

The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program



Cooperative Games for a Warm School Climate
Pre-K to Grade 2



*The more we play
together, the happier
we'll be. RAFFI*

WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY SUZANNE LYONS

Praise for The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program

“A useful introduction to — and a spirited discussion of — cooperative games. Apart from its other benefits, including pure fun, Lyons shows us that helping children to play with, rather than against, one another may help to create a school climate where bullying is less likely to take root.”

✚ ***Alfie Kohn, Author of No Contest: The Case Against Competition***

This book is a terrific resource! Its theme “the more we *play* together, the happier we’ll be” nurtures the innate social good in children and can surely help prevent bullying too. When children feel the joys of win-win play, they can sense that there is a *both-and* world, rather than just an *either-or, me-versus-you* world. Learning that cooperation is Nature’s way and is in our very best *human* nature too is an important lesson. We owe children that enrichment. This delightful book, *The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program*, is a cooperative gem!

✚ ***“Raffi” Raffi Cavoukian: Singer, author, founder of the Centre for Child Honouring***

The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program is a great piece of work and significant contribution to bullying prevention. Through the use of practical, easy to implement, and class-friendly games, Suzanne Lyons promotes a new mindset regarding the substantial impact of cooperatively structured play activities. This work reaches into and beyond bullying prevention with techniques that transform classrooms into social milieus reinforcing values of sharing, kindness and peace. The methods and activities in this book encourage positive social skills development and they help children build confidence in their own ability to relate to and work with one another. I wholeheartedly support and appreciate Ms. Lyons’ work. It bridges empirical research on cooperative games and aggression reduction with the school system. As such, it is rightly an integral part of bullying prevention.

✚ ***Dr. April Bay, Clinical Psychologist and author of the University of Nevada Reno study, “Cooperative Games: A Way to Modify Aggressive and Cooperative Behaviors in Young Children”***

The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program Cooperative Games for a Warm School Climate PreK–Grade 2, by Suzanne Lyons, is an “all in one” resource for educators who want to understand the why and how-to of cooperative play. It provides meaningful context and motivation for teachers to re-examine norms of competition that characterize typical board games and playground activities. The

book offers many easy-to-implement alternatives that could be used in a variety of settings. Lyons makes clear the many benefits children reap when they play together.

I could almost hear children's laughter as I read the directions for active learning games like "Pass the Funny Face." *I would love to see this book used widely in teacher education.*

✚ ***Mimi Coughlin, Professor, College of Education
Sacramento State University***

Suzanne Lyons' wonderful book examines, in a most delightful and clear way, why learning to cooperate is important and how cooperative games can instill the cooperative habit. As you read, you'll quickly see how different this orientation is towards interpersonal interaction compared to the competitive mode we are trained to adopt. If you read with an open mind, you will probably discover what you missed in the games of your youth. You may even conclude that taking on a playfully cooperative attitude can help bring you success in many areas of your own life today! As a physician, I see that cooperative play relates to the health of children and adults—and to society as a whole as well.

Suzanne Lyons has made a true contribution with this potentially transformative book. I recommend it highly to everyone!

✚ ***Emmett Miller MD, Physician and author of Deep Healing***

This is a lovely, inspiring and very practical book. Hats off!

And it is a great initiative. I believe it's important to contribute to an attitude of cooperation instead of competition. As we know, for example through the development of our technology, life seems to go faster and faster. Truly the world, the universe we live in, is an ever changing, dynamic co-existing system based on a flow of give and take. So, if we look closely, competitiveness is an attitude that does not reflect the true reality of nature. Yet, the human mass mind, coming from fear and the willingness to control has created unnatural, competitive systems. If we humans could take quiet time to study and understand the deeper workings of nature, we would be able to see that playful cooperation is in line with nature and the way the universe works.

By helping young children practice cooperation through cooperative games such as those described in this book, we can nurture the development of functional and healthy neuro pathways in children. This is of the utmost importance as these children are the leaders of tomorrow.

✚ ***Fred Matser, Founder of the humanitarian organization Malaria No More!, chairman of Child Alive and author of Rediscover Your Heart***

My three kids and I started to play cooperative games during a school vacation and got hooked! I couldn't believe the difference playing cooperatively made in my children's' interactions and in our home atmosphere! As a biologist, writer, and educator, I ponder questions about the roots of human competition and cooperation. While those questions are unlikely to be definitively resolved anytime soon, Suzanne Lyons' compelling book makes it very clear that choosing to emphasize cooperation rather than competition has many benefits in the world today. Cooperation creates a happier, more nurturing environment for kids, in learning and in life."

✚ **Jennifer Yeh PhD, Mother of three school-age children and author of books including *Endangered Species: Must They Disappear?***

The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program is a title that certainly got my attention as a book-buyer for Reach And Teach. We're huge fans of the cooperative game concept as well as being deeply rooted in working to reduce bullying in our schools and society. The book is truly unique in that it provides comprehensive information about the role of cooperative gaming in fostering social-emotional learning environments where children can thrive, in a way that is easy to read while still quite grounded in well-researched data.

For those who need to be brought on board to the value of cooperative gaming, this book is perfect. For those who are already convinced about the value of cooperative gaming, the book provides a wealth of resources to act on, through recommendations of off-the-shelf games that are available for purchase and lots of detailed instructions for games that can be played with materials available in most classrooms and other learning environments.

This book strikes just the right balance between articulating important research results, best practices, and concrete tools that can be used immediately. Teachers and others who work with children will come back to this book time and time again for new ideas. Great book!

✚ **Craig Weissner, Co-Founder Reach and Teach**

In her book, *The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program*, Suzanne Lyons takes on those who bully. But in the spirit of cooperative games, Lyons addresses the problem with love and constructive information. Her program supports teachers, children, and parents so that everyone can work together on the problem of bullying... but in a fun, positive, and completely painless manner! With this book and program, everyone will win and feel good.

✚ **Ken Kolsbun, Founder Animal Town Game Company and author of cooperative board games including *Save the Whales and Nectar Collector***

Suzanne Lyons reminds us that another world truly is possible... a world where kids learn how to be good friends, listen well, see the value in others, build trust, and work together towards win-win solutions. *The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program* is an incredible resource that will help both families and schools work together towards creating environments in which play (the work of children) is a safe place to practice the learned skills of cooperation. In turn, individuals, classes, schools and communities will flourish. Lyons challenges our notions of the “value of competition” and presents a compelling case for the deep-rooted necessity of a society that has cooperation at its core. This book will convince both parents and educators to take a step towards intentional cooperation.

✚ ***Tiffany Malloy, Mother of three young children and blogger at Eat, Play, Grow***

The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program shows that playing together cooperatively is an effective way to prevent bullying and create a safe school climate. Implementing this program will bring lots of happiness to your classroom. This book shows that it might be more natural for children to play cooperatively than we might think. Suzanne Lyons states: “Once children have experienced win-win cooperation, they know what it feels like to be inclusive and included, respectful and respected, kind and treated kindly by others—and as a result, happy. Children learn that the path to these good feelings is cooperation.” Play can work miracles... Suzanne’s book can help those miracles happen.

✚ ***Anne Mijke van Harten, Director of Earth Games, specialists in cooperative games, the Netherlands***

This book represents a sea change in the field of educational gaming. Early in my career as an educational game designer, I attended a talk by a prominent researcher who insisted that a defining characteristic of a “game” was that it included competition. I have discovered through my work that he was absolutely wrong. Games that are cooperative are not just feasible but extremely fun. As a designer of cooperative games, I am so pleased to find a growing community of educators and gamers who recognize the value of cooperation. This book is a timely resource for that community. Not only does the *Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program* offer evidence from research that indicates the benefits of cooperative play, the book also includes numerous cooperative games (fifty-seven in all!). Many of these games are flexible and can be adapted to various types of classrooms and educational settings (music

class, outdoor summer camp, homeschooling settings, etc.) Parents, teachers, and educators who appreciate the value of community are sure to find many resources and inspiration within these pages!

✚ ***Hillary Lauren, Educational game designer and researcher***

The elephant in too many classrooms is bullying. Teachers care but often don't know what to do. Suzanne Lyons convincingly argues that an effective response to the bullying crisis is promoting cooperative play among youngsters. Her assertion is supported by much educational research, which she cites. Additionally it's easy to see that her approach makes a tremendous amount of common sense. She shares many cooperative games requiring no special equipment. But though this book presents a specific and practical method to prevent bullying, it has a larger scope. Cooperative play and what it means for a better world is what this very important book is about. This is a story of general interest to everyone who cares for children and the future!

