

Leader cards

57 games · two cards per page, cut on the dashed line

CARD	GAME	PEOPLE	TIME	SECTION
1	Steal the Bacon	8-30	10-20 min	Meeting room
2	Crows and Cranes	10-40	10-15 min	Meeting room
3	Captain's Coming	8-60	5-15 min	Meeting room
4	Red Light, Green Light	5-30	5-15 min	Meeting room
5	Cat and Mouse	12-30	10-15 min	Meeting room
6	Snake in the Grass	8-30	5-10 min	Meeting room
7	Bandana Tails	6-40	5-15 min	Meeting room
8	Mother, May I?	4-20	5-15 min	Meeting room
9	Capture the Flag	12-60	20-60 min	Outdoor and field
10	Sharks and Minnows	8-40	10-20 min	Outdoor and field
11	Blob Tag	10-40	5-15 min	Outdoor and field
12	Spud	6-20	10-20 min	Outdoor and field
13	Kick the Can	6-25	20-40 min	Outdoor and field
14	Fox and Geese	6-20	10-20 min	Outdoor and field
15	Prisoner's Base	10-30	20-40 min	Outdoor and field
16	Smugglers	10-40	30-60 min	Outdoor and field
17	Hare and Hounds	6-30	30-60 min	Outdoor and field
18	Story Chain	4-30	10-20 min	Campfire
19	Fortunately, Unfortunately	4-30	10-15 min	Campfire
20	I'm Going Camping	4-20	10-20 min	Campfire
21	Night Sounds	2-30	5-15 min	Campfire
22	Star Hunt	2-30	15-30 min	Campfire
23	Skit Bag	8-40	20-40 min	Campfire
24	Cheers and Applause	5-100	5-15 min	Campfire
25	Flashlight Tag	6-25	15-30 min	Campfire
26	Blindfold Tent Pitch	4-8	20-40 min	Patrol challenges
27	String Burn Challenge	3-6	20-40 min	Patrol challenges
28	Tarp Shelter Race	3-6	20-30 min	Patrol challenges
29	Pack Your Pack Relay	4-8	15-25 min	Patrol challenges
30	Tripod Lashing Challenge	3-6	20-40 min	Patrol challenges
31	String Cup Stack	4-8	15-25 min	Patrol challenges
32	Marshmallow Catapult	3-6	30-45 min	Patrol challenges
33	Camp Scavenger Hunt	4-60	30-60 min	Patrol challenges
34	Balloon Volleyball	6-30	10-20 min	Rainy day
35	Paper Airplane Contest	2-40	20-40 min	Rainy day
36	Paper Snowball Fight	8-60	5-10 min	Rainy day
37	Sketch Relay	6-40	15-25 min	Rainy day
38	Hot Potato	6-25	5-10 min	Rainy day
39	Paper Football	2-30	10-30 min	Rainy day
40	Kim's Game	2-40	10-20 min	Kim's game and skills
41	Feely Bag	2-30	10-15 min	Kim's game and skills
42	Sound Kim's Game	2-40	10-15 min	Kim's game and skills
43	Knot Relay	4-40	10-20 min	Kim's game and skills
44	Knot Chain	4-40	10-15 min	Kim's game and skills
45	First Aid Scenario Relay	6-40	20-40 min	Kim's game and skills
46	Improvised Stretcher Relay	6-30	20-30 min	Kim's game and skills
47	Compass Triangle	2-30	20-30 min	Kim's game and skills
48	Compass Point Call	4-40	5-10 min	Kim's game and skills
49	Pace and Estimate	2-40	20-30 min	Kim's game and skills
50	Trail Signs Tracking	4-30	20-40 min	Kim's game and skills
51	Silent Ball	6-30	5-15 min	Quiet games
52	Heads Up, Seven Up	10-35	10-20 min	Quiet games
53	Sleeping Lions	5-40	5-10 min	Quiet games
54	Keeper of the Keys	6-30	10-20 min	Quiet games
55	Who's Missing?	8-30	5-15 min	Quiet games
56	Signal Drill	4-60	5-10 min	Quiet games
57	What Changed?	2-30	5-15 min	Quiet games

Steal the Bacon

also: Snatch the Bandana, Steal the Flag

8-30 people · 10-20 min · indoors or out · energy: high · light touch · ages: 6+

Two numbered teams face each other; when the leader calls a number, those two players race to grab the bandana and get it home without being tagged.

