

Games for *All* Young Children



The Illinois Early Learning Standards (Benchmark 20.B.EC) stress the need for teachers to encourage young children to increase endurance (the length of time that one can continue a physical activity) by becoming more active. Games help make movement fun. Play and laughter can help develop friendship while encouraging physical fitness. Consider each child's abilities, and encourage all children to play by adapting games for children with special needs.

Play balloon games.

For older preschoolers, supervised balloon play can be a fun way to encourage control skills, such as hitting, kicking, and catching. Using large, colorful, inflated balloons, demonstrate hitting a balloon with different parts of your body. Emphasize safety: keep balloons away from the mouth, stay within a safe space, and let an adult pick up any broken ones. For children with poor motor control, partly inflate balloons and put them inside the palms of non-latex gloves, so that they can grasp and move the balloon more easily using the glove. Tie a bell onto balloons for the child with visual impairments.

Set up a maze indoors or out.

Try using large mats folded to stand on end or chairs with sheets draped over the back to form walls. Have one starting point but several exits. Make the path wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and the walls sturdy enough for a child with visual impairment to feel her way. Place pictures or tactile objects on the walls and give children a picture checklist that they can mark as they find the pictures.

Provide a target for throwing.

Paint a target on the sheet, tie or sew bells onto it, and hang it in a safe place. Let children throw balls or safe beanbags at the target. Encourage children to make the bells ring. Let one child give verbal directions in throwing to a classmate who has visual impairments. Allow a child with poor motor control to get very close to the target.

Try the “freeze” game!

Have each child move her arms and legs and head in time to music. When the music stops, all children freeze in their positions for a few seconds. Play this game with eyes closed, then ask them to open their eyes to see the funny poses.

Play team tag.

If you have one child in a wheelchair, ask her and the child who is “it” to be a team. When a child is tagged, he remains touching the chair, joining the tagging team. Continue the game until all the children are tagged and have joined the team.

Have fun with rhythmic ribbons!

Children can wave colorful ribbons in time to music and form patterns with different colors. Use a soft elastic or rubber band to secure a ribbon to the wrist or ankle of a child who lacks motor control.

Look for other ideas related to specific special needs in these resources: Creative Play Activities for Children with Disabilities: A Resource Book for Teachers and Parents, by Lisa Rappaport Morris and Linda Schulz, and Adapted Games and Activities: From Tag to Team Building by Pattie Rouse (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).

For related Web resources, see “Games for *All* Young Children” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.



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