✚ ***Paul Hewitt, Physics professor and author of *Conceptual Physics****

Suzanne Lyons' book outlines a program that would benefit every preschool and elementary school in the U.S. by preventing one of the biggest childhood problems today, bullying. "Using cooperative games to improve school climate can be the first line of defense against the meanness, aggression, domination and exclusivity that lead to bullying," says Lyons. Besides giving clear directions for a number of cooperative games for the classroom and playground, this book examines the research and philosophy behind competitive and cooperative games. As a former preschool teacher for the Northwest Missouri State University Early Childhood Center and Head Start, I believe cooperative games would greatly benefit young children. Written with clear directions in an appealing format, it will be easy to incorporate this book into any curriculum. An anti-bullying program is essential in today's world.

✚ ***Amy Houts, Preschool teacher and author of over 60 books for young children***

Having just read Suzanne Lyons' wonderful book, *The Cooperative Game Bullying Prevention Program*, I realize something I have felt but not articulated to myself before. Competition, even in activities I otherwise enjoy, can easily lead to tension between people and that tension can easily lead to bad feelings and even domination, meanness, and bullying. This book opened my eyes. Surely we should rethink

competition as a culture and be very careful with it, especially when it comes to encouraging children to compete. This book makes interesting reading for everyone concerned with the state of the world and the future, at the same time that the book is an actionable plan for those who work with children.

It will be a different world if children learn to love the cooperative game of life. Suzanne’s book is a powerful step in that direction!

✚ **Rev. Phillip Pierson DDiv Unity minister and author of *The Metaphysics of Buckminster Fuller***

Multiple research studies in early childhood education reveal that early intervention yields highest impact. In this book, Suzanne Lyons provides a way to reduce bullying through early intervention. She provides strong research, teacher tips, and fun games that nurture cooperation and discourage competition. This method of prevention and intervention is worth its weight in gold.

✚ **Neva Bandelow,
Early Care and Education Quality Improvement Program Manager
Planning Council Coordinator
Alameda County Early Care and Education Planning Council**

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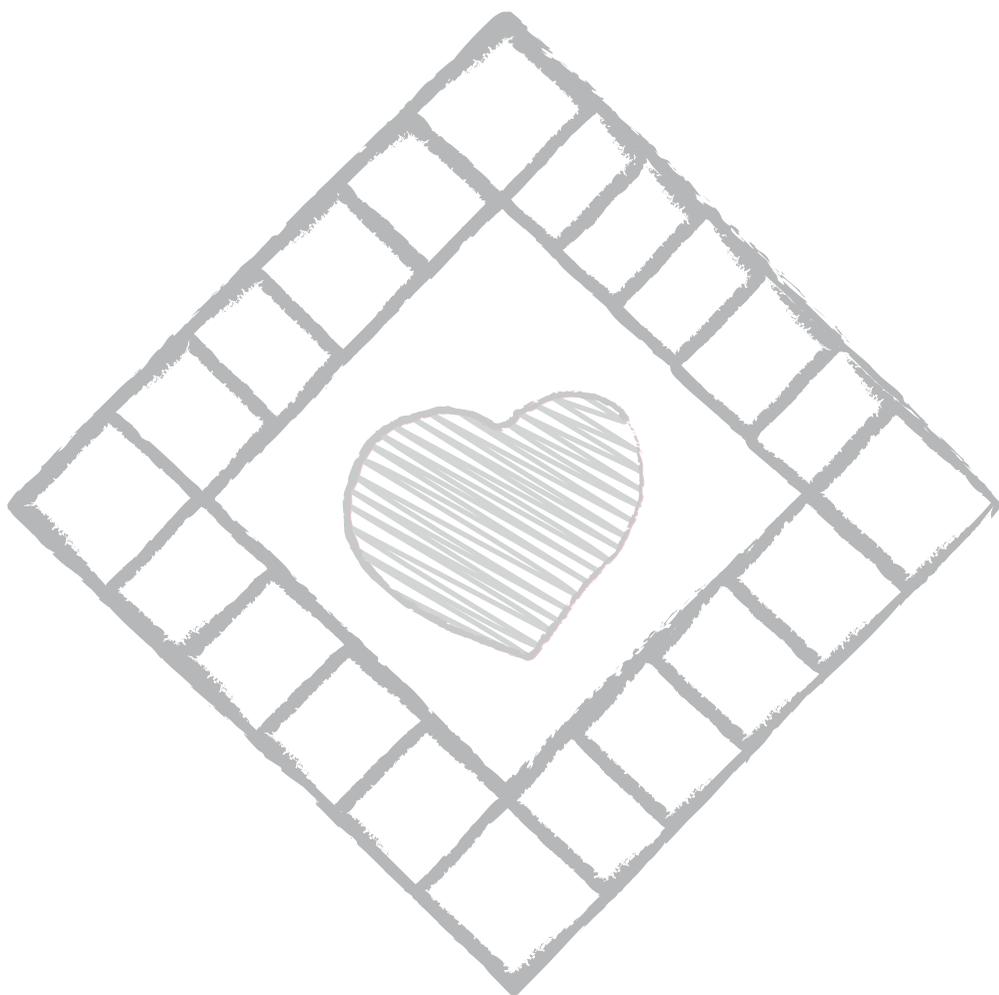


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Pre-K to Grade 2



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Dedication

This book is dedicated to Anne Mijke van Harten, friend and mentor. Anne Mijke helps people experience cooperative play and connect to nature through her company *Earth Games*, located in the Netherlands. Her website is *Earthgames.nl*.

Acknowledgments

I wish to thank Jim Deacove for inventing cooperative board games—board games based on the idea that everyone can win by playing together. Jim developed breakthrough cooperative game strategies and began manufacturing cooperative board games through his family business, *Family Pastimes*, in Canada, decades ago. And he is still at it! Thanks also to Jim's wife Ruth Deacove for her part in operating *Family Pastimes*, especially for helping me choose games for my shop, CooperativeGames.com. Another grateful acknowledgment goes to Terry Orlick. Professor Orlick is a founding father of the cooperative play movement. Dr. Orlick has created hundreds of active cooperative games and written several books on cooperative games and sports. He is also an academic researcher and an Olympic coach—which only goes to show that a cooperative mindset boosts productivity and excellence! I gratefully acknowledge Dr. April Bay (formerly Dr. April K. Bay-Hinitz) and her colleagues at the University of Nevada, Reno. I thank them for their groundbreaking research documenting the fact that cooperative games reduce aggression in young children. Dr. Bay's research is the bedrock of *The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program*. Also regarding the literature on cooperation versus competition, I sincerely thank Alfie Kohn. His book *No Contest: The Case Against Competition* is a comprehensive analysis of competition in all its complexity and varied manifestations. *No Contest* is a spellbinding investigation into a largely unquestioned, but certainly questionable, social norm.



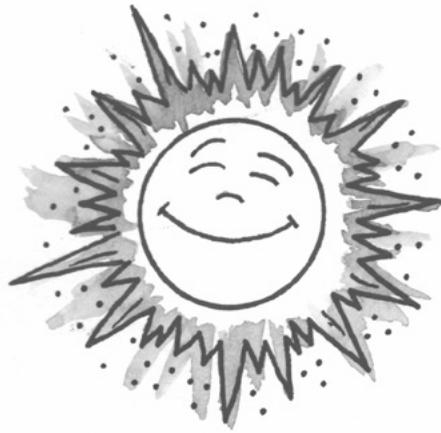
I thank Patty Arnold, book designer extraordinaire, for her brilliant layout skills, which made this book come to life. I thank Marianne Rogoff for her expert copy editing and attention to detail. I thank my husband Pete and my children, Tristan and Arianna, for their love, support, and daily inspiration. I thank my dad, Frank Lyons, for believing in this project and encouraging me throughout its development. Collaboration and support everywhere I look! Thank you All.

Finally, I thank my dear friends Ken and Jan Kolsbun, who founded *Animal Town Game Company* in the 1970s. Ken designed the first cooperative board games published in the United States and sold them, as well as wonderful playthings of all sorts, through *Animal Town*. Ken's games include the classic *Save the Whales* and *Nectar Collector*. These are cooperative games with a social and environmental message, as relevant today as it was decades ago. The Kolsbuns shared a magical world with me that I share with you, so you can share it with the children in your life.



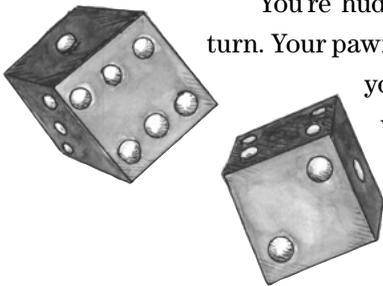
Table of Contents

<i>Introduction: The Win-Win Way, Cooperative Play</i>	5
<i>1. Why Play Cooperative Games in School?</i>	9
<i>2. Cooperative Games Warm the School Climate</i>	19
<i>3. The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program</i>	25
<i>4. Expanding Your Bullying Prevention Program</i>	41
<i>5. What the World Needs Now Is Cooperative Play</i>	47
<i>6. The Research on Cooperative Games and Bullying</i>	59
<i>7. More Cooperative Games for Classroom and Playground</i>	79
<i>8. Additional References and Resources</i>	131



The Win-Win Way: Cooperative Play

Introduction to Cooperative Games



You're huddled over a board game with a five-year old, and it's your turn. Your pawn is in position to wipe your young opponent off the board. If you make your move, the game will be over and you will win. Will you do it? It's common for adults to feel torn in situations like this because competitive games often upset children. When kids lose, bruised feelings and emotional meltdowns are commonplace. We want games to be occasions for joyful interaction, but all too often they are stress-ridden, competitive encounters that activate aggression and create divisions. Feelings get hurt as friends are turned into rivals.