YOU NEED

A bandana or soft object, tape or cones for two lines

SETUP

Tape two parallel lines about 30 feet apart. Split the group into two even teams, one on each line, and number each team's players from 1 up so both teams have the same numbers. Put the bandana in the middle.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Players stand behind their team's line. Matching numbers should not stand directly opposite each other.
2. The leader calls a number, for example "Four!"
3. Both number fours run to the middle. The goal is to grab the bandana and carry it back across your own line.
4. If you grab it and your opponent tags you before you cross your line, their team scores. If you get home untagged, your team scores.
5. If neither player grabs it, they can feint and circle as long as they like. Call a second number to add pressure.

6. Play to 10 points or until everyone has run several times.

SAFETY

- Tags are a one-hand touch on the back or shoulder, never a shove or a grab of clothing.
- Keep the play area clear of chairs and at least 10 feet from walls, so nobody slides into one going for the bandana.

LEADER TIPS

- Call numbers so that faster and slower players meet evenly; you know who's who.
- Calling two or three numbers at once keeps everyone involved and makes for great chaos.
- With younger kids, drop tagging: first one to touch the bandana wins the point.

VARIATIONS

- Math version: call "3 plus 2" and the fives run.
- Skills version: the first runner home must tie a square knot in the bandana before the point counts.

Crows and Cranes

also: Rats and Rabbits

10-40 people · 10-15 min · indoors or out · energy: high · light touch · ages: 6-16

Two teams line up at the center; the leader calls "crows" or "cranes," and the called team runs for home while the other team chases.

YOU NEED

Tape or cones for a center line and two safe lines

SETUP

Mark a center line and a safe line about 20 feet behind each side. Name one team Crows and the other Cranes. Teams stand on either side of the center line, a few feet back, facing each other.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The leader calls "Crrrrrrrows!" or "Crrrrrrranes!", stretching out the first sound so nobody knows which until the end.
2. If Crows is called, the Crows turn and run for their safe line while the Cranes chase them.
3. Anyone tagged before reaching the safe line joins the other team.
4. Everyone returns to the center for the next call. Play until one team is very small or time runs out.

SAFETY

- Running is toward the walls, so the safe lines must be well short of them. Use cones, not a wall, as home.
- Players chasing must stop at the safe line; no diving tags.

LEADER TIPS

- The drawn-out "Crrrr" is what makes this game. Ham it up.
- Throw in a fake now and then, like "Crrrrrackers!", where nobody should move. Anyone who runs on a fake just walks back; nobody is out.

VARIATIONS

- Use true/false statements: if the statement is true the Crows run, if false the Cranes run. Good for reviewing facts from the meeting.

Captain's Coming

also: Ship, Shore, Captain's Coming

8-60 people · 5-15 min · indoors or out · energy: high · light touch · ages: 5-14

Players act out a ship's crew: the leader calls commands and everyone races to do the right action.

SETUP

Name one end of the room "bow" and the other "stern." Teach four or five commands before you start, with a demonstration of each.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Everyone starts in the middle of the room.
2. The leader calls commands: "Bow!" (run to the front), "Stern!" (run to the back), "Hit the deck!" (lie flat), "Captain's coming!" (stand still and salute), "Man the lifeboats!" (sit in threes and row).
3. Add commands as the group learns them, for example "Scrub the deck" (pretend to scrub on hands and knees).
4. Instead of putting people out, give anyone who's last or wrong a silly job, like being the captain's parrot, and let them keep playing.

SAFETY

- Before "Hit the deck," make sure there's room to lie down without kicking a neighbor.

- Lifeboat groups should form by walking, not by grabbing people.

LEADER TIPS

- Speed up as the group gets better, and repeat commands in a row ("Bow! Bow!") to catch people out.
- Let a youth leader be the captain after a few rounds.

VARIATIONS

- For a mixed-age group, change the count for lifeboats ("Lifeboats for four!") so younger kids get pulled in.

Red Light, Green Light

5-30 people · 5-15 min · indoors or out · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 5-10

Players creep toward the leader on "green light" and freeze on "red light"; anyone caught moving goes back to the start.

