

Introduction to the First Edition

THERE WAS BIG TROUBLE ON THE PLAYGROUND at a local independent school. Violence was present almost every day, and most of the first and second grade children had formed cliques. The parent who had the responsibility for monitoring the playground was getting angrier and angrier and lacked support for coping with the situation. The teachers acknowledged the problem and saw it as an extension of difficulties in the classroom, but their every attempt to help backfired. Some parents blamed other parents and other children for the problem, and the administration and other teachers were growing increasingly alarmed. It was at this point that we were called in. Was there any way to relieve the pressure short of major surgery?

Since this is an introduction to cooperative games and activities, we won't describe in detail the different means used to ease the tensions at this school. Cooperative games and activities weren't sufficient unto themselves, but they were the critical factor. They not only provided a common ground for all to meet on but allowed us to test the effectiveness of the other conflict-resolution techniques being employed. The games served both diagnostic and remedial purposes.

The first time we met the class on the playground, we had them play "Spaghetti." This was our way of saying to

them that we are all interconnected and, though sometimes relationships become knotted up, it is possible to find a solution. “Spaghetti” is played by having everyone stand in a circle, then each person taking the hand of someone not directly next to them. Each person must be holding the hand of two different people. The object is to recreate the circle while continuing to hold hands. This is not easy to do, and there is often no way to do it, but communication and patience are emphasized if there is to be any chance at all. Once children get the idea, they want very much to have success. This class played twice, with manners no one would have believed possible, before finally “winning.”

Next we played “Rolling Along.” In this game, children pair off, lie on their backs, and try to roll down a field with their toes connected. At first we let them pick their own partners; then we chose partners randomly; and finally we deliberately matched certain students together. Of course, there was dissatisfaction with both the random and deliberate methods of pairing, but the game was so much fun, and the release of energy so significant, that the children cooperated.

Then it was into group games such as “Chase in the Ocean” and “True or False.” Then we collectively made an obstacle course and collectively navigated it. Finally we played “Hug a Tree.” This was an important moment in the day because this game requires a high degree of trust. Children are in pairs and one is blindfolded. Then, in a fairly dense wood, the sighted child leads the blindfolded partner to a tree by a circuitous route. The blindfolded child explores the tree with all senses but sight. Then, via a different route, the child is led back to start, the blindfold removed, and the child tries to find the tree.

But how to arrange the pairs? If we put together children who had been having difficulty with one another and

they violated trust, it was altogether likely that cooperative games would not be energized into healing intensity. If, on the other hand, we allowed the “best friends” who formed the core of the cliques to pair off, then there was the probability that those cliques would be reinforced.

The understanding of how the students were connected had been developing in us during the time the previous games were played. We relied on no other person’s judgment, not even that of the teacher. It is in the course of the games, while involvement is total, that the child will forget the more superficial aspects of image and will react according to needs. For instance, two boys who were often the object of one another’s aggression had greatly enjoyed being paired in the game “Rolling Along.” They moved across the field so quickly that the other children were delighted and stopped to watch them. Everyone was surprised — and comfortable — when they realized the new roles these boys were living.

In every group there are those who have the capability of providing a “neutralizing” influence. Often, this capability is hidden, for there is great pressure to join one side or another. In this class of first and second graders, the neutralizers were well underground. Communication and “safe space” had deteriorated to that extent. But we had spotted them during the group games. They played the games for the enjoyment of it and did not worry who was next to them. They looked to us for information as to how best to play, and they were not afraid of telling those who interfered to be quiet.

The biggest clue to the identity of the neutralizers was their need to let us know they were not identified with any one group of children. They let us know in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. One child would deliberately stand apart from the group while awaiting the next round of play. Another

would deliberately join in with a child or group she didn't usually join and would give us a verbal sign that she was doing so.

The neutralizers played a critical role in the games that followed. We split the more closely attached of the cliques among the neutralizers. The rest we arranged so that they were with children they weren't ordinarily with or ones with whom they had moderate difficulties. It worked out very well. By now our allotted time was spent, and it was with a groan of displeasure that the children returned to the classroom.

Over the next few weeks, we trained the parent who was in charge of the playground. Gradually, more and more complex games were introduced, each time expanding the children's perception of safe space. Eventually we played games like "Cast Your Vote" and "Interview," in which they could express their understanding of their classroom and their ideas of what they would like it to be. To do so took great courage on their part, and an open expression of courage was not readily forthcoming. There were other difficulties in the relationship of the classroom teacher and the parents, but finally the class reached a place where, at least in the playground, the children could channel their energy into cooperation.

Principles of Application

Cooperative games are a tool, and like all tools, they must be used with skill and sensitivity. One of the beautiful and exciting aspects of cooperative games and activities is that they can be varied according to the ages and talents of the participants; they can be adapted to every learning situation. Vary the games to fit the profile of the participants.

Age is a factor for each game. Please do not take age guidelines literally; experiment, and enjoy as you go along.

But it is important to consider age, and at a deeper level, the growth stage of the children.