We tell children that, "It's only a game," but it's a mistake to think this simple saying erases all the troubling feelings that competition arouses. Children are very in touch with their feelings. Losing feels like failure and rejection, while winning feels like success and approval. Kids who lose are asked to bury emotions of hurt, embarrassment, or anger in order to "toughen up" and be a "good sport" rather than a "sore loser." Winners, on the other hand, are invited to think only in terms of their own victory—never mind that it comes at the expense of someone else. Ultimately, what do children *really* learn from competitive games about relationships, the validity of their true feelings, the nature of community, the appropriateness of aggression, and values such as sharing and caring?

When a competitive game is conducted in an overall setting that is respectful, inclusive, and psychologically safe—that is, when the competition occurs in a *cooperative* framework—the hazards of competition are reduced. A friendly game of *Bingo* at the Senior Center is not typically a cut-throat experience! Unfortunately, though, it's common for competition to go beyond the emotional safety zone. Competitions stimulate an overzealous desire to win when stakes are high in personal or material terms. Players focus on beating and defeating one another. From here, it's a short road to aggression. Competition may be lauded in many circles, but there is a great deal of myth and misunderstanding surrounding it. Much research and scholarship show that there is a strong connection between competition and aggression. As famed author and educator Alfie Kohn summarizes in his classic treatise *No Contest, The Case Against Competition*, "...it is quite clear that the hostile encounter called competition—on the playing field and in other contexts, for both participants and spectators—leads us to become more aggressive."¹

Besides aggression, competition can also trigger resignation and giving up. When winning appears impossible because another contestant has all the advantages, it's natural for the disadvantaged player to quit. If the competition is mandatory, as it often is in school, outright giving up may be impossible. The child resigns internally and loses his drive to succeed. His self-esteem suffers as, time after time, the rewards and accolades go to someone else.²

In between defeatism on the one hand and aggression on the other, there is stress. There is always the threat of losing in a competitive encounter and this creates anxiety. Psychoanalyst Rollo May concluded, upon completing his study of competition in America, "Competition is the most pervasive occasion for anxiety in our culture."³ The stress associated with competing for grades in school is infamous. As the National Headache Foundation reports, tension headaches, the most common type, "are almost always caused by stressful situations at school, *competition*, family friction, or excessive demands by parents."⁴ Excessive competition sets the stage for serious psychological and social problems, ranging from aggression to lowered self-esteem to anxiety and stress.

Even in its mildest forms, competition is about "me" not "we." It focuses on individual victory rather than on community success. When we overdo competitive activities, and don't



balance them with cooperative ones, we get a skewed perspective. We start to think success depends solely on individual achievement. We forget how interdependent we really are.

Is there a way out of the competitive matrix? At least, is there a way to reduce excess competition and its many deleterious effects?

In Cooperative Games, people play *with* one another rather than *against* each other. The fun comes from the camaraderie and challenge of the game—not from being the “best” player left standing when everyone else is eliminated. In a cooperative game, everyone cooperates. And everybody wins because everyone enjoys him- or herself! No one is eliminated. What *is* eliminated is fear of failure and the incentive to beat others.

Cooperative games exist for all ages and settings, including home, the workplace, the classroom and playground, organizational meetings, camps, churches, and community gatherings, virtual space, and even the cocktail party! All these games demonstrate the value of cooperation through positive personal experience. Though cooperative games have a thousand beneficial applications, in this book we focus on using cooperative games in school.



We begin by discussing the nature of cooperative games and their overall benefits in education. Then we move on to the ways they nurture a positive school climate and prevent bullying. We'll offer a step-by-step, research-based program you can use as a teacher or care provider to stop bullying before it even starts. Beyond our step-by-step program, we offer guidelines for expanding your bullying prevention program. You'll find fifty additional games, plus information on transforming competitive games to cooperative ones, and additional resources for creating a cooperative classroom community. Supporting research, pedagogical considerations, and the cultural reasons why cooperative games are clearly an idea whose

time has come are also explored. With this background and support, you can easily become an expert in cooperative games yourself, able to help create a positive school climate that brings out the best in everyone. Welcome to the world of cooperative play!



**Purchase the complete book at
Cooperative Games.com**



Chapter 1

Why Play Cooperative Games in School?

Cooperative Games Use the Power of Play

Play is a child's workshop; it is through play that children learn how to be in the world. Much current scholarship documents the close link between play and learning. For children across cultures, learning is achieved through play.⁵ Hunter-gatherer children play field games that prepare them to forage and hunt. Contemporary children in the U.S., on the other hand, play with toy cars, plastic tools, fake money, miniature kitchens, and dollhouses in preparation for their adult roles. Play is so deeply ingrained in biology that it isn't even unique to humans. Mammals in general learn the skills they will use as adults by playing when they are young. Little foxes playfully pounce to practice predation. Fawns run and kick their long legs to rehearse the survival skill of fleeing. Young ones everywhere need to play in order to learn the skills they will use in adulthood.

A teacher's gratifying and important role is to nourish the inevitable learning process of youth, to channel it in ways that lead to healthy and happy lives. Since play is a chief mode by which children learn, it's important for educators to keep an eye on what kinds of play opportunities we offer kids in school. With a bit of consciousness and care, teachers can set children up to learn beneficial skills through play at recess and during academic class time, too. We are remiss if we ignore the opportunity to foster positive skills through play, for the play yard and classroom can become breeding grounds for harmful habits and negative social behaviors when meanness and aggression are allowed to take hold.

Play is normal, natural, and free. One of the basic attributes of play is that the outcome doesn't matter. In the realm of play, we escape the pressures of real life. We can take risks, experiment, goof off, and try something new. The lack of concern over real consequences

makes us open-minded and ready to learn. Games are played in the magical kingdom of suspended reality, just as other forms of play are. However, games are special in that they have established rules that players must learn. For this reason, games are even more directly important for learning social behavior than other forms of play, such as solitary imaginative play. When a child plays a game, it's inevitable that he will follow—and thereby learn—a set of social rules.

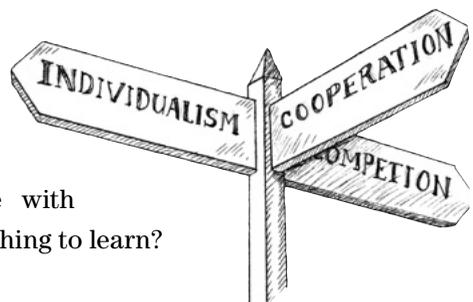


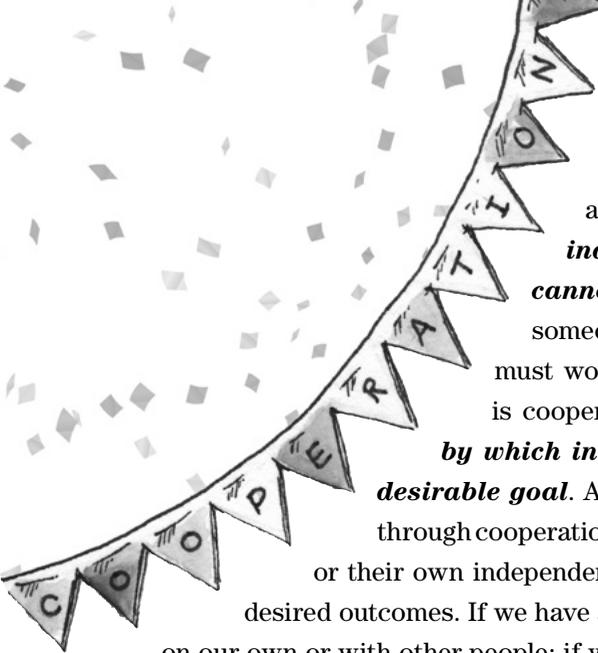
The wise caregiver recognizes that children are learning rules of social engagement during games, no matter what. We should pay attention to this and be sure the learning is what we want to impart. Do we want to expose kids only to competitively structured games? Or should we give children the chance to play games that foster getting along and helping one another?

Offering children opportunities to play cooperatively is not about controlling them, meddling in their play, or making competition taboo. Instead, it's about giving kids the chance to exercise their pro-social nature during playtime and experience its joys and pleasures. Cooperative play is fun for kids in the moment and it provides positive experiences that motivate kids to keep cooperating well beyond the game.

