right foot..." in an appropriate speed.

## Light branch

5-10 pax > 5-10 min.

Participants are asked to lift together a light branch above their heads and put it back on the floor. They are allowed to touch it with only one finger, but they have to touch it all the time. The difficulty in this game is that touching the branch means adding some uplifting pressure, so already with more than 5 people; it will be very hard to put it back to the floor.

## Catching chairs

6-15 pax > 5-10 min.

Participants each stand behind a chair that are all put in a regular circle. The chairs are being balanced on their two rear legs by holding the back of the chair with one hand. Participants now have to swap their places, always moving one chair to the right at the same time. The goal is to go around the whole circle once by passing on the chairs without ever letting them rest or fall down on their four feet.

## Pass on the ball

8-20 pax > 10-15 min.

Participants stand in a circle. A ball is passed from one person to another, but only once to each person. Everybody keeps in mind from who he/she received the ball and to whom he/she has passed it on. In a second tour, two balls are passed on the same way, and then three, four etc, until there are as many balls as participants (or maybe one or two less). The last person throws the ball to the first one which closes the circle.

**Harmonisers are short, very diverse and rich in adrenalin and creativity. They can usually be played anywhere – inside and outside – and require very little preparation and material. They are an ideal transition from a break to a next workshop unit, and often help to animate and energise the group. The harmonisers that require some touching among the participants furthermore strongly contribute to informal team-building.**

**Invent your own harmoniser:** There is no rule for inventing a cooperative energiser. Use your imagination and try any idea that crosses your mind. The simplest ideas can become the most entertaining activities.

\* Participants



# OBSTACLES

**Collectively surpassing an obstacle is a perfect set-up for cooperation and team-building.**

## Surpass the rope

4-20 pax > 10-20 min. > Intimacy!

A rope is spanned between two trees (or anything else) at the height of a person's chest. The players must get from one side to the other by passing over the rope without ever touching it. This game can also be played inside.

## Wall of ropes

4-20 pax > 10-20 min. > Intimacy!

Several ropes are spanned between two trees (or anything else), leaving only some very tight holes for passage. Different tasks could be given to the group: you have to get to the other side without touching the ropes, each hole can only be used by one person, you have to hold hands during the whole time, two persons have to pass at the same time and so on. Participants can be asked to come up with their own challenges.

## Pass a river

4-20 pax > 10-30 min. > Intimacy!

When somewhere in nature, natural obstacles such as rivers, ditches, fallen trees or stone walls can be surpassed by the group. Specific rules (like having half of the group blindfolded) can add some suspense in case the obstacle is not difficult enough. In any case, the task should be challenging but not dangerous.

## Invent your own obstacle:

Obstacles are everywhere; it only needs you to perceive them as such. But you can also create them with ropes, chairs, tables and whatever material that is usually available. Use your imagination for some specific rules that will transform the obstacle into a challenge.

***Obstacles can be either artificial or natural. The interest lies less in the obstacle itself, but in the challenge linked to how to master it. Therefore it is often useful to add some specific rules on how the obstacle should be surpassed (blindfolded, with only one hand, touching each other...).***



# GROUP TASKS

**Challenging participants with a shared task helps them cooperate as a group.**

## Lego duplo puzzle

4-8 pax > 10-20 min. > Debriefing!!!

A specific form is built out of 5-8 bricks of Lego duplo. The group has three minutes to look at the form and to decide on a strategy on how to solve the task, which is explained to them as follows: the bricks will be distributed inside a circle of about 2-3 meters radius. Only one person – blindfolded – will be inside the circle. All the other players are outside the circle and are not allowed to speak throughout the game. The blindfolded person has to find all the bricks and put them together exactly as they were before. The game can be played twice or even three times with different people blindfolded and more complicated Lego forms for each time.

## Human scan

6-20 pax > 15-25 min. > Debriefing! > Intimacy!