A thorough and meaningful understanding of the growth stages of children is one of the best tools for all education. Success with these games depends in large measure on your understanding of child development. With this understanding, games can be chosen and applied with an efficacy that is astounding. (Toward that aim, we have included an Appendix with information about Natural Learning Relationships in this third edition.)

The attitude of the game leader is critical. Children are naturally attuned to accept guidance from elders and so are able to read us in disarmingly straightforward ways. If the leader does not genuinely wish for cooperation, or in any way exhibits prejudice or manipulation, the playing of cooperative games becomes hypocritical. *As you model, so you teach.*

If a game does not work well the first time, come back to it later. Sometimes it takes several attempts before children grasp the sense of a game. Cooperative games and activities are not woven into the fabric of most of North American play. Children have not been watching cooperative games on TV since they were born. Therefore, go slowly. Do not attempt too many variations immediately. That creates the image of desperation. It is better to try lots of different games. Be honest; be patient; and enlist the children's help. You might be surprised how much children are honored by such a request and rise to the occasion with cooperative ideas.

If a child does not want to play, do not force her. Do not allow her to disrupt the group, either. Our experience has been that, after observing, most children either join or find a different constructive activity. There is something

about the cooperative nature of the event that increases a child's safe space. The atmosphere becomes gentler, and the children sense it.

Go ahead and play. Read through the games once or twice; familiarize yourself with the ones you are to play that day; and then go for it. Why not? You've got nothing to lose. Your ability to facilitate will come from experience and will come rather quickly.

Bring your sense of humor. This is the most important point of all. Make jokes, even silly ones. Lighten up; play games; and let everyone enjoy themselves. Humor is the most healthy environment for everyone — and one in which you will have access to the most information concerning the children.

Games in Different Situations

Cooperative games and activities have been used successfully in all learning environments, at parties, within the immediate family and the extended family, and at large group gatherings. We have played them with whole communities, camps, public and private schools, people who are disabled, and homeschooling collectives. They provide an excellent focus that allows appreciation of everyone's abilities in a friendly, comfortable way. Self-esteem grows; the inner sense of peace and interconnectedness comes alive.

There are games that serve as icebreakers, as a medium for feelings, as concentration intensifiers, as artistic and thinking enhancers, and as group and individual centering techniques. With a minimum of effort and a maximum of fun, cooperative games provide a way to recognize and integrate the rhythms of the participants.

In the experience described at the beginning of this introduction, the situation was conflict within a large school

group. We would like to close with descriptions of two more experiences, each of a very different nature. These three examples hardly exhaust all the situations amenable to the use of cooperative games. Hopefully, taken together, they will stimulate you to find your own approach to using them. If you require more information, feel free to write to us. We are available for consultations to help you create an application suitable for your situation.

Early in our career, we had the honor of guiding a group of children on a nature walk every Friday. There were about a dozen in the class, ranging in age from 6 to 12. Our rhythm was to take an hour-long walk in the forest that surrounds our community, have a snack, and then play cooperative games. We had lunch and then it was more games, storytelling, or acting. The aim of the class was for the children to learn how to be friends. This aim they knew. When conflict arose we stopped our activity and worked toward a resolution. No cliques were ever allowed. We all agreed that being friends is not all that easy. Every one of them was glad for the opportunity to learn. They are also angry that this skill is not usually taught, for they clearly perceive the trouble grownups have relating.

Surprisingly, nature was not the primary attraction for the children. That honor belonged to cooperative games and activities and the social dynamic arising from them. When we came across a red-tailed hawk doing a mating flight, examined coyote scat to determine its diet, surprised a flock of wild turkeys, or collected wildflowers to press, there was always great delight, wonder, and appreciation of nature. But these were not sought. The children preferred to play cooperative games. This, to us, was something of a shock but a tribute to the power of these games in satisfying a genuine need of the children.

Their favorite game is not listed in this book. They created it themselves and, to be honest, we do not know all the rules. It is called “Wild Horses,” and it has something to do with playacting horses, mountain lions, people, sheep, and whatever or whomever any participant wants to be. This game evolved from a game they invented about the Greek myths. All we asked was that everyone be included, that there be no real violence, and that no cliques formed. At first there was some resistance to these guidelines, but soon we didn’t even need to mention them. Every now and then we checked in with different children to make sure they were included in a satisfactory way. We were never disappointed.

The children’s created game, “Wild Horses,” did not appear until the class had been together over a year. We had gone through many games, most of them with success. Most games had their moment of being preferred, but on the whole each has had a similar amount of consideration. Often the children came up with their own variations.

One last experience concerns a mother and her six-year-old boy. We were asked to help when the mother was concluding a painful and violent divorce from the boy’s father. The boy — bright, energetic, and sensitive — was having a difficult time in school. He was strong and liked the spotlight. His classmates had seized upon this to use him to personify their own negative tendencies. As a result, he was often dared and taunted. Like his father, he responded violently. The label of “bad” was hung on him, and any time the others needed to participate in “badness,” this boy was the chosen object.