YOU NEED

Tape or a rope for a start line

SETUP

Mark a start line. The caller stands 40 to 60 feet away, facing the group.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The caller turns their back and calls "Green light!" Players walk or run toward the caller.
2. The caller calls "Red light!" and turns around. Everyone must freeze.
3. Anyone the caller sees moving goes back to the start line.
4. The first player to touch the caller becomes the next caller.

SAFETY

- On a slick floor, make it walking only.

LEADER TIPS

- Add "Yellow light" (move in slow motion) once the group has the basics.
- The caller should name the movers out loud so there's no arguing.

VARIATIONS

- Animal version: green light means "move like a bear," and the caller changes the animal each round.

Cat and Mouse

also: Doors and Windows

12-30 people · 10-15 min · indoors or out · energy: moderate · light touch · ages: 6-12

Players hold hands in a circle that acts as a house; they raise or lower their arms to let the mouse through and block the cat.

SETUP

Choose one cat and one mouse. Everyone else forms a circle holding hands, with the mouse inside and the cat outside.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The cat tries to tag the mouse.
2. The circle helps the mouse: players raise their joined hands to open a door for the mouse and lower them to block the cat.
3. The cat may not break through joined hands or crawl under them.
4. When the cat tags the mouse, or after two minutes, choose a new cat and mouse.

SAFETY

- Circle players keep their hands low and soft; no clotheslining the cat with raised arms.
- Cat and mouse run around the circle, never through it at full speed.

LEADER TIPS

- Time each round. Two minutes is long enough; a cat who can't catch the mouse quickly gets frustrated.
- Let the circle play favorites only within reason. If it becomes unfair, add a second mouse.

Snake in the Grass

8-30 people · 5-10 min · indoors · energy: moderate · light touch · ages: 5-11

One player is a snake who slides on their belly and tags ankles; tagged players become snakes too.

YOU NEED

A carpeted floor or mats

SETUP

Clear a space on a carpet or gym mats. One player lies on their stomach in the middle as the snake.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Everyone else must touch the snake once to start, then may move anywhere in the play area.
2. The snake moves only on its belly, using its arms, and tries to tag feet and ankles.
3. Anyone tagged becomes a snake and lies down where they were tagged.
4. The last person standing is the first snake in the next round.

SAFETY

- Shoes off for the walkers if snakes are on a hard floor, so nobody gets stepped on with a sole.

- Walkers may not jump over snakes.

LEADER TIPS

- It's a great game for the first five minutes of a meeting while people arrive: latecomers just join as walkers.

Bandana Tails

also: Flag Tag, Tail Tag

6-40 people · 5-15 min · indoors or out · energy: high · light touch · ages: 6+

Everyone tucks a bandana in their waistband like a tail and tries to collect other players' tails while protecting their own.

YOU NEED

One bandana or strip of cloth per player

SETUP

Each player tucks a bandana into the back of their waistband with at least half of it hanging out. Set clear boundaries.

HOW TO PLAY

1. On "go," everyone tries to pull other players' tails while keeping their own.
2. Players may not hold their own tail or tuck it in tighter.
3. If you lose your tail, you can keep playing and collecting; you just can't be pulled again.
4. After three minutes, count tails. Then everyone takes a tail back and plays again.

SAFETY

- Pull the tail only; no grabbing shirts, arms or waistbands.
- Tuck bandanas into a waistband, never around the neck or into a belt loop where they could catch.

LEADER TIPS

- Team version: two colors of bandana, and each team counts the other team's tails at the end.

VARIATIONS

- Patrol version: each patrol defends a captain, and the round ends when a captain loses a tail.

Mother, May I?

also: Captain, May I?

4-20 people · 5-15 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 5-9

Players ask permission before taking each step toward the leader, who answers yes or no and can add silly moves.

SETUP

Players stand on a start line. The leader stands about 30 feet away.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The leader gives one player an instruction: "Maria, take three giant steps."
2. That player must ask "Mother, may I?" (or "Leader, may I?") before moving.
3. The leader says "Yes, you may" or "No, you may not," and may change it: "No, but you may take two baby steps."
4. A player who moves without asking goes back to the start.
5. The first player to reach the leader takes over.

SAFETY

- Keep moves things everyone can do: no backflips. Hops and spins are fine.