Make a loop the size of a small hula hoop ring at the end of a rope. Each member of the group needs to go through the rope once, in the shortest time possible. The group is invited to first discuss a strategy, and then receives three trials. The aim is to need not more than as many seconds as there are members of the group plus two additional seconds (so ten seconds for eight group members).

## Shape a form

8-16 pax > 10-20 min. > Debriefing!

Some 6 – 10 people are blindfolded and form a circle inside a rope with its two ends tied together? All the others remain outside and function as observers. The blindfolded participants then receive certain tasks one after another, for example: build a triangle, build a square, build a star, build an oval etc.

## Build a tower or a bridge

4-6 pax > 25-40 min. > Debriefing!!!

The group receives a certain amount of material like paper, glue, scissors, rulers and pens. The task is to build a tower (or a bridge) that is as high, stable and as creative as possible. A specific timeframe should be set from the beginning. Build several towers if there is a large number of participants.

## Obstacle course

4-15 pax > 15-25 min. > Debriefing!

Participants can be asked to carry or balance any chosen item (like a ball carried on a cloth held by four people) through a specifically designed obstacle course. The ball should never fall down, but the group should advance as quickly as possible. The group can use several trials and discuss strategies to surpass specific obstacles.

**Group tasks can be any kind of challenges presented to the group. Their solution asks for cooperation and creativity, and often the discussion concerning the appropriate strategy is actually more important than the carrying out of the task as such (for example in the human scan game). A central aspect of any group task though is a well-prepared debriefing at the end of the activity (see extra box).**

**Invent your own group task:** Almost any activity can become a group task if it is wrapped up appropriately. Find any small challenge and build it up by adding specific rules, conditions or handicaps. But the tasks don't have to be only games, they can also be linked to "serious" tasks with a tangible outcome: invite participants to compose a hip-hop song on peace, to cook a pirate dinner or to produce a revolutionary children's toy. One of the best group tasks is to invite them to invent something themselves, for example a harmoniser. You do not need to have the ideas yourself, but you just need the right questions and challenges to tap the creativity of the participants.



# VERBAL COMMUNICATION GAMES

**Verbal communication games are group tasks with a specific focus on good communication.**

## **Tandem drawing**

*2-30 pax > 20-40 min. > Debriefing!*

This game is played in tandems, but also functions in triples if there is not a pair number of participants. Each tandem/triple sits comfortably back to back. One of the two receives an abstract drawing prepared by the facilitator, which he or she explains to the other person(s) who directly draws it on a new paper. The drawing person is not allowed to speak but can only say "yes" and "no". When they think they are finished the drawing is compared with the original. Roles can be switched in a second round and with a new drawing. The debriefing should first be done in the tandems, a group debriefing can be added, but is not absolutely necessary.

## **Instruction chain**

*4-30 pax > 20-30 min. > Debriefing!*

Teams of about 4 – 6 members are formed. Each team has to decide on one person who will start. This person then receives a (not too complicated) drawing from the facilitator with the following instructions: you have three minutes to look at the picture and learn it by heart. After this, you will have to explain it to one of your team members during another three minutes. The second team member will explain it to the

next person, and so on, until the last person has received all the instructions in order to draw it on another paper. All the team members who have passed on the instructions will remain completely silent for the rest of the game (but they are invited to observe). At the end, the two pictures are compared and discussed.

## **Group drawing**

*4-10 pax > 15-25 min. > Debriefing!*

Half of the group is allowed to look at a drawing prepared by the facilitator, while the other half is blindfolded. The drawing needs to be copied as exactly as possible, but only the blindfolded members of the group are allowed to touch the pens. Everyone is allowed to speak, but all the blindfolded participants have to contribute to the drawing. A time limit could maybe be set to add some pressure.

## **Chain story**

*8-20 pax > 10-15 min. > Debriefing!*

One participant tells a story to another one, who tells it to another one, and so on. The last person to whom the story is told tells it out loud. The group compares the original story to the 'result'.

