



Benefits of Cooperative Games

In Cooperative Games, people play *with* one another rather than *against* each other. Players enjoy each other as they share resources and make decisions. The fun comes from the setting and story of the game—not from seeing who’s “best” or luckiest. When we play, we practice how to be in the world. So when we play cooperatively, we practice cooperative skills—listening, sharing, negotiating, etc.—all of which make us good at teamwork. Besides that, cooperative games open the heart. ♥ So we learn that cooperation is not just beneficial in a practical sense but it’s also a joy. In this way, playing cooperative games pave the way for good relationships with others.

Cooperative games are the antidote to the excessive competition we experience in today’s hypercompetitive society. In the modern, industrialized world, winning and “getting ahead” take on exaggerated importance. We hammer competition into kids at school then ask for more on the sports field and even in the games kids play to “relax” at home. It never lets up even though research and common sense tell us that excessive competition leads to stress, envy, anxiety, inequity, and feelings of isolation and depression. It’s harmful to self-esteem and relationships. So it’s healthy to take a break from competition and play a cooperative game.

Cooperative games are healthy for the Earth too. What’s the connection? Cooperative games teach cooperation—and cooperation is necessary for a sustainable environment. When we cooperate, we find ways to *share* resources rather than racing to grab them for ourselves, trampling our beloved Earth in the process. And cooperation promotes complex problem-solving. Today’s environmental problems are big and complex. Surely we will be more successful solving them if we can work together.

Did you know that Elinor Ostrom won the 2009 Nobel Prize in economics for her work on cooperation? She showed that, in many cultures worldwide, people can and do cooperate to preserve the resources they depend upon—even when there is no outside authority enforcing that sharing. It’s natural. People *can* and *do* cooperate!

Here’s something else few people know: Biologists say cooperation is at least as normal in nature as competition. Biologist Peter Kropotkin says: “Competition . . . is limited in animals to exceptional periods . . . Better conditions are created by the *elimination of competition* by means of mutual aid and mutual support.” Stephen Jay Gould said: “The equation of competition with natural selection is merely a cultural prejudice.” Did you know the phrase “survival of the fittest” was not coined by Charles Darwin but by Industrialist Herbert Spencer??

Hurray for Cooperation! I wish you many hours of fun, joy, and learning with cooperative games! They are good for us in our own lives—and they support the common good too. ☺

Yours truly,

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