What's So Great about Cooperation?

Cooperative games give students practice with cooperation. Why is cooperation such an important thing to learn?





Competition is defined, the sociologists say, as ***a social arrangement in which two or more individuals try to achieve a particular goal that cannot be attained by everyone.*** Someone wins and someone else loses. In a competitive activity, individuals must work against each other. The opposite of competition is cooperation, which is defined as ***a social arrangement by which individuals work together to achieve a mutually desirable goal.*** A third way people can work toward a goal is neither through cooperation nor competition, but rather through ***individualism***, or their own independent actions. These are the three ways we can pursue desired outcomes. If we have a problem to solve or a job to do, we can either work on our own or with other people; if we are working with others toward the goal, we have the choice to either compete or cooperate.

Reasonable people may differ about the proper role of competition. How competitive should we encourage our children to be? Is competition necessary in fulfilling one's hopes and dreams? How does it prepare children for the world in which they will be living? What is the net impact of a competitive ethos on the culture at large? All these questions are a matter of debate. But no matter how we view competition, surely we can all agree on one thing: the social alternative—cooperation—is fundamental to the well-being of self and society.

Cooperation is needed because it helps people solve problems. As we say, "Two heads are better than one." Cooperation brings the skills and talents of multiple stake-holders to bear on any given situation. If we want to solve a vexing problem, it's best to bring all brains on board.

Cooperation is needed for efficiency as well. Many jobs are so big that they can only be accomplished through group effort. "Many hands make light work."

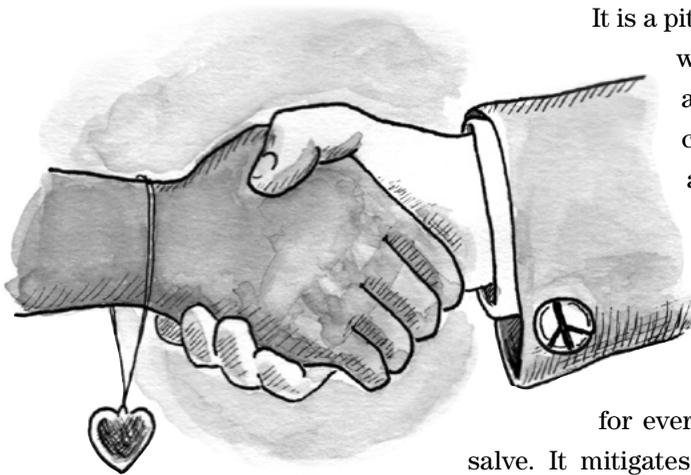
Cooperation is also essential because it promotes healthy relationships. When we cooperate, we share. And, as we know, "Sharing is caring." Cooperating and sharing evoke emotions of appreciation, gratitude, and trust as we help one another. These positive emotions underlie social bonding and healthy relationships.

Further, cooperation is important because it's the foundation of equity. Cooperation, in the sense we are talking about here, involves decision-making based on mutual respect and participation. It's different than obedience. It's motivated by the desire to listen to one another, appreciate each other, to be fair and get along. Cooperation is the means by which equitable social arrangements can be forged and maintained.

Cooperation is fundamental to human life, as we can easily see by looking at human cultures across the globe and throughout history. Without cooperation, there would be no social institutions whatsoever.⁶ Reflect for a moment on the degree of cooperation required

to run a hospital, organize a school, conduct a hunt, feed a family, drive safely down the highway, or even play a song on the guitar. Without cooperation, civilization is not possible.

Though cooperation is vital, it is underappreciated in the public sphere. We may say that two heads are better than one, many hands make light work, and sharing is caring, but in our highly individualistic culture, this message is underplayed. If we appreciated the value of cooperation, we would consciously aim to cooperate more often. Instead, we glorify competition. Turn on the television, and you will find a parade of competition-based reality shows. Dancers, cooks, athletes, singles-looking-for-a-date, and on and on, are constantly pitted against one another. If you've ever watched these shows, you'll see that the cameras record a great deal of misery, stress, and strain among the contestants. The more intense the competition, and the less cooperative the overall social framework, the more intense is the strife. Why are such shows so popular? Competition is inherently suspenseful. The "thrill of victory" and the "agony of defeat" get the adrenalin pumping more than peace and harmony ever will. This makes competition stimulating to watch on TV. Since competition is so telegenic, we see a lot of it in the media. The ubiquity of competition in the media just reinforces the false belief that competition is desirable, natural, and necessary. Imagine what our children are learning about the supposed inevitability and appropriateness of competition from seeing so much of it on TV!



It is a pity that we don't regard cooperation with the same degree of excitement as competition. The rewards of cooperation in the real world are actually quite thrilling. Most conflicts occur when people—at the individual, team, national, or international level—lack the desire or skills to cooperate, to procure the greatest good

for everyone involved. Cooperation is the salve. It mitigates conflict and stress. Cooperation promotes equity, peace, inclusion, and problem solving in practically any setting. As President Eisenhower once said, "Though force can protect in an emergency, only justice, fairness, consideration, and cooperation can finally lead men to the dawn of eternal peace." If cooperation underlies constructive social engagement, and if cooperative games can teach cooperation through the powerful medium of play, then surely cooperative games are an appropriate teaching tool for our times.

Cooperative Games Enhance Your Teaching



Cooperative games are a tool you can use to bring your teaching to new heights. You are reading this book to learn how to use cooperative games to prevent bullying. In truth, cooperative games enhance your teaching in many additional respects. How? Let us count the ways.

First and foremost, with cooperative games you teach a range of social and emotional skills. Cooperative games teach children how to cooperate effectively and this involves a broad range of social and emotional skills.

Consider the classic cooperative board game *Max the Cat*. In this game, players must do all of the following to keep the game going successfully: take turns, share, solve problems together, and be inclusive, respectful, and considerate of everyone. The game prompts these behaviors through its story and setting as well as the play dynamics. In *Max the Cat*, players adopt three little creatures — a bird, mouse, and chipmunk. The little creatures' goal is to travel all the way around the board and finally return to the home tree. Meanwhile, Max, a fluffy black Tom Cat, rests on the porch. Players roll the dice when it is their turn. If they roll green dots, the little creatures move toward the home tree. But if players roll two black dots, Max advances on the board. If Max lands on the same square as a squirrel, bird, mouse, or chipmunk, the little creature becomes Max's lunch.

How can the humans work together to keep the little creatures safe? One way is to lure Max back to his porch with catnip, milk, cheese, and cat food tokens. Tokens are scarce and need to be used judiciously—and that takes teamwork. A theme of the game is that Max is a natural hunter and it's not fitting to hurt him or hate him. Better to coexist with him by luring him back to the porch where he can be happy without causing harm to others. To make this happen, players must be smart and work together by practicing their pro-social skills.

Second, cooperative games help prepare students for cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is an approach to teaching that involves groups of students working together on a shared project such that grades or other rewards are earned by the group as a whole, and all group members are expected to contribute. The roots of cooperative learning can be found in the writings of John Dewey, who argued that, "If humans are to learn to live cooperatively, they must experience the living process of cooperation in the schools. Life in the classroom should represent the democratic process in microcosm, and the heart of democratic living is cooperation in groups."⁷

I'm a former classroom teacher. When I was in the classroom, I relied on cooperative learning, as most teachers do. After all, the research on the benefits of cooperative learning is clear. For example, one researcher (Vermette) reviewed over 300 studies of cooperative

learning and found that “cooperative learning tends to produce more desirable outcomes on motivation, self-esteem, and achievement measures when compared to traditional instructional strategies and competitive or individualistic ones. This generalization is supported by studies across thirteen years of schooling and is true for students of both genders, all ethnicities, and across various disabilities.”⁸ David Johnson and Roger Johnson from the University of Minnesota compared the interpersonal consequences of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning approaches. They found that cooperative learning produces desirable effects, as listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Interpersonal Effects of Cooperative Learning

- ✱ High interaction among students
- ✱ Mutual liking among all group members
- ✱ Effective communication among all group members
- ✱ High trust among all group members
- ✱ High mutual influence
- ✱ High acceptance and support of all group members
- ✱ High use of other students’ resources
- ✱ High sharing and helping
- ✱ High emotional involvement of all participants, not just winners
- ✱ High coordination of effort among all group members
- ✱ Division of labor possible
- ✱ High divergent thinking
- ✱ Reduction of self-other comparisons

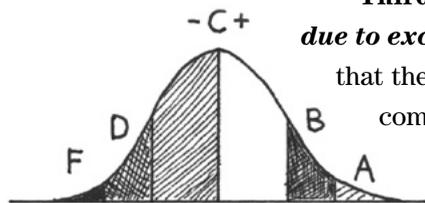


Everyone who has ever learned anything through her own effort and concentration knows that a great deal of learning occurs on an individual basis. That’s axiomatic. However, a big question arises about learning that takes place in a social context. If we are learning together in school, we have the choice to compete or cooperate. Cooperative learning has clear advantages over competition, for

content learning as well as social-emotional learning. The Johnsons found that the benefits of cooperative learning listed in Table 1 are dampened by competitive learning activities.⁹

Cooperative learning is here to stay since students and teachers like it and because it has so many benefits. In practice it takes a lot of skill to run a cooperative classroom. I found in my own teaching that the hardest part was ensuring that students knew how to cooperate and saw the value in it. I prepared my classes for group work by teaching collaborative skills in the usual way. I used methods such as assigning kids roles within their groups and having them practice the role of “harmonizer,” “manager,” or others. I relied on “individual accountability” strategies to motivate kids to work together—methods such as basing individual grades on the group’s performance. Teaching methods like this are helpful, as collaboration depends on each student understanding her role in the group. Still, I found that the preliminary instruction in collaborative skills was not particularly easy or fun. Also, it took time away from subject learning. How much easier it is to prepare students for collaboration in their school-work by playing games. Truly, cooperative games are a great pedagogical aid since they teach kids the cooperative skills they need for cooperative learning.