***Verbal communication games allow for a specific focus on how we communicate among each other. They can show common challenges, pitfalls as well as biased assumptions, which makes them an excellent tool for intercultural learning. As with most other group tasks, the debriefing of the activity is as important as the activity itself.***

**Invent your own verbal communication game:** This is maybe a category where the invention of a new game is not really easy. But in the essence, any activity in which certain information is passed on once or several times and then again analysed, can build the basis for such a game.



# NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION GAMES

**Speaking is not the only way we are able to communicate.**

## **Stand in a row**

*6-10 pax > 10-15 min. > Debriefing!*

All participants are invited to build a single ascending row according to a specific factor, for example the date of one's birthday, the amount of time needed to travel to the venue or anything similar. During the whole exercise, speaking is not allowed, only non-verbal forms of communication are permitted. In the end, one checks whether the row is indeed in the right order.

## **Secret number**

*6-15 pax > 10-15 min. > Debriefing!*

Every participant chooses a number between 1 and 5. Participants are then invited to find each other in groups of people who have chosen the same number, without speaking, or using their fingers for signs or writing the number down; they have to find other non-verbal forms of communication to find their mates.

## **Silent cooking**

*2-10 pax > 40-90 min. > Debriefing!*

If the group is cooking their own meals, one could arrange for a silent cooking dinner: cooks are not allowed to speak, nor write anything until the food is ready on the table and people share the "enjoy your food".

***Non-verbal communication games are tasks to be solved without using our capacity of speaking. They push participants to be creative and show how strongly we usually rely on verbal communication. In this sense these games can very well be used as an introduction to a discussion on communication, especially in an intercultural set-up. Here as well, a debriefing at the end is most useful.***

## **How to invent your own non-verbal communication game:**

Most tasks that could easily be fulfilled with speaking become very challenging if we cannot use this important tool. The tasks can be either completely random in the form of a game (like secret number) or an everyday task of the group (like cooking). Almost any activity can be transformed into a non-verbal communication game.



# TRUST GAMES

**A common obstacle to cooperation is the lack of trust. Let's practise it!**

## Leading the blind

6-30 pax > 20-30 min. > Debriefing! > Intimacy!

Participants are in couples, one behind the other, with no physical contact. The one in front is the blind one and closes his/her eyes. The one behind guides the blind one with 5 words only: forward; backward; left; right; stop. All the couples move at the same time. Remind the participants that, apart from the instructions, the exercise is done silently (the facilitator can put more and more obstacles, make noises, etc.). Roles are inverted.

Each pair does the exercise again, but this time, directions are given through touch and without spoken instructions. Roles are inverted. This exercise is good for illustrating the complementarities of verbal and non verbal communication. Note also that the idea of "leading a blind person" can be creatively implemented anywhere and also with different objectives than only enhancing our sense of cooperation.

## Dizzy bottle

7-12 pax > 10-15 min. > Debriefing! > Intimacy!!!

Participants stand in a close circle. One person comes in the middle (the bottle) and closes his/her eyes. He or she has to completely let go and lean forward, backwards and to the sides while not moving his/her feet on the ground. The task of the group is to slightly push the bottle so that it does not fall to the ground. If there are girls over 11 years old, all should cross their wrists as a shield with hands on opposite shoulder.

## Human wall

6-10 pax > 10-15 min. > Debriefing! > Intimacy!

The participants stand in a line, and one of them goes in front, 5 or 6 meters from the line. His/her task is to run as fast as possible and stop as close from the 'wall' as possible, without touching it. The wall should not step back!

## Fall from the table

6-10 pax > 10-15 min. > Debriefing! > Intimacy!!!

A participant is on a table and others are grouped in front of him or her. The person on the table lets himself or herself 'fall' down and the rest of the group catches him or her as softly as possible.

## Invent your own trust game:

The concept is pretty easy to put into practice. One person is deprived of one or several senses or capacities, and needs to rely on others to fulfil a task or simply to execute an everyday life thing.