And, to be sure, part of him liked it. It was attention and power, and even those who did not like him needed him. One boy, frail in body and underdeveloped emotionally, particularly enjoyed leaning on him, getting hit, and both of them being punished.

While work with this family proceeded on many levels, one small but important part involved cooperative games. We wanted to reawaken this boy's sense of belonging and rightful place in the world. If he could feel that he belonged on this planet and in his family, then his life would be of value, and destructive behaviors would diminish.

Two cooperative games were chosen, and both worked very well. First, to give the mother the information of the disposition of the boy each day, an animal game was introduced around the breakfast table. The mother had many pictures of animals — everything from rearing cobras to cuddling koalas. Each morning she would hold one up, and each person would say how they resembled that animal that day. There was a younger sister in the house, and the three of them would play together. Often they acted out their animal feelings. Of course, their moods became family knowledge, and that instantly released some tension. And the mother had a much clearer picture of how to apply other remedies we were using in our attempt to improve the overall situation.

The other game was a morning family stretch game. Like the one above, it was very simple. Everyone met by the fireplace for a five-minute stretch together, with each family member being the leader on a rotating basis. They soon added the variation of a hand-coordination game. They now started their day taking a relaxed breath together. The connection that the boy needed to experience was present. He responded favorably, and his good health and well-being were soon restored.

Friends, thank you for giving us the opportunity to write about cooperative games and activities. We truly hope you will experiment with them and find them as useful as we have. In this critical juncture of human evolution, they can

help teach cooperation, respect, and friendship. These are qualities that go a long way and of which we can never get enough.

If we can be of any help to you, please do not hesitate to write.

Peace,

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Preface to the Third Edition

EVERYONE WANTS TO CREATE A GOOD AND JUST SOCIETY that cares for the education of children.

Educational choices reflect values. Engaging in cooperative activities with children as part of their education offers a playful way to grow together that benefits everyone involved.

Children are always changing. When we create rich, developmentally appropriate, and playfully engaging environments for children, we are shaping and creating a healthier and more socially just future. In cooperative games, there are no winners or losers. When playing cooperatively, there is no dominant power person. Rather, helping one another is the way we all succeed. These cooperative games are structured so that players must use pro-social skills such as sharing, encouraging, listening, and participating in order for everyone to succeed together.

We are delighted to have the honor to present this third edition of *Everyone Wins* at the request of New Society Publishers. Perhaps you can imagine how full of excitement we are to learn that the *Everyone Wins* games book has traveled in the pockets of more than 25,000 school teachers, youth group leaders, camp counselors, kindergarten teachers, playground monitors, outdoor education teachers, and many others since it was first published in

1990. Inspired by the receptivity and usefulness of the first edition, we have added 12 new games that we have been playing for the past 20 years.

As you read through this introduction you will learn about our experiences with cooperative games and activities throughout our 30-plus years of use. We ground games in child development and introduce you to how cooperative play is a foundation to building resilience. We also discuss the importance of play, learning by doing, and meeting the needs of today's children to build a more positive social world. In addition, we introduce you to how to use cooperative activities to learn about children, observe obstacles to healthy relationships, and apply remedies. Moreover we discuss the hidden benefits to adults who play. Explore with us as we share with you how everyone grows together while engaging cooperative activities with the children in your lives.

Our experiences with cooperative play

Since its first publication more than 28 years ago, *Everyone Wins* has had a profound impact on an incredibly diverse group of readers and their practices. Specifically, as reported by teachers, camp counselors, family coaches, and youth group leaders, these games, activities, and initiatives have had great value in assessing interpersonal dynamics, teaching social justice, and assessing developmental capacities.

We have used games, cooperative activities, and methods like these in schools of every pedagogical type, in board rooms to build common vision, at conferences to build community, in classrooms for interpersonal learning and to increase friendship, in schools to inspire a culture of meaning, and with adults and children in all walks of life.

In addition, the book has been used by child psychologists and family therapists. It has been sold in many countries, is

included in the national data bank on conflict resolution, and has won the Parent's Choice Award. We never would have guessed that this little book that began on scraps of paper would have such incredible impact on so many great people.

Everyone growing together

We have honed cooperative games and activities over the years by playing with others and paying attention while we do it. In all honesty, we have grown as much as the many participants in the process. In our experience, there are few engagements that have such a major impact on the future of humanity as conscientiously connecting to each child as we play. We are shaping the future by our presence, genuine participation, full engagement, and enthusiasm to meet children where they are. We are truly the child's context and part of their environment. Who we are is what we teach. Engaging in self-reflection and questioning who we are as we play offers us unparalleled opportunity for growth.

Grounding games in whole-child development

Natural Learning Relationships (NLR) is a practical and applicable whole-child developmental science. NLR details the psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual components of optimal well-being. Furthermore, it describes the dynamics by which these capacities emerge within each stage of childhood. Relationship based, NLR includes the context of the child's life: family, school, and background. It is founded on both fieldwork and the literature in child development, family systems, and contiguous psychological disciplines.