Third, cooperative games help you *alleviate the stresses due to excessive competition in school.* It’s widely acknowledged



that the American school system is extremely competitive. Kids compete in the classroom and on the sports field. Rightly or wrongly, competition is part and parcel of the sorting and ranking that goes on in school, and ultimately

determines access to economic opportunity. Educational researcher Rick LaVoie finds that 85 percent of activities in school are competitively structured.¹⁰ With the emphasis on competition in the classroom and on the sports field, it’s no surprise that the competitive habit carries over to the social arena, too. It’s easy for children to begin to think of themselves as rivals. They are socialized to believe that “it’s a jungle out there” and this is a “dog-eat-dog world.”



All of this is most unfortunate for the human psyche, personal relations, and educational equity. Competition runs rife through our society and is largely unexamined, but research and scholarship show that competition actually has many ill effects, including (but certainly not limited to) stress.¹¹ When a child plays a cooperative game, he takes a healthy break from the competitive pressure of the school-day. He can relax and appreciate others rather than feel challenged by them.

Fourth, cooperative games *nurture intrinsic motivation.* In an unthreatening psychological environment, kids need not expend precious energy defending themselves against social threats. When a child feels accepted, he can listen better to his own inner voice. Thus, cooperative games help kids feel accepted and safe enough to tune in to their intrinsic motivation, that inner compass that guides a person toward his true interests.¹² Making the switch from external incentives to intrinsic motivation bodes well for long-term success in and out of school. We do our finest and most enthusiastic work when we discover what we

enjoy and allow ourselves to do it. Too much focus on pleasing others and gaining extrinsic rewards through competitively structured schooling subverts the self-discovery process.



Cooperative games have another magical effect. **Because they are so explicitly noncompetitive, cooperative games show that there is an alternative to competition. Cooperation!**

Aha! Must we always vie to win? Must we always measure our own success in terms of someone else's failure? Competition, like wallpaper, is so pervasive that we rarely notice it, let alone question it. But competition is, in fact, highly questionable. When you expose your kids to cooperative games, you expand their awareness of how they can be in relationship to others. They see that they have choice about whether to compete or cooperate. There is great freedom and empowerment in that.

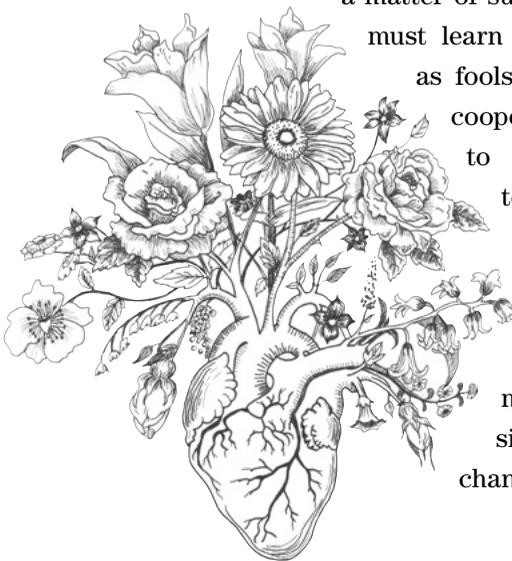
Do you want your students to be happy? Of course! It is widely known that children learn best when they are happy. Besides assisting cognitive growth and content mastery, happiness is important in its own right. It's FUN-damental. And cooperative games are certainly fun! Studies by Terry Orlick of the University of Ottawa have shown that young children usually enjoy playing cooperative games more than competitive ones when they have the opportunity to experience both.¹³ **Cooperative games are a way to add some healthy fun to the school-day.**



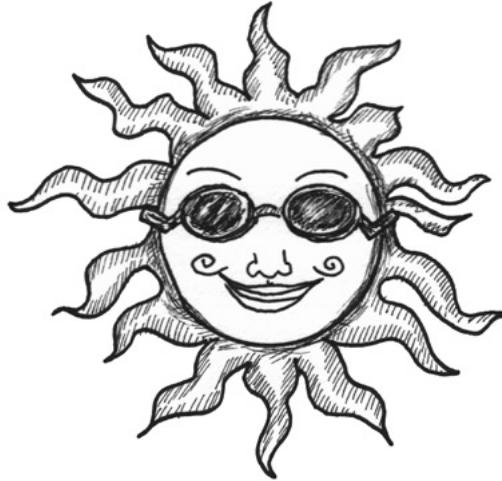
Finally, by fostering cooperative play, your educational practice contributes to a sustainable future. The ultimate, long-term benefit of cooperative games is that they facilitate positive social change. In a world where resources are scarce, our huge human population is growing, and complex problems threaten civilization, cooperation has become

a matter of survival. As Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, "We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools." The time for cooperation is now. Fortunately,

cooperation is more achievable than ever before due to advanced communication and transportation technologies. Competition has become so rampant and exaggerated in the economy, sports, politics, schools, television, and so forth that the tide is beginning to turn. The cooperative food movement, cooperative businesses, the sharable movement, the heart intelligence movement, and similar trends suggest social norms are beginning to change.



Learning to get along, share, and respect one another rather than aiming to grab the goods first are seen as the heart of a happier, more inclusive, and sustainable society. Knowing this, we are looking for ways to make the shift from “me” to “we.” Cooperative games are an outstanding vehicle by which we can do this. Since people learn through play, and cooperative games nurture kindness, sharing, and collaborative problem solving, they can help bring about a more peaceful and just society. We can play our way to a better world!



**Purchase the complete book at
[Cooperative Games.com](http://CooperativeGames.com)**



Chapter 2

Cooperative Games Warm the School Climate

What Is Bullying?

Asha sees two girls in her second-grade class playing hopscotch at recess. She tries to join them but the girls run away. The next day, Asha sees the same girls gathered around the slide but now there are three other girls, too. She tries to join the group but all five of the girls throw wood chips at her. In class, the girls look disdainfully at Asha. They seem to have formed a group that targets her. When the teacher assigns Asha to work on class projects with any of the group girls, they act like they don't want to have anything to do with her. On the playground, the girls sometimes come up to Asha and ridicule her clothes and her hair. They make fun of the vegetables Asha's mother packs in her lunch. The group of girls is bullying Asha, since they repeatedly taunt her and exclude her from their group.

The kindergarten class is assembled in a circle as the teacher reads a book for story time. Bryan sits in the second row. Ouch! Someone is pinching him. Later that day, he is in the lunch line. He is being pinched again! He doesn't see who is doing it but there is a group of boys laughing and running around nearby, pointing at him. There is one boy in particular—Adam—who does not like Bryan. Bryan has a club foot, and Adam makes fun of it. Adam gets other kids to join him in teasing and harassing Bryan. For many months now, Bryan's school life has been riddled with taunts, physical harassments, put-downs, and rejection. He has few friends. Lately he has been complaining of stomachaches and has been begging his mother to stay home. He is the victim of bullying.

Hanna has many friends among her middle-school peers. She feels like the popularity queen, setting fashion trends and fielding the flirtations of a throng of admirers. However, Hanna is insecure. She jockeyes for social position skillfully, deciding who is in and who is out of her group. Her legions look to her for leadership, but Hanna knows that her friends are really “frenemies”—allies in the constant struggle to stay on top in a social hierarchy rather than trustworthy companions. Sure enough, the day comes when Hanna gets a taste of her own medicine. Now she is the one whom the rumors are defaming. It’s her Facebook page that is suddenly full of slander. Another girl challenges her to a brawl after school and a crowd of onlookers gathers. A teacher finds out about the fight being staged so the showdown is thwarted. Still, Hanna feels terrified, betrayed, and humiliated. She begs her parents and is allowed to switch schools but it seems everyone in her small town knows about “Hanna, the whore.” Hanna spirals into a depression and anxiety condition that lasts for years. She is never able to set foot on a public-school campus without experiencing panic attacks again.