***Trust games can be any kind of exercises where a person depends on a group or another person for his/her safety in general. It is often based on reducing the capacity of this person, who needs to be put in the hands of someone else. This type of exercise is emotionally powerful and needs to be handled with care, while paying extra attention to the context and target group. No one should be forced to be in such a position if he or she does not want to, although one of the purposes of trust games is to push one's limits. The debriefing is particularly important, especially if someone has a very intense experience.***



# SURPRISE GAMES

**Surprise games reveal our everyday pattern; we see competition where there is none.**

## Chair Game

12-25 pax > 15-30 min. > Debriefing!!!

According to the size of the group it can be split into 3 – 5 groups of about 4 people. Each group receives a paper with an instruction they should follow, without showing the paper to any of the other groups. One possible set of instructions could be the following (4 chairs being put in the middle of the room):

- A > Your task is to put the chairs into a circle
- B > Your task is to take the chairs and to put them into another room (or simply out of the room)
- C > Everyone from your group needs to sit on a chair
- D > Your task is to take care that the chairs never watch towards each other

All groups start at the same time upon your command, trying to fulfil their task. See the general paragraph at the end of the chapter for more information about the logic and dynamic of this game!

## Line Game

12-30 pax > 10-20 min. > Debriefing!!!

Participants are placed in two lines, facing one another. The task of each member of Group 1 is to make sure that the member of Group 2 in front of him/her comes on his/her side of the room. The task of each member of Group 2 is exactly the same, but both groups ignore it. The solution is to simply swap sides, but most groups would first engage in some form of fight.

## Opposite directions

4-6 pax > 10-15 min. > Debriefing!!!

Pick up 5 volunteers amongst the participants. 2 will play the game, 2 will observe one player each, and the last one will observe the interactions between the two players. Tie the two players together with a two-meter-long rope on their hips, and ask them to stand about a meter from each other, back to back. Place a fruit (or any other desirable object) 3-4 meters far from each player. The task of each player is to grab the fruit in front of him/her.

***The main idea of surprise games is the following: all the proposed tasks are complementary, not contradictory, which means that they all can be fulfilled at the same time without harming any of the other groups. Usually the groups would start fighting without engaging in any form of communication and realize only later that cooperation would actually have been the easiest, fastest and most sustainable option. This realization often only comes in the debriefing, which is the most important part of any surprise game.***

## How to invent your own surprise game:

The essential ingredient of a surprise game is the evasiveness of the instructions. Without ever mentioning competition or cooperation, participants rely on their instinctive perception when confronted with a task. Therefore any activity based on such instructions becomes a surprise game.



# COOPERATIVE SPORTS

**With slight adaptations, even the most competitive sports can become quite cooperative without losing any of their original fun.**

## Alternative football

Popular sports such as football are an excellent means to practice key human values such as fair-play, tolerance, appreciation and respect. Some simple rules and adaptations can put a specific emphasis on cooperation instead of competition: for example, before the game, both teams discuss and agree on several rules of fair-play (no cursing, no hard fouls, helping others getting back on their feet...), which allows for the distribution of fair-play points after the game - again by the players themselves. As a result, the game includes some form of dialogue and remains fun, but also it is impossible to win without adopting a fair-play attitude. Of course other rules can be added: every team member can score only once, goals have to be shot after a pass and not after dribbling on your own, all boys can only score with their left foot and so on.

## Ultimate Frisbee and Tchoukball

These two sports contain a lot of cooperative aspects in their original form. In Ultimate Frisbee for example there is no referee, and players discuss and decide

upon fouls as they occur. Both teams therefore naturally adopt a fair play attitude. Tchoukball explicitly excludes any striving for prestige, whether individually or as a team; rather it is a sport in which players pursue excellence through personal training and collective effort. Tchoukball encourages one to aim for perfection while always avoiding any negative conduct toward the adversary.

## How to invent your own cooperative sport:

The philosophies of these two and other cooperative sports can be adapted to fit any sports activity. Often only one rule has to be changed or added and the game becomes much more cooperative in its essence. As for the type of rule to be invented, the examples above can give some hints, but there should not be any limits to your imagination.

*More cooperative sports: [www.coopsports.com](http://www.coopsports.com)*

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