We are all born with innate capacities that need relationship in order to come out and be actualized. When we play

with children and nurture their developmental needs, we are recognizing, strengthening, and nurturing a quality that was there from the outset.

With knowledge of Natural Learning Relationships whole-child development, adults have (1) increased competence with children, (2) better communication on the child's developmental level, (3) fewer conflicts and more understanding for the child's age-specific capabilities, (4) improved relationships with each child, and (5) less frustration.

Life stages contain capacities, but development occurs *in relationship*. Developmental needs are provided during play because development is emergent (ever changing). Simply, this means that our kind awareness of the child's internal state is a statement of acceptance — obvious, subtle, explicit, tacit, or implied. When a child comes into this warm environment he opens up; imagination can flourish, and the child develops the ability to feel resourceful, bounce back from small set-backs, be a creative problem solver, ask for help when needed, and thrive in well-being. Details about Natural Learning Relationships can be found in Appendix A.

Knowing the characteristics of developmental stages gives the adult insights into the child's needs, the different perceptions of each age, and the best environment to support well-being.

Knowledge of child development is important during play because when we know how children develop and grow, we know how each age child organizes her world. We can see through the child's eyes and apprehend who she is. That knowledge leads to better connection with the child, guides healthier decisions, and inspires more appropriate expectations. As expectations become relational to the child's developmental markers, frustration decreases for both adult and child. Children are happier when their developmental

needs are met. Better connection with a child means that trust develops between adult and child. Trust leads to internal experience of well-being.

Brain development and play

What the social sciences and affective neurosciences are revealing is that the legacy of our intelligent brain is our social mind.

(Immordino-Yang, 2016)

Relationships in life shape the structural development of the brain. Our minds are open to ways in which interpersonal experiences continue to facilitate development throughout our lifespan.

The brain is a complex emergent system. The behavior of the whole cannot be predicted from the parts, because the combinations of all parts are nonlinear (often unpredictable), emergent (ever changing), self-organizing, and adaptive.

Experience shapes the brain. The brain changes throughout our lives, from the moment we are born until the moment we die. Moreover, our brains require stimulation and connection to survive and thrive. Close supportive relationships that nurture our developmental needs will stimulate positive access to our innate capacities and optimal well-being.

In addition, the field of neuroscience has revealed that emotion and learning are inextricably interconnected and interdependent. Yes, cognition and emotion cannot be separated. What is more, we tend to think deeply about things we feel for and care about. Making meaningful decisions without emotion is neurobiologically impossible (Immordino-Yang, 2016). While engaging in play and cooperative activities, we

develop emotions that guide our social endeavors; promote exploration; and lead us to discover empathy, care, compassion, and interest in others and in life.

Brain development occurs in relationship. We posit that cooperative games and activities lead to emotional intelligence. One aim of this book is to give you the tools and information so that you can make those relationships support the optimal well-being of the child and in so doing nurture your own growth and development.

Observation, obstacles, and remedies

Knowledge about child development gives us the tools to observe children at play and use cooperative games to identify obstacles and apply remedies to build trust, improve friendships, and increase intimacy. Creating classroom culture with the use of cooperative activities is a tool at your fingertips.

As you observe, you will find that children organize their world differently in each stage of their development. As children grow, the different organization of their world influences the way relationship is engaged. Observation of behaviors, vocabulary used, how children play, what they do with their body, and more gives us information about their internal world. To enter their world and form successful relationships requires understanding of each child's moment.

When children are in the company of someone who genuinely cares, they feel supported to be who they are. Learning how to focus on children's strengths while also caring for their developmental needs sets up a safe environment in which children experience trust. Providing emotional nurturing by being trustworthy adults creates an environment of trustworthiness in which children can relax, open up, and be themselves as they play. Such an environment

is a turning point for children as difficulties melt away. Knowledge about child development is critical to understanding developmentally appropriate ways to provide play environments of security, safety, trust, and authenticity.

As a result of staying connected with children in this way, we grow in confidence and inner-resilience. One facilitator said, “I remember what I need to do right now in this moment to help this child. I know I am doing the right thing. I just keep picking up and going on. I have stamina; I stay with it.” The first things she asks herself are, “What age is this child? What was the trigger? What does this child really need?” There are always insights when we are able to see children as they are, in the moment. “I find that it’s easier for me to be compassionate with myself, with the children, and with other adults when I question what a child really needs.”

Facilitator neutrality

No teacher or facilitator is ever fully objective. We are all conditioned by our life experiences. Consequently, it is very important that we each take a second look and question how our life experiences have affected our values, beliefs, and judgments. As facilitators, we must check to see to what extent our position of power in the group affects our relationships and shapes our views of the children. Do we encourage all participants to develop along their own unique paths? To what extent might our educational history “domesticate” children to fit obediently into the roles required of them by the dominant culture? To what extent can we liberate children to be critical, creative, free, active, and responsible decision makers? Can we find a way to present a core problem back to the group for them to search for solutions? Can we offer our input as a starting point for further

discussion and not as the formal “truth” or the definitive answer?