Bullying, as these examples show, is a cruel torment. Kids who are bullied are five times more likely to be depressed, compared to their peers. Bullied boys are four times more likely to be suicidal. Girls who are bullied are eight times more likely to be suicidal.¹⁴ Nevertheless, bullying is shockingly common, especially in middle and secondary school. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, over 27 percent of students aged 12 to 18 reported being bullied at school during the school year in 2011, the most recent year for which statistics are available.¹⁵



Moreover, the link between bullying and later delinquent and criminal behavior is significant. Nearly 60 percent of boys classified by researchers as bullies in grades six through nine were convicted of at least one crime by the age of 24.¹⁶ It’s not just the bullies who are at risk for later criminal behavior. Victims of bullying sometimes explode in ways that threaten the school community, including school shootings. A Secret Service study of school shootings found that “almost three-quarters of the attackers felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others prior to the incident.”¹⁷

The U.S. government is responding to the bullying crisis through various measures. Currently, over twenty states have adopted laws to address bullying. The Department of Health and Human Services created StopBullying.gov, an extensive information portal for the public. StopBullying.gov defines bullying this way:¹⁸

BULLYING DEFINITION

Bullying is unwanted aggressive behavior among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated or has the potential to be repeated over time...Bullying includes such actions as making threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally, and excluding someone from a group.

Bullying can be defined in various ways but the definition given here reflects what most of the experts have to say. So, the major features of bullying are that it is *aggressive* behavior *intended* to cause harm, that it is *repeated*, and that it involves a *power imbalance* such that the perpetrator dominates the victim. Also, most often, bullying is a group phenomenon. In the majority of cases, a bully does not act alone but is part of a bullying group that gangs up on the victim.

Note that “excluding someone from a group on purpose” ranks as a bullying action right up there alongside physical attack. Being excluded from a group that we want to belong to hurts us to the core, social animals that we are. Look into the eyes of your son or daughter, or your student, when they are the only one in the class not invited to a birthday party,



and you will feel their pain. Scale that pain up a hundred times when chronic bullying excludes a child from normal social interaction day after day. Given that social exclusion is so hard to bear, and that *competitive activities often involve social exclusion*, it seems quite an oversight to reflexively promote competitive activities and sports in schools.

Establishing a Positive School Climate

One of the approaches to bullying that has gained credibility lately, and has been favored by the U.S. Department of Education, seeks to reduce bullying by improving school climate. This is where cooperative games come in.

School climate is a general description of the feelings that a school environment elicits. While some school environments feel safe, positive, and inclusive, others feel exclusionary and even unsafe. A positive school climate fosters a feeling of connectedness among students and teachers so students have a sense of belonging to the school. Notwithstanding the bias toward competition across the school system, researchers have begun to notice that competition correlates with negative school climate. Audible voices are therefore advising schools to reduce it. For example, a report published by the National Association for Elementary School Principals lists “decreasing the emphasis on student competition” as one way to improve school climate.”¹⁹

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has responded to the bullying crisis with its website StopBullying.gov. The section *Prevent Bullying* offers a handful of essential guidelines. Among them, StopBullying.gov asks school personnel to “build a safe environment” by reinforcing “positive social interactions and inclusiveness.”²⁰ As a teacher or administrator, your hands are too full to respond consistently to individual student

behaviors. Like synapses in the human brain, the number of connections among hundreds of students on any school day is staggering! Teachers and administrators obviously cannot keep up with individual interactions. In order to increase positive interactions, students need to be set up with activities that they will naturally enjoy and want to do and that will bring out the best in them, even when no one is directing their activity. Kids play naturally. Let's think about how we can give students the opportunity to play in socially constructive ways. They will discover from their own personal experience that it's "nice to be nice." Authentic personal knowledge will inform their choices even when the games have stopped. The overall school climate will reflect the countless decisions each child makes every day to choose kindness.



Kids with different temperaments benefit from cooperative play in different ways so cooperative games provide differentiated instruction. Children who come into the play situation with healthy social skills practice inclusive behavior, are reinforced in their good habits, and are inoculated against the stresses of excess competition at school. Children who are less proficient in social skills, and are therefore

at higher risk for being involved in bullying, benefit from cooperative games in other ways specific to them. Research documents that children who are at risk of becoming bullies or victims of bullies are less cooperative than other children. Cooperative games are thus an especially important intervention for those kids who are at high risk for involvement with bullying.²¹

Dominant children who tend toward aggression will benefit because they gain practice in sharing and respecting the rights of others. Further, they observe that their peers as well as their teachers and school personnel honor fairness and inclusivity rather than just competition and individual triumph.

On the other hand, children who lack assertiveness and tend to withdraw from social interaction are the most likely victims of bullies. Cooperative games give these children the opportunity to contribute to the group, and a guaranteed positive reception when they do. This builds communication skills, social confidence, a sense of safety at school, and assertiveness. These traits help reticent children avoid becoming targets of bullying.

Cooperative games work from the inside-out and elicit the best in everyone. When everyone operates according to their highest potential, the school climate reflects the cumulative good will, and the school feels safe and nurturing.

An Ounce of Prevention Is Worth a Pound of Cure

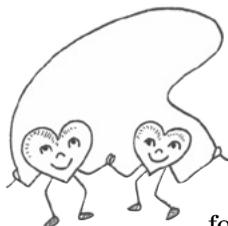
“Bullying prevention” programs can be distinguished from “anti-bullying” programs in that the latter emphasize surveillance and punishment for episodes of aggressive behavior



while the former optimize school climate by instilling pro-social skills and a sense of belonging. To use the vernacular correctly, the Cooperative Games program described in this book is a *bullying prevention program* rather than an *anti-bullying program*.

Cooperative games in education are like the wellness approach in health care—they emphasize preventing disease rather than curing it once it has developed.

Within the genre of bullying prevention, you’ll find approaches that use conflict resolution and others that employ nonviolent communication. These programs have been

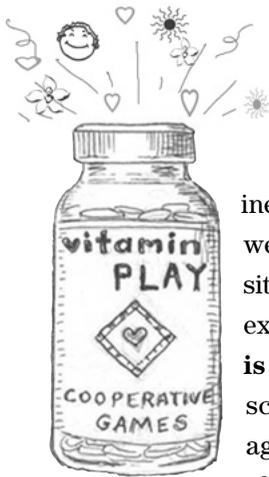


used to great effect. Nonviolent communication teaches language skills that kids can use to express their feelings and needs in ways that are considerate of others. Conflict-resolution skills help children learn emotional control and negotiation so that small conflicts do not escalate into big ones. Cooperative games work a little differently. They don’t focus on learning considerate approaches to communication or processing

interpersonal conflict so much as they promote positive, inclusive, group experience. Cooperative games deliver the *experience* of inclusivity, mutual respect, and peaceful contact. Joy and peace are not goals to work toward, but an immediate reality to see and feel. Once children have experienced win-win cooperation, they know what it feels like to be inclusive and included, respectful and respected, kind and treated kindly by others, and as a result, happy. They learn that the path to these good feelings is cooperation. Cooperative games and other bullying prevention programs have different, but complimentary, emphases. They work well together.

Anti-bullying programs frequently work in the opposite way. Often, they single out the bully and chastise him, but bullying is more complex than a contest between “good kids” and “bad kids.” Temperaments come in all flavors for a variety of reasons, not all of which are known. Kids may play the role of bully in some contexts while they play the victim in others.

Both bullies and victims frequently behave the way they do because they are acting out their own wounds and fears of rejection.



Don't get me wrong. Responding to outright bullying is critical. Teachers and administrators must react to overtly aggressive behavior with any of a variety of tools appropriate to the situation to keep students physically and psychologically safe. It's just that the data on heavily punitive anti-bullying programs shows that they are often ineffective.²² These programs carry the risk of unintended downsides as well, such as the further marginalization of students involved in bullying situations, which can exacerbate hostility and social withdrawal. The experts at StopBullying.gov say, **“The easiest way to address bullying is to stop it before it starts.”** Using cooperative games to improve school climate can be the first line of defense against the meanness, aggression, domination, and exclusivity that lead to bullying. Especially when introduced early, these games have great promise.



