

1988

Family Games and Recreation Activities

Dale N. Le Fevre
Sonoma State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions>

Recommended Citation

Le Fevre, Dale N. (1988) "Family Games and Recreation Activities," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 7 : No. 3 , Article 15.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/visions/vol7/iss3/15>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Visions in Leisure and Business by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

FAMILY GAMES AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES

BY

DALE N. LE FEVRE, INSTRUCTOR

SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY
PO BOX 51
MANCHESTER, CALIFORNIA 95459

ABSTRACT

In modern America, family games and activities have largely disappeared. However, in the last decade a number of activities which have started to meet his needs. The focus is on New Games, an activity that the author knows and does best.

New Games is for all people regardless of age, size, sex or ability. Some games are old, some slightly changed, others new or invented by participants. Winning is not important--playing and having fun is. The rules are flexible and no equipment is needed, just people.

Changing a New Game is part of the game. New Games can be played practically anywhere. They can also be used to relax people, open up communication, and teach motor and perceptual skills. New Games can even be used as a warm up for other activities.

FAMILY GAMES AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES

WHAT FAMILY GAMES?

As the last decade of the twentieth century approaches, it seems that the concept of family has undergone some radical changes from what it was thirty years ago. The nuclear family is now almost non-existent. Today everyone lives their own life, even if they happen to share the same house. How this has affected games and recreation activities is that they have become highly specialized by age, size, sex and skill. Family outings and activities including grandparents, parents and children are a rarity if they happen at all. There seems to be no common grounds on which to meet.

Given this general background, how can the generations with their great variations come together? Rather than try to explain this in detail with many possibilities, I'll focus on one that works that I know best: New Games.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT NEW GAMES?

First and foremost, New Games are for everyone, not just alpha types in their twenties. I've played with a wide variety of people and have seen old folks and children hugging to become unfrozen for the "Wizard's" spell, families and singles getting all tangled up in a "Giant Knot," mentally and physically handicapped people becoming "Fire Engines," police and prisoners protecting their mutual leaders from the "Detective"--sometimes all these people were in the same game! It's hard for anyone to resist joining, but no one is chastised for not doing so, either.

Some New Games are ones you know but haven't played for years or that have been changed to make them new. Others are games you've never seen before, and still others are invented by you. Some games, like "Cat and Mice," are rough while some, like "Captain Video," are gentle and quiet. All are safe.

While a number of the games include competition, no one cares or remembers who wins or loses. There is no pressure or need to win, hence there is no anxiety about losing. People play with one another rather than against one another. Players are not eliminated; they simply change roles and keep playing. No special treatment is given to the winner: "You're the last one left? Great, you can start the next game."

Playing is just as exciting for someone who has played the games many times as it is for the first-time player. The games don't get boring because they are different each time you play them. I'm never sure what will happen! Even though I've introduced some games more than a hundred times and think I know everything about them, players just being introduced to them can sometimes think of a wonderful variation that never occurred to me.

By encouraging suggestions and responding positively to them, I invite everyone to participate by using their imagination. Though rules are given to start a game, they are not chiseled in stone. Everybody's ideas count. Sometimes the ideas flop. So what? Who cares? At least we tried it. We can always go back to what we started with or try something else. Very often, though, we end up with a better game.

NO TOYS, JUST US!

Unlike many games or activities, New Games require no equipment. I know many people still identify New Games with the Earth Ball, parachute and boffers. But this gimmicky equipment is expensive and therefore not economically feasible for most people. It's also not easy to find. There are other problems: stationary apparatus is generally accessible to small numbers, while equipment that can be moved always involves transport scheduling, and all equipment requires maintenance and replacement.

The main ingredient in New Games is the player. People discover how

much fun it can be to simply play games cooperatively with each other. A unique sense of community develops where people feel closely connected. They can let go of their normal roles in a supportive atmosphere that allows them to express themselves more freely.

ANYBODY ANYPLACE

These games can be played almost anywhere. In reply to a question from Simon Vinkenoog, a Dutch author I met in Amsterdam, asking whether I could do a few games in his cramped, crowded work room at home, before I could think I blurted out confidently, "I can do them in a closet!"

An important aspect I stress is that each player develop a concern for the safety of fellow players so that everyone plays fully but no one is ever hurt. This provides us with a model of cooperative behavior that is constantly reinforced during the games session. Since it doesn't matter who wins, and since by the very nature of the games, players are constantly changing role or teams, there is very little chance to develop animosity.

There are important psychological and sociological aspects to the playing experience. In games where there is no "loser," a person can develop self-esteem and a more positive self-image. There isn't any worry about getting chosen last for a team or pressure about blowing a big play that loses the game. There isn't the constant feedback of "You're not good enough." You ARE good enough. All you have to do is join the game.

It doesn't matter if you can't do the action, such as running; you simply do the best you can. No one is judging. Or you can always suggest a change, such as s-l-o-w m-o-t-i-o-n. It doesn't destroy the game as long as the other players are included in making the decision. An alternative that is fun and a challenge can always (repeat: ALWAYS) be found. No New Games leader ever says, "You can't play. Go away!"

When playfully expressing oneself, one relaxes, often unconsciously, and tension dissolves. People who are normally shy, withdrawn or afraid of meeting new people regularly "forget" how they are supposed to be and play without inhibition.

Finally, basic exercises of any kind can be pretty boring boring boring, but when the exercise can be put in the form of a game, it becomes an aD-vEn-tURE. Since the elements of the games are highly adaptable, they can be changed to get the desired result. For instance, any motor or perceptual skill can be developed through the use of games. Many of these skills are already a part of most games, and it merely requires finding a game that has the desired movement or discrimination. If one can't be found, you can change an existing game to include what you need or invent a "new" game!

And, to say it one more time, New Games can be done by everyone, all at the same time in the same game. If that sounds redundant, even within that sentence, it's because such activities have become so unbelievable

these days, that it has to be said again, just to make sure you read it right. New Games are by no means the only family activity, either, they are just the best ones I know. So, mom, dad, kids and grandparents, go out and play! New Games are a starting point.

REFERENCES

1. D. N. LeFevre, New Games for the Whole Family , Perigee Books, New York, New York, pgs. 30-33, 1988.