Our role as the facilitator throughout cooperative activities is not to give answers but to set up a process through which the group can look for their own answers and explore their ideas and systems of thinking.

The importance of play

We learn as we play. Play is an activity done for its own sake, characterized by means rather than an end. In cooperative play, the process is more important than the end point or goal. There is no success or failure in play, no mandatory achievement. Thus, a primary aspect of play is safety and freedom. *Play is the medium of learning for all age children — even for adults.*

The more you know about child development, the more competent and the better able you will be to create environments and relationships that give children optimal access to innate capacities at every stage of their growth. An example is how children play at learning rules through the medium of the game:

- BodyBeing children (ages 0 through 7) play with words, develop language, and actualize a more complex self.... Play remains the medium in which mastery develops.
- FeelingBeing children (ages 8 through 12) play with social relationships.
- IdealBeing children (ages 13 through 17) idealize a self and play with identities.
- ReasonableBeing children (ages 18 through 23) — organizing their world to optimize interconnectedness — play with system creation. Play leads to language, but then language becomes the field of play. Moreover, language

cannot be restricted to words or verbal-linguistic intelligence. (Luvmour, 2006)

Less play and more mandated learning results in increased anxiety and depression, delayed emotional and social development, inhibited executive functioning skills, and diminished intellectual vitality.

Play is a fundamental component of learning and allows all people (young children, adolescents, and adults) to engage in the deepest and most meaningful forms of learning, maximizing their creativity, and igniting intellectual passion.

Learning by doing

Play is what children do. Playing is learning. Playing with children is one of the most important activities we do with them, because play involves social, emotional, and cognitive development. Playful activities promote connection with others, problem solving, and social-skills development, and they provide a medium to work through stress and emotional tension and to have fun. During play, children grow to understand boundaries and limits — while at the same time pushing limits to explore what might happen (a very healthy thing to do).

Social and emotional learning is supported in cooperative play. According to Maurice Elias, director of Rutgers University's Social and Emotional Learning Lab, social emotional learning is the process through which we learn to recognize and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, and avoid negative behaviors. Children's social, emotional, and character development is promoted during cooperative activities. Above all, we should never lose sight of the importance of our modeling the value of close relationships, supporting and caring for one another, and enjoyment.

Building our social world

Discovering that cooperative games impact our society for the better is an understatement. Through cooperative play children increase their language skills, develop self-trust, negotiate skills, hypothesize, and empathize with others; these are all building blocks that are fundamental to life-long success in the workplace, in marriage, and in every community.

Relationships impact learning. Cooperative activities and games are always relational and emergent. In this context, relational means opportunities for personal and authentic encounters in which the child is known and feels that his feelings are understood. Emergent refers to the state of being in continual process, never arriving (no end state), and always moving and changing. Emergent systems continually interact with the environment — changing and adapting. Interactions in groups of human beings left free to regulate themselves tend toward spontaneous order. Our relationship with children during play requires us to adapt the game as we go, no matter how well planned or organized a game may be. A beauty of these games is that you can be creative and adapt them to meet the needs of the children and environment you are in. Many times children will come up with their own adaptations that improve everyone's experience. When we surrender to these spontaneous and creative adaptations, we are transformed in the process.

Children need meaningful experiences that connect new information with what they already know to be true. This forms “webs” of information that relates and is grouped into sets and subsets. With this information children construct their understanding of the world, adding from their experiences and observations to their repertoire of learning. When we see ourselves as part of the play environment, we

can move with it and influence what happens, but we cannot control it. Through continuous facilitated interactions and interplay, children experience their contributions as meaningful and valuable. This allows children to be active agents in shaping their world and thereby creating meaning.

Children who experience themselves as *socially valuable* throughout their childhood feel trust for themselves and for others. Trusting children have the greatest likelihood of facilitating the transition to a socially just world. When each child's contributions are recognized, appreciated, supported, and engaged, participation in social justice becomes a societal norm.

Our job is to simply know the children we are with and meet children where they are to build relationship. The games presented in this book offer you relationship-based activities for all ages to build your social world toward meaningful, connected, and socially just relationships.

Meeting the needs in today's world

The news is filled with sad stories about violence in schools. We need to create an effective response now that promotes a sense of connection and personal well-being while also advancing resilience with a sense of purpose. Prevention means being proactive.

Supportive relationships and positive learning experiences are keys to student well-being, learning, and success. Needed is an approach that values the human spirit and the development of the child as a whole. Children need to be supported in emotional well-being and other non-academic facets of the whole child that underpin their reaching their highest potential and promote positive attributes as well as meaning in life.

Within the family children develop the values and emotional metabolism they will take into the world to sustain their way of living. Within each family children are learning ethical and moral standards through role models. We are the models that children shape their relationships after and discover how to care for one another in mutually supportive and caring ways.