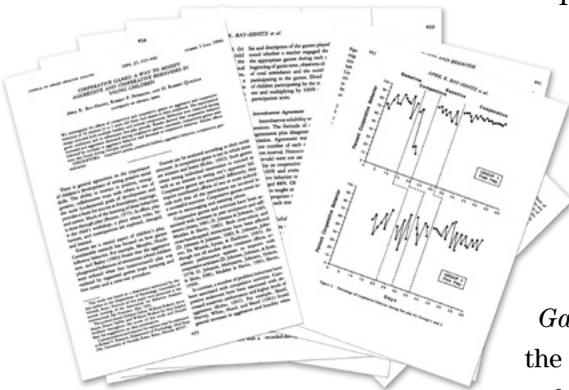


Chapter 3

The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program

Classroom-Tested and Research-Based

There is more than a compelling rationale for cooperative games as a means to reduce aggression in children—there's proof. *The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program* consists of a series of seven active physical games and a set of four board games, as well as this teaching manual. All the games in our program were tested in an impartial, classroom-based study conducted by the University of Nevada, Reno. The results were dramatic: The games in this program were found to reduce aggression and foster cooperation in young children. In light of these results, through this program, we are happy to provide you with the very same games that the Reno researchers used. There is no doubt—these games work!



The university study that our program is based on is a 1994 University of Nevada, Reno, study called *Cooperative Games: A Way to Modify Aggressive and Cooperative Behaviors in Young Children*.²³ The study was conducted by April Bay, Robert F. Peterson, and H. Robert Quiltich. See Chapter 6, *The Research on Cooperative Games and Bullying*, for a detailed summary of the study. Also, you can find a link to the actual study in the References section of this book.

Let the Games Begin!



The core of *The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program* consists of four classic cooperative board games and directions for seven active cooperative games suitable for children ages 4–7. These very same games were tested in the

University of Nevada study and shown to be effective in curbing aggression and building pro-social skills. The board games used in our program are:

- ❖ **Max the Cat**
- ❖ **Sleeping Grump**
- ❖ **Granny's House**
- ❖ **Harvest Time**

These games were all designed by Jim Deacove. Jim and his wife Ruth are former teachers who started Family Pastimes, a Canadian publishing company that pioneered cooperative board games over thirty years ago. Truly, we are indebted to Jim for showing us, through a fantastic array of varied and original board games, it is more fun to play with one another than against each other. You can find many of the Family Pastimes board games for all ages at CooperativeGames.com.



The research-tested, active group games in our program are:

- ❖ **Cooperative Musical Chairs**
- ❖ **Freeze De-Freeze Tag**
- ❖ **Balance Activities**
- ❖ **Cooperative Musical Hugs**
- ❖ **Beanbag Freeze**
- ❖ **Devine**
- ❖ **Half a Heart**

These active games were developed by Terry Orlick, Ph.D. Dr. Orlick is a professor of kinesiology as well as a world-renowned Olympic athletic coach and corporate trainer, who teaches skills for positive living and personal excellence. He has been developing active cooperative games and implementing them in the schools over a span of decades. He conducted formal educational research showing that children often prefer cooperative to competitive games.²⁴ A most grateful *Thank You* goes out to Terry Orlick for showing us

how to do our personal best without the stresses of competition. Also, thanks to Dr. Orlick's publisher Human Kinetics for giving us permission to reproduce his games.

Teaching Tips for the Board Games

For directions to each of the board games in our anti-bullying collection, please refer to the instruction sheets contained within each game box. We recommend that you use these particular cooperative board games because they were tested in the study and shown to work for kids ages 4–7. That being said, you may want to use other games. There are many great cooperative board games, with new games coming on the market all the time.



One caution about substituting games: You will find cooperative board games of varying styles on the market. The Family Pastimes games tested in the study have a gentle quality. The message of cooperation is deeply embedded in the games

because in these games, everyone wins. No one, not even the characters depicted on the game board, are fought against. There is an overall energy about the games that feels gentle and powerful—as well as fun. There are some cooperative games on the market that are cooperative in the sense that players compete against the game. For example, players might compete with a monster to be the first to grab a sack of gold. This is cooperation in the sense of teamwork—but we already have lots of ways in which kids team up to oppose a rival. Here, we are talking about using cooperative games as an antidote to aggression. We aim to nurture the cooperative spirit at a deep level by showing that it's possible for everyone to be happy all at the same time. When you choose cooperative games for young children specifically to nurture a loving school climate and



ward off bullying, think about whether a given game is deeply cooperative—whether it conveys values of peace, sharing, and respect for everyone, even the fictitious characters in the game setting. The games that were tested in the Reno study embodied this spirit. We cannot say, based on the Reno study, whether cooperative games that set players against a

fictitious “bogey man” embedded in the game setting will have the same aggression-reducing effects as the deeply cooperative games that were tested have. With cooperative games for bullying prevention, we aim to teach children how to be gentle and employ empathy even though there may be conflicting wants and perspectives. Play the games to get a sense of the message they impart and the emotions they evoke. Be sure the games you choose and use foster mutual respect and appreciation just as the games tested in the University of Nevada study do. And of course, the games have to be fun too!

Now, suppose you have your games and you are ready to get started. Be sure to have enough games available so that everyone who wants to play can participate. Also, be sure you are familiar with how to play the games. You’ll need to explain the directions and answer kids’ questions. When you introduce board games to very young students, it’s great to have volunteers on hand. Consider arranging for an adult or older student to sit with the children and show them how to play. You can send a notice to parents asking them to help out on game day—there’s a Volunteer Request Sheet at the back of this book (see the section *Additional References and Resources*). If you are in an elementary-school setting, consider recruiting students from the upper grades to help run the games for the little ones. When you have your cadre of helpers, host a practice session during lunch-time where volunteers can learn the games.

It’s often easiest to sit on the floor, with the game in the center of a circle of players. Or play on a table-top with students seated around.

While it’s helpful to encourage children to play, you should not force them. By definition, play is a freely chosen activity. If we force children to play, they are not really playing—they are complying.

Please remember that the *playful mindset* is different than the *judged mindset*. When we play, we’re not worried about outcome or proving what we know. By contrast, when we are in the judged mindset, we are demonstrating what we already have learned for the purpose of being evaluated. These are two very different psychological modes. Guess which one correlates best with learning new things? If you guessed the playful mindset, you are right!



One way to maintain the playful mindset is this: Don’t tell the kids cooperative games are “good for them”—like spinach. My advice would be to discuss cooperation and competition but not to lecture the kids on these topics. I wouldn’t necessarily tell the kids that cooperative games are being used to prevent bullying, either. If we say so explicitly, the games might start to resemble another “top-down” teaching tool. If we just play the games, they will work their magic!

Regarding safety: Watch for small board game pieces if there are youngsters aged 3 or younger in the vicinity. Small pieces are a choking hazard! **These games are not recommended for children aged 3 or under.** Also, caution students about keeping the game pieces clean to preserve them and to avoid spreading germs.

It's helpful to preface game-play with a discussion of cooperation versus competition. Though this step wasn't a part of the research study that this module is based on, it's my experience that kids like to talk about the differences between cooperation and competition. Fruitful discussion questions include:

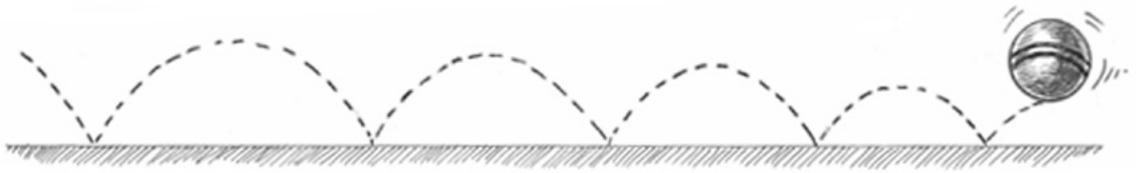
- ☉ *What is competition? What is cooperation? Can you give an example of each?*
- ☉ *How do you feel when you compete with a friend?*
- ☉ *How do you feel when you cooperate with a friend?*
- ☉ *How is a cooperative game different than a competitive game?*

The board games can be played in about 15 minutes each. You may find that kids are eager to play several board games in series. To do this, it's convenient to station games in different locations and have players rotate around the room. Or, purchase multiple copies of each game so the entire class can divide into small groups with different groups playing the same game at the same time.

Once kids know how to play the board games, you can bring them out during free-play periods and let children gravitate to the games on their own.



Here is another idea: Designate a place in your classroom as the “Cooperation Station”—a cooperative play zone for board games and playful activities children do while seated. Keep easy-to-play games there so children can access them on their own. For example, kids who finish work early can go to the Cooperation Station to play. Or children can choose to go there during free-play periods. To make a Cooperation Station, dedicate a bulletin board to images of cooperation and hang it where you want the children to gather. Or you can buy a beautiful, colorful poster from CooperativeGames.com that illustrates cooperative play. We designed the poster to serve as a backdrop that defines cooperative space and sets the intention to cooperate. Put a table and chairs near the poster, and *Voila!* You have a Cooperation Station. Stock your Cooperation Station with the four board games in our program: *Max the Cat*, *Sleeping Grump*, *Granny’s House*, and *Harvest Time*. You can also check CooperativeGames.com for printable games, cooperative coloring pages, additional board games, and more resources. Puzzles, puppets, and tea sets are examples of toys that promote cooperative play. Such cooperative toys are great “instructional aids” that students can play with independently at your Cooperation Station.