LEADER TIPS

- It's a manners game in disguise, so it works well with very young groups and new dens.
- Invent steps that fit your group: frog hops, crab walks, tiptoes.

Capture the Flag

12-60 people · 20-60 min · outdoors · energy: high · light touch · ages: 8+

Two teams each guard a flag in their territory and try to capture the other team's flag and carry it home without being tagged.

YOU NEED

Two flags or bandanas, cones or rope for a center line, two jail markers

SETUP

Split a field in half with a visible center line. Each team hides or places its flag in its own half where it can be seen, and marks a jail area near the back of its half.

HOW TO PLAY

1. On your own side you're safe. On the other team's side, you can be tagged.
2. If you're tagged on enemy ground, you go to their jail.
3. A teammate can free you by reaching the jail untagged and tagging you; you both get a free walk back.
4. If you grab the enemy flag, you must carry it back across the center line without being tagged. If you're tagged carrying it, the flag goes back where it was.
5. The first team to bring the other flag home wins the round.

SAFETY

- Walk the boundaries together before you start, and keep the field away from roads, water, steep banks and poison ivy.
- Tags are a touch, not a tackle. Ban flag guarding within 10 feet of the flag so nobody gets piled on.
- Set a recall signal (three whistle blasts) and practice it once.

LEADER TIPS

- Have each team pick a few guards and a few attackers; otherwise everyone attacks and nobody defends.
- Large or wooded fields need an adult at the center line and one roaming.
- Rounds of 15 to 20 minutes keep it moving. Swap sides at half time.

VARIATIONS

- Night version with glow sticks on each player and a lantern on each flag, only on a field your group has walked in daylight.
- Many-flag version: each team has five small flags, and the round ends after 20 minutes. Most flags wins.

Sharks and Minnows

also: Pom-Pom Pull-Away, Octopus

8-40 people · 10-20 min · indoors or out · energy: high · light touch · ages: 6-16

Minnows try to run from one end of the field to the other; sharks in the middle tag them, and tagged minnows become sharks.

YOU NEED

Cones for two end lines

SETUP

Mark two end lines 50 to 80 feet apart. Choose one or two sharks to start in the middle. Everyone else lines up on one end as minnows.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The sharks call "Fishy, fishy, cross my ocean!"
2. All minnows must run to the other end line.
3. Any minnow tagged becomes a shark for the next crossing.
4. Keep crossing back and forth until one minnow is left. That player starts as the shark next round.

SAFETY

- Tag below the shoulders with an open hand. No pushing.
- With mixed ages, give younger players their own lane or let them be minnows twice.

LEADER TIPS

- Short rounds and a fresh start keep slower runners from spending most of the game as sharks.
- Seaweed version: tagged minnows sit where they're tagged and tag from the ground, which slows the game and lets everyone stay involved.

Blob Tag

also: Amoeba Tag, Chain Tag

10-40 people · 5-15 min · indoors or out · energy: high · light touch · ages: 7+

Two players join hands to form the blob; everyone they tag joins the chain until the blob catches everyone.

YOU NEED

Cones for boundaries

SETUP

Mark a square play area about 50 feet across. Pick two players to hold hands as the starting blob.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The blob chases the other players and may tag only with the free hands at each end.
2. Tagged players join the blob by holding hands.
3. When the blob reaches four people, it splits into two blobs of two.
4. Play until everyone is caught. The last two players free are the first blob next round.

SAFETY

- Blobs move at a jog, not a sprint; a chain whipping around a corner can pull someone off their feet.

- If the chain breaks, it must stop and rejoin before tagging again.

LEADER TIPS

- Smaller boundaries make faster games. Shrink the space if it drags.
- Watch for blobs dragging the smallest player; split them sooner if so.

Spud

6-20 people · 10-20 min · outdoors · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 8-16

One player throws a ball high and calls a number; that player catches it and yells "Spud!" and everyone else freezes while the catcher tries to hit someone below the waist.

YOU NEED

A soft playground ball

SETUP

Everyone gets a number. Players stand in a tight group around the thrower.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The thrower tosses the ball straight up and calls a number.
2. Everyone else scatters. The player whose number was called catches or retrieves the ball and shouts "Spud!"
3. Everyone freezes. The player with the ball may take three giant steps toward anyone.
4. They throw the ball gently at that player, below the waist. A hit gives the target a letter (S, then P, then U, then D). A miss gives the thrower a letter.
5. Whoever got the letter throws next. Collecting all four letters means sitting out one round, then rejoining.