When children are in the company of someone who genuinely cares, they feel supported to become imaginative and resilient. Feelings of connection and a willingness to collaborate are the result. Experiential learning that occurs in cooperative activities builds connection, strengthens emotional bonds, and promotes resilience. These activities give you the tools to improve social and emotional well-being wherever you are with children (e.g., in school, playgroups, family gatherings, independent learning, and home-based education). Restoring relationships through games is an amazingly effective response to the needs in today's world. We are creating and shaping the social world in which we live during play.

Cooperative play as a foundation to building resilience

Mental health is more than an absence of pathology. Resilience is the ability to bounce back in the face of significant life challenges or adversity and thrive despite negative life experiences. It is more than coping (which can be seen as a protective factor of managing stressful circumstances); resilience has to do with recovering and overcoming adversity to actualize a positive outcome.

Empathy, compassion, and cooperation have played a fundamental role in how we evolved as a cooperative species. Empathy learned during play also expands our world, helping us to feel or imagine the feelings of another. The

result is empathy that motivates us to care about each other and act with kindness. In a world of indifference, isolation, loneliness, and destructive trends (even in children), activities that promote cooperation and social learning are needed now more than ever.

Educators who nurture the development of trust, care, and empathy serve as role models that can promote self-control and resilience — especially when educators are backed up by parental support in the home. Our experience and research has shown that adults benefit as much as children when we care for and nurture the development of resilience in our children and students.

Hidden benefits to adults who play

We do not stop playing because we grow old.... We grow old because we stop playing.

(George Bernard Shaw, playwright)

Playing with children is a process that doesn't only make us more mindful, compassionate, and resilient but deeply transforms us and the way we live our lives. Everyone who teaches learns.

Parenting is a field of play in which uncertainty, ambiguity, and adaptation are ongoing parts of our lives. There is a tremendous amount of helplessness and uncertainty. At the same time, our parenting can inspire us to live authentically, to be more aware, to gain self-knowledge, and to grow in ways that were once unimaginable.

(Luvmour, 2017)

Every day is a new opportunity to connect with our children, develop their strengths, and help them to access meaning

and purpose. Meeting children where they are with an attitude of acceptance and playfulness is a service that is simultaneously beneficial to our hearts. We are continually humbled by the enormous opportunity that meeting a child's developmental moment offers us to grow. The wonderful news is that we get many opportunities — it's not once and done. To engage with children this way requires our willing attention and active presence. These ideas will be easier to understand when they are seen, felt, and experienced in the context of play.

Remembering that we have an inexorable tendency toward wholeness, toward goodness, we are ever reorganizing in relationship with the children in our lives. Ba and I feel great gratitude for anyone who appreciates the opportunity to grow together with the children in your lives.

Who we are is what we teach.

This book is for

- Children everywhere
- Teachers of every age group
- Home-education communities
- Teachers of interpersonal curriculum in education
- All professionals who promote emotional skills
- Parents
- Counselors and therapists who work with children and families
- Childcare professionals (and anyone who cares for children)
- Youth leaders
- Camp counselors
- Grandparents
- All playful relatives and friends

- Therapists, marriage and family counselors, and health professionals
- Anyone with a child in their life

Special note

Pronouns are alternated throughout this book. *He, she, and they* are used interchangeably and do not indicate preference for one over the other by the authors.

Invitation

We close this brief introduction with an invitation. We invite everyone reading this — parents, students, teachers (of any kind), and anyone who is interested in working for a better future — to engage in play with children of all ages. Please use the materials offered in this book as well as develop your own variations. Be creative. Above all else, enjoy yourself and enjoy the children

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How to Use This Book

UNDER THE NAME OF EACH GAME you will find four categories containing information to help you evaluate its usefulness in different situations. These categories are:

Activity Level

“1” is the most active and “5” is the least active. The games are arranged by activity level. You will find the activities listed in order from 1 to 5.

Age

Age refers to the minimum age a participant needs to be to enjoy the game. All games are indexed by age at the back of the book.

Location

“In” means the game is best played indoors. “Out” means it must be played outdoors. “Inside or Outside” means the game can be played indoors or outdoors.

Group Size

This refers to the minimum amount of players necessary to play the game. All games are indexed by group size at the back of the book.

How to Use the Indices

Games within an index are in alphabetical order. Thus if you want to find a game that needs six players, go to the Games Group Size Index and look up “Six or More Players.” The games are alphabetically listed. If your players are seven and eight years old, then go to the Games Age Level Index, look up the age and cross reference with those games selected from the Games Group Size index. You are now ready to play.

The body of the game information consists of the *Description*, *Variations*, and *Special Hints*. If *Materials* are needed, they are indicated in this section as well. Don't be afraid to try your own variations — and please drop us a line with any new hints you may discover in your play!

Activity Level 1

Elbow Tag

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 8+

Location: Inside or outside

Group Size: 10+

Materials: Sturdy shoes

Game Description:

Designate an “It” and a “Rabbit.”

Arrange all other players in a circle in pairs. Between each pair create a space of (at least) a full extended arm’s length. The members of each pair hook elbows with one another then extend the other elbow, hook style, out from the side with hand on hip.

