

# Inclusive Game Play for School Aged Children



By Bruce Hurst

**G**roup games and activities are an important part of life in an outside School Hours Care Service. They provide important experiences that contribute to the development of all children. Games and activities provide the opportunity for children to further develop fine and gross motor skills in a fun way. Game and activities also support the development of skills such as problem solving and conflict resolution and allow for the development of social skills such as learning to cooperate, team work, leadership, and encouraging and communicating with peers.

The secret to successful game play lies in maximising the participation of all children. Inclusive game leaders involve all children in the game all of the time, ensuring high levels of activity, enjoyment and skill development without sacrificing self esteem for any member of the group.



## Small Groups Are Great

OSHC services cater for a wide range of ages and abilities. Often I see workers conducting games with groups of 20 or more children. In large groups like this, children who are younger, or at a physical disadvantage are often pushed aside by larger and stronger children. By having smaller teams, it allows all children to play a more meaningful role in the game, enhancing their enjoyment, skill development and sense of belonging. Next time you run a relay race; have 4 teams instead of 2. It will give each child twice the activity and twice the fun.

## Being a scorer isn't the same as playing

Inclusion means that all children have the opportunity to participate equally in an activity. Often child care workers try to include children with additional needs in a token way, be having them act as referees, scorers or cheer squads. Most children want to play, not assist staff. It is your role to think creatively about how all children can participate fully in the activity and experience that are on offer in your service.

## Competitive Games

Competition helps to motivate some of us to achieve and learn, but we need to learn how to use it positively. Don't focus on who wins a game. For every child who is experiencing the joy of winning, there is at least one other who will be experiencing failure. If we want to foster self esteem and confidence in children it may be better to focus on individual and team achievements.

# Inclusive Game Play for School Aged Children

By Bruce Hurst

## Find Alternatives to Elimination

Many of the games we play involve the systematic elimination of children with the aim of having an ultimate winner. Games like Poison Ball, Musical Chairs and Dodge Ball all do this. There are many problems associated with eliminating children from activities. Children who aren't engaged in activity may become bored and present workers with behavioural challenges. Once a child is out of a game, they are no longer able to have fun, learn skills and feel part of that group.

Eliminating children contributes to a cycle where the most talented and skilled children receive the most opportunities to develop and improve.

It is almost always the same children who are eliminated from activities first. These children, by not participating, have reduced opportunities to reach the same skill level as their peers. Think carefully about the rules for your activities and try and find alternative to sitting children out.

---

## Choosing Teams

Most people can remember the process of 'choosing captains' from our school days. I'm sure most of us can also remember the child from the class who was always selected last. Rarely would games and activities be fun for this child. The process of captains selecting their teams usually becomes a popularity contest with the strongest and fittest being chosen first and the slow and less physically able selected last, reinforcing the notion that they are somehow less important than other children. Imagine how hurt a child would feel after 12 years of school and child care being selected last all of the time. Sometimes, the selection process can become very damaging with opposing captains arguing over 'who has to have them;' in their team. It saddens me to walk into service and still see workers choosing teams in this way.

### IT'S NOT DIFFICULT

Playing games inclusively is not difficult.

- » Choose teams in a friendly and fair fashion
- » Find alternative to eliminating children from activities
- » Involve children with additional needs in a meaningful way
- » Keep groups and teams small

For further information and advice, contact CHILD Australia.

5 Carson Road, Malaga WA 6090

Telephone: 08 9249 4333 ☎ Facsimile: 08 9249 4366

Email: [admin@childaustralia.org.au](mailto:admin@childaustralia.org.au) ☎ Website: <http://www.childaustralia.org.au>