SAFETY

- Soft ball only, and throws below the waist. Anything at the head is a letter for the thrower.
- The frozen target may dodge by moving their upper body but must keep their feet planted.

LEADER TIPS

- Kids who are new to the group may not know each other's numbers yet; use first names instead.

Kick the Can

6-25 people · 20-40 min · outdoors · energy: moderate · light touch · ages: 8+

A hide-and-seek game where the seeker guards a can; caught players go to jail, and any hider who kicks the can frees them.

YOU NEED

An empty plastic jug or can with no sharp edges

SETUP

Put the can in an open spot. Set clear boundaries and a jail area near the can. Choose one seeker.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The seeker covers their eyes at the can and counts to 50 while everyone hides.
2. The seeker searches. When they spot someone, they race back to the can, touch it, and call out the hider's name and location. That player goes to jail.
3. Any free hider who sneaks in and kicks the can frees everyone in jail. The seeker must put the can back and count to 20 before searching again.
4. When everyone is in jail, the first player caught becomes the new seeker.

SAFETY

- Use a plastic jug, not a metal can with edges. Kick it along the ground, never in the air.
- Set off-limits areas clearly: no hiding in vehicles, sheds, on roofs or near water.
- Do a headcount at the end of every round.

LEADER TIPS

- Dusk is the classic time, but stop before it's fully dark unless your group has a night plan.
- If one player is seeker too long, add a second seeker.

Fox and Geese

6-20 people · 10-20 min · outdoors · energy: high · light touch · ages: 6-14

A tag game played on paths stamped in snow in the shape of a wheel; everyone must stay on the paths, and the hub is safe.

YOU NEED

Fresh snow, or chalk or rope to mark the wheel

SETUP

Tramp a big circle in fresh snow, then two or more paths crossing through the middle like spokes. The center where they cross is the safe hub. On grass or pavement, mark the wheel with rope or chalk.

HOW TO PLAY

1. One player is the fox. Everyone else is a goose.
2. Everyone must stay on the paths. Stepping off the path while being chased means you're caught.
3. Only one goose at a time may stand on the hub. If another arrives, the first must leave.
4. A tagged goose becomes the fox.

SAFETY

- On icy or packed snow, make it a walking game.
- Keep the wheel away from slopes, fences and parked cars.

LEADER TIPS

- This is an old winter game and one of the few that's better in snow than on grass. Save it for the first good snowfall.

Prisoner's Base

also: Prisoner's Bars

10-30 people · 20-40 min · outdoors · energy: high · light touch · ages: 9+

An old running game where players dare each other out from their home base; you may only tag players who left their base before you did.

YOU NEED

Cones or rope for bases and prisons

SETUP

Mark two home bases at opposite ends of a field, and a prison area beside each base. Split into two teams.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Players start at their home base. To begin, one player runs out to dare the other team.
2. The key rule: you may only tag an opponent who left their base before you left yours. Whoever left most recently is the hunter.
3. Touching your home base again resets you, so you become "fresh" when you run out next.
4. A tagged player goes to the other team's prison. A teammate can free them by reaching the prison untagged.

5. A team wins when all opponents are in prison, or when the most prisoners are held at the whistle.

SAFETY

- The left-first rule creates arguments. Use an adult or older youth as referee for the first games.
- Touch tags only.

LEADER TIPS

- Prisoner's Base has been played in England for centuries. Telling older kids that makes them more willing to try a game with an odd rule.
- Start with only five players per side until the dare rule clicks, then play with everyone.

Smugglers

also: Smugglers Over the Border

10-40 people · 30-60 min · outdoors · energy: moderate · light touch · ages: 10+

A wide game: one team tries to sneak a secret "contraband" slip across a border and into town; the other team guards the border and searches.