Teaching Tips for the Active Games

Time to get physical! Of course, safety always comes first. The games in *The Cooperative Games Bullying Prevention Program* are easy and safe. Still, be sure to keep a watchful eye for hazards, such as objects that children could trip over, bang into, or swallow.

To begin an active game, you'll first need to give the children instructions. Clapping your hands or holding up five fingers are time-tested methods. Banging a drum or jangling a tambourine are also good attention-grabbers. If you like to sing, try: "Children, children gather 'round. Come to the play zone and sit down."



It's useful to designate the play zone for the active games: a place where the children will gather when you announce it's time to play an active cooperative game. You can opt to use mats to designate a space within your classroom. Make a circle using colorful tape, or put a rug in the corner of the room, play yard, or gym, or draw a fun shape on the playground with chalk, among other ways.

Let children release some of their energy on the way to the play zone. Explain that they can skip, hop, or crawl on their way but once they get to the play zone, they need to sit quietly. Encourage them to focus on you with their eyes and to put their hands in their laps with their bodies facing you. Now they are in a position to listen and learn the rules of the game. When you explain the directions to an active game, break it down into very small steps. The games in this program are very simple. Simple rules help maintain order, plus they assure that diverse-ability children can understand what to do and participate. To reach children with diverse learning styles, speak the rules *and* give a demonstration so everyone can see what to do. Ask for volunteers to help you demonstrate the main steps of the game; for example, by balancing a beanbag on their heads or freezing when tagged.

If a child does not want to participate, ask that she at least stay to hear the directions. Encourage her to try the game but if the child clearly wants to be left out, it's best to honor that and allow the child to simply observe or do a quiet activity. Don't force participation. Keep inviting the child to join, though. Over time most children will see that they are welcome to play, that the games are fun and inclusive, and they will want to join in.



Importantly, don't give up! While most young children are intrinsically motivated to engage in cooperative play, you may encounter students who withdraw or take an oppositional stance. When children live in difficult circumstances, have medical issues, or a history of insecure attachment relationships with teachers and caregivers, they may find cooperative games and activities challenging at first. Some children may come from families that emphasize competition or they may have seen a lot of competition in the media or elsewhere. These children may see their classmates as their competitors, even at their very young age. Children can have poorly developed social and emotional skills, for any of a variety of reasons, and thus resist even positive and supportive group activities. It's these very kids who need to be included most. Kids with undeveloped social skills are

especially vulnerable to aggression and bullying behaviors so they are the ones most in need of positive group interactions. Know that you are making a difference in the lives of these children when you keep inviting them into the circle.



Be flexible. If you see that the children are confused, be ready to stop the game and sort out what's going wrong. You might want to increase or decrease the challenge to maximize the fun.

Feel free to participate in the game yourself, if you like. It will give you a close look at what is going on and you'll have fun. Your attitude will set the emotional tone of the game

so be sure to relax and enjoy yourself, too!

After one game, you may wish to begin another. If you are launching into an unfamiliar game, it's wise to call the children back to the play zone where you give directions. If you are starting a game the kids already know, you will still want to get them to stop and refocus on you first. Raise your fingers, bang your tambourine, sing, or do whatever it is you like to do to

get their attention. Then ask them to freeze, drop to one knee, or take a seat while you remind them of the rules.

When you are finished playing games, have a debriefing session. Find out what worked and didn't work by asking questions such as these:

- ☉ *Did you like the game?*
- ☉ *Was it fun?*
- ☉ *Was there anything that confused you?*
- ☉ *What was the most fun part of the game?*
- ☉ *Did you feel included in the game?*
- ☉ *Would you like to play the game again?*

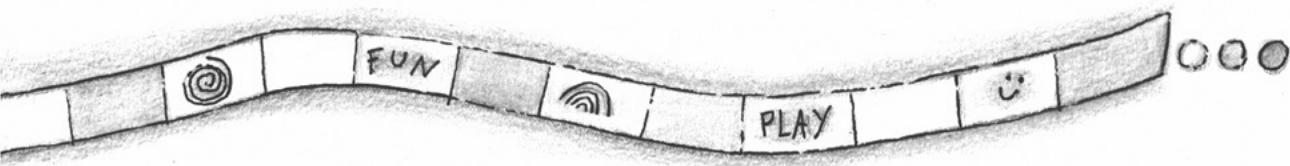


Reinforce the message of cooperation with questions like these:

- ☉ *Did it seem to you that everyone was included in the game?*
- ☉ *How did you include someone else when you were playing the game?*
- ☉ *Did you find anyone that you could help? What did you do to help him or her?*
- ☉ *Did we all win together?*
- ☉ *How can we improve the game?*

You'll see that these games will take on lives of their own. Be open and spontaneous. Expect some magic, as always happens when people come together with positive intentions!





Directions for Active Games

1. Cooperative Musical Chairs

Materials: A number of chairs equal to the number of players; a music source such as a CD player or MP3

Time Estimate: 10 minutes

Number of Players: Between 5 and 20

Object of the Game: For all players to find a seat even as chairs are removed

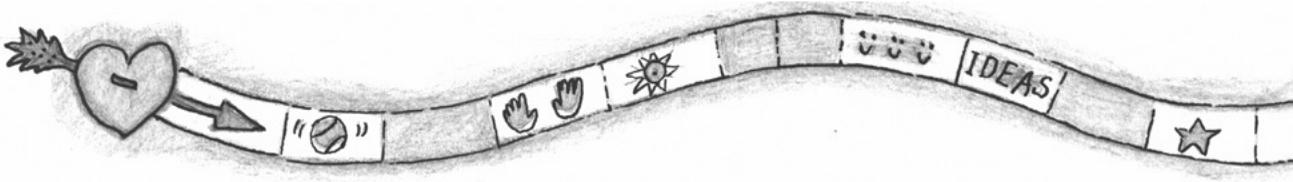
Skills: Cooperation; Balance; Large motor skills

Game Category: Active physical game; Party game

This is just like the traditional game except that no one gets eliminated—and everyone wins. To begin, arrange chairs in a long row or two rows back to back.



Have children sit in the chairs while you explain the rules. Explain to the children that they will stand around the chairs and begin walking when the music starts. When the music stops, everyone needs to quickly find a chair and sit down—sharing a chair when needed. With every round, another chair is removed. It's silly fun and a cuddly challenge for the entire group to try to fit onto a diminishing number of chairs. The group wins as a whole if they can manage to all sit on the last chair or on someone's lap who is sitting on the chair. If this is physically impossible due to the number of players, huddling together so everyone is touching is also a Win.



2. Freeze De-Freeze Tag

Materials: None needed

Time Estimate: 10 minutes

Number of Players: At least 5

Object of the Game: To freeze friends if you are a Freezer or thaw frozen friends if you are not a Freezer

Skills: Cooperation; Large motor skills

Game Category: Active physical game



A few children are the *freezers*. The freezers count to 10 while the rest of the children scatter about. After 10 seconds, the running begins. Freezers set off after the runners and try to tag them. When a child is tagged, he becomes frozen in a stride position with one arm outstretched.

The runners aim to thaw their frozen friends, which they do by shaking their hands or passing under their legs. To keep the game moving at the right pace so that freezing and thawing are both occurring, you may want to add or subtract more freezers by calling names. That makes you the “Frost Wizard!” When the group seems tired, the game is over.

Follow up the game by asking children how many of their friends they were able to unfreeze. That puts the emphasis on helping one another.

Variations: Children can play Freeze De-Freeze Tag in pairs. This variation is like the previous one, except that kids hold hands and run together. They also freeze together and unfreeze together, with both partners shaking hands with the frozen pair or going under the frozen partner’s four legs.

Precautions: This game can be played indoors or outdoors. Use common-sense precautions. Outdoors, it’s best to play in an enclosed play yard on a soft surface such as grass. When playing indoors, be sure there is enough room so that kids don’t bump into furniture and trip.



3. Balance Activities

Materials: A large rubber ball; other objects that can be balanced between partners such as oranges, balsa-wood blocks, or lightweight and flat boards (for example, game boards)

Time Estimate: 10 minutes

Number of Players: Any number of players divided into pairs

Object of the Game: To balance objects between two bodies

Skills: Cooperation; Balance; Communication

Game Category: Active physical game; Trust-building game



Players put the ball between their bodies and try to prevent it from falling to the floor. When they have mastered this, they try the other objects. Students cannot use their hands to keep the object balanced between their bodies. They can hold hands or they keep them at their sides.

Variations: In groups of 3 or 4, the children try to balance large objects (such as a hula hoop) between them. Challenging!

Precautions: Tell the children to watch for toes and avoid pushing.

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