The players who are It and Rabbit start opposite one another on the outside of the circle.

On the “Go!” command, It tries to tag Rabbit. They can run inside or outside the circle (but not far). It’s a good idea to define boundaries. Rabbit runs to avoid being tagged and can hook into any free elbow. The person next to the hooked person then unhooks with his partner and becomes the Rabbit.

If Rabbit is tagged, they immediately switch places, and the Rabbit becomes It and turns to chase the new Rabbit. The new Rabbit must hook up elbows with any player in the circle quickly. Hooking and unhooking happens often.

Special Hints:

Remind players, often if necessary, to hook up quickly. Facilitate everyone getting a turn, and try to not let a fast runner dominate the game by staying Rabbit for too long.

Chase in the Ocean

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 4+

Location: Inside or outside

Group Size: 6

Game Description:

A caller shouts “ship”: and all the children run to the base at which she points. After counting three, the caller chases with arms outspread ready to gobble any child not on the base and touching another. The caller — if older — usually just misses.

Variations:

Sardine: All the children must be on base and touching one another.

Crab: The children must be back to back with one another.

Special Hints:

Make three or four areas to run to so caller can surprise the children by pointing as she calls.

Smaug’s Jewels

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 4+

Location: Inside or outside

Group Size: 5

Materials: A rag

Game Description:

The “treasure” — a rag — is placed on the ground. One child guards it. All the others try to grab it. If a thief is touched by the guardian of the treasure she takes three steps back.

Variations:

Play with two guardians and have the tagged thief take five steps back.

Special Hints:

Be the referee.

Dho – Dho – Dho

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 7+

Location: Inside or outside

Group Size: 8

Game Description:

Two teams face off. While holding her breath, one player from a team crosses the line and tries to tag one or more players and make it back to her side; all the time holding her breath and with enough air left to say Dho-Dho-Dho. All tagged players switch teams. If the player does not succeed she joins the other team.

Variations:

Vary playing area size.

Special Hints:

Not fully cooperative so monitor closely. Valuable for energetic ones to let off steam.

Giants-Wizards-Elves

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 5+

Location: Inside or outside

Group Size: 8

Game Description:

Two teams. Each team agrees on a posture for a giant, a wizard, and an elf and shows it to the other team. Each huddles and decides which creature it will be. Teams come to center line and at the count of three make the chosen posture and say the creature's name. Wizards fool Giants. Giants beat Elves. Elves trick wizards. Whoever loses has to beat it back to their safety about 20 feet away from the center line before the other team catches them. Those caught switch teams.

Special Hints:

Similar to Rock-Paper-Scissors with action.

On Your Knees

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 7+

Location: Inside or outside

Group Size: 1

Game Description:

Kneel down with back straight. Lift heels towards rump and grab ankles. Take knee steps as you are now balanced on your kneecaps.

Variations:

Try it as a group — grabbing a partner’s ankle in a relay race or a dance.

Special Hints:

Make sure no knees get hurt.

Emotional Relay Race

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 9+

Location: Inside or outside

Group Size: 12

Materials: Three bowls and three pieces of fruit

Game Description:

Three teams — each lined up behind the piece of fruit of its choice. Each player takes time to come up with their sound and movement for “sad,” “angry,” and “happy.” The bowls are set distance away. Each player picks up the fruit — runs to the bowl — puts it down — does “angry” three times — runs back to the start — does “happy” twice — back to fruit for “sad” twice — brings the fruit back to the start — takes a bite — and on to the next player.

Variations:

Can substitute other emotions or do it in tandem.

Special Hints:

Players should be in a playful mood right from the start.

Hop As One

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 5+

Location: Inside or outside

Group Size: 5

Game Description:

Players in a line — except for the leader — lift and extend left leg so the person behind can grab ankle or heel. They then place right hand on right shoulder of person in front for support. Now it's hop time.

Variations:

Switch sides — do a dance — collective timing — over obstacles.

Special Hints:

Remind them of careful coordination. Practice before getting discouraged.

Blanket Volleyball

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 8+

Location: Outside

Group Size: 6

Materials: Blankets and balls

Game Description:

Players hold the edge of the blanket. They place a ball on the blanket. They then toss the ball up by cooperatively manipulating the blanket. They try to catch it in the middle of the blanket. Score is cumulative.

Variations:

Use volleyball or beach ball. Change blanket size; define boundaries; use net. Pass the ball between two groups with blankets.

Special Hints:

Switch positions on blanket; make sure little ones do not get hurt. Skill needed. Greatly helps energetic ones to center on cooperation.

Upside Down Cycling

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 4+

Location: Inside or outside

Group Size: 2

Game Description:

Lie on back and touch bottom of feet with bottom of partner's feet. Do simultaneous cycling action first in one direction then in another.

Variations:

Try three players; eyes closed; use music.

Special Hints:

Works well for all shapes and sizes of people — even those in conflict.

Dragon Dodge Ball

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 5+

Location: Outside

Group Size: 7+

Materials: Sponge balls or rubber balls

Game Description:

All join hands in a large circle. Two people form a Dragon. One, the head, stands upright. The other, the tail, holds the head's hips and sticks her fanny out. The others pass balls around and try to hit the Dragon's fanny. If a ball hits the ground it must be passed before being thrown at the Dragon. No player can hold a ball more than three seconds. Passer who sets up the hit becomes the new tail. The former tail becomes the head. Use at least two balls at a time.

Variations:

More dragons. Vary circle size.

Special Hints:

Warn against collisions. Excellent for working out aggression.

How Do You Do?

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 8+

Location: Outside

Group Size: 10

Game Description:

All but two players join hands and form a circle. The outside two are a lost ship looking for port. They choose a pair from the circle. Holding hands, the chosen pair and the outside pair run around the circle in opposite directions attempting to get back to the vacant spot. As they pass one another, they must stop, shake hands and say “How do you do?” before continuing.

Variations:

Hop or skip around the circle. Travel with eyes closed and runners touching the circle as they move.

Special Hints:

Explain rules and direction of travel carefully. Warn against crashes. Make sure all get a turn.

Up and Around

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 8+

Location: Outside

Group Size: 2

Materials: Two-foot stick; belts; string; rubber ball

Game Description:

With a string tied to a broomstick, hang a tennis ball just above the ground. Children support the stick at their waists against their belts. Without using their hands they try to swing the ball over the stick.

Variations:

Make it wind and unwind. Play with eyes closed.

Special Hints:

Let little ones use their hands.

Blow the Ball

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 4+

Location: Inside

Group Size: 5

Materials: Ping pong ball and mats or blankets

Game Description:

One child lies on stomach on a mat. Six others grab edges of the mat and pull while the child blows the ping pong ball across the room. How fast can they do it?

Variations:

As a relay race with or without obstacles.

Special Hints:

Make sure no one player is overburdened.

Go Tag

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 8+

Location: Outside

Group Size: 10

Game Description:

Everyone squats in a line. Alternate players facing opposite directions, to the right and left. Everyone but person in front — *the chaser* — or back — *the chased* — kneels. The chaser can tap a squatter who then takes up the chase. The first chaser takes the squatter's position. The chaser must always go in the same direction. The chased can go in either direction. For example: Players 1–10 line up. Players 1, 3, 5, 7, 9 face to the right. Players 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 face to the left. Player 1 chases 10. If 1 decides that 7 has a better chance to tag 10, she taps 7 and takes her place. Player 7 takes up the chase. It's a game of timing and cunning.

Special Hints:

Practice a few times so all understand. Give everyone a chance to do everything.

It

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 6+

Location: Outside

Group Size: 16

Game Description:

Two teams. Each goes to a different tree, leaving about 150 feet between them. One player calls It and starts running toward the other tree. If she touches the tree she scores a point. But anyone who touches her or is touched by her automatically becomes It. She can deliberately touch another on her team, who then continues toward the same goal. But if touched by a member of the other team, It is transferred and that player tries to move to her tree. No one can block or help the runner as she advances toward her tree.

Special Hints:

It is as if a spirit is being transferred at touch. Points are hard to score but not impossible.

Cooperative Relay Races

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 5+

Location: Outside

Group Size: 8+

Materials: Varies according to type of race

Game Description:

Divide children into teams. They race for a best collective time while negotiating a course.

Variations:

Obstacles; crawling; running backwards; skipping; with golf ball in a spoon.

Special Hints:

Let children make up their own order of running; be prepared for it to get crazy.

True or False

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 7+

Location: Outside

Group Size: 8

Game Description:

Two teams, “Trues” and “Falses,” face off in the middle of a field with a safety area for each team about 20 feet behind. Leader makes a statement about nature. If correct, Trues chase Falses. If incorrect, Falses chase Trues. Anyone caught goes to the other team.

Variations:

Statements about academics; or any other subject.

Special Hints:

Let confusion reign before supplying the correct answer. Choose questions appropriate to knowledge of players. This is an excellent teaching game.

Big Toe

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 7+

Location: Inside or outside

Group Size: 1

Game Description:

Squat down, grab your toes, bend your knees and try to jump forward as far as possible.

Variations:

Do it as a collective long jump or choreograph as a dance.

Special Hints:

You'll improve with practice. It is funny as a group.

Pull Together

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 5+

Location: Outside

Group Size: 10

Materials: Large strong rope

Game Description:

Leader divides children into two equal teams so when they pull on the rope as hard as they can, neither team moves.

Variations:

Tie a rope around a heavy object and try to move it.

Toby Terrific Turtle

Activity Level: 1

Age Level: 6+

Location: Outside

Group Size: 5

Materials: Obstacles; green clothes; old blanket

Game Description:

Group huddles under blanket. All are blindfolded except the leader. Group moves together through obstacles as quickly as possible. Everyone gets a chance to be leader.

Variations:

Play in mud puddles! Group can hold hands.

Special Hints:

Be careful!