YOU NEED

A few slips of paper (the contraband), rope or cones for the border and town

SETUP

Mark a long border line across a big field or along a trail, and a town base well behind it. One team guards; the other team are smugglers, starting far on the other side. The smugglers secretly give one player the contraband slip.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Guards spread out along the border and may walk but not run until a smuggler crosses.
2. Smugglers cross the border any way they like: all at once, in pairs, one by one.
3. A guard who tags a smuggler may ask them to show what they're carrying. Smugglers without the slip go free back to the start.
4. If the player carrying the contraband reaches town untagged, the smugglers win. If they're caught, the guards win.

5. Swap roles each round.

SAFETY

- Use a site you've walked in daylight with clear limits, and post an adult where the border meets any road or water.
- Searching means showing your hands and pockets yourself; nobody touches another player's clothing.
- Players stay in pairs if the area includes woods.

LEADER TIPS

- Decoy slips that say "nothing" make it more fun: the guards don't know who to chase.
- A version of this game appears in Baden-Powell's 1908 book on scouting, with the smuggler wearing tracking irons. Ours uses a slip of paper and no tracking.

VARIATIONS

- Dispatch version: the slip is a message to deliver to a leader in town within 20 minutes.

Hare and Hounds

also: Paper Chase, Trail Hunt

6-30 people · 30-60 min · outdoors · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 9+

One small group (the hares) lays a trail with markers; the rest (the hounds) follow it a few minutes later and try to catch up.

YOU NEED

Trail markers: chalk, sticks, or biodegradable flagging tape that you remove afterward

SETUP

Pick two or three hares and give them markers and a 10-minute head start. Agree on a trail area and a finish point.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Hares lay the trail, leaving a marker every 30 to 50 feet within sight of the last.
2. Hares may lay short false trails, but must mark the dead end with an X.
3. Hounds follow the trail as a group. When the trail splits, they must work out which branch is real.
4. If the hounds reach the hares before the finish, the hounds win. If the hares reach the finish first, they win.
5. The last group on the trail picks up every marker.

SAFETY

- Hares travel in at least a pair and stay on agreed trails, never off-trail in unfamiliar woods.
- Agree on a turnaround time. Everyone comes back to the start if it's reached, game or no game.
- Do not use paper scraps or anything that stays in the woods.

LEADER TIPS

- Teach a few trail signs first (straight on, turn left, turn right, not this way, end of trail). Your group's handbook will have a set; any consistent set works.
- Using sticks and stones as markers, the old way, also leaves nothing behind once the hounds scatter them.

CAMPFIRE

Story Chain

also: Round-Robin Story

4-30 people · 10-20 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 6+

The group builds a story one sentence at a time around the circle.

SETUP

Sit in a circle. The leader gives the opening line, for example: "The night the canoe floated away, nobody noticed at first."

HOW TO PLAY

1. Going around the circle, each person adds one sentence that continues the story.
2. Anyone may say "pass," and the story moves to the next person.
3. The leader warns the group when three turns are left so they can wrap it up.
4. The last person gives the ending.

SAFETY

- Set a limit before you start if your group includes young kids: spooky is fine, gory isn't.

LEADER TIPS

- Give a setting and a problem in your opening line; it gets better stories than "Once upon a time."

- Pass a stick or flashlight to show whose turn it is, so people don't talk over each other.

VARIATIONS

- Three words each instead of a sentence, for a faster, sillier story.
- Fortune version: see Fortunately, Unfortunately.

Fortunately, Unfortunately

4-30 people · 10-15 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 7+

A story chain where sentences must alternate between good news and bad news.

SETUP

Sit in a circle. The leader starts: "Fortunately, the hike was only two miles."

HOW TO PLAY

1. The next person must start with "Unfortunately..." and add bad news: "Unfortunately, it was two miles straight up."
2. The next starts with "Fortunately..." and finds the good side.
3. Keep alternating around the circle until the leader calls the last line.

SAFETY

- Keep bad news away from real people in the group.

LEADER TIPS

- It teaches kids to spot the good side of a bad day, which is handy on a rainy campout. You don't have to say that out loud.

I'm Going Camping

also: I Packed My Bag, Grandmother's Trunk

4-20 people · 10-20 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 6+

A memory game: each player repeats the whole packing list so far and adds one item.

SETUP

Sit in a circle.

- Go first as the leader with something useful, then later players start packing things like a piano.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The first player says "I'm going camping and I'm bringing a flashlight."
2. The next player repeats the list and adds one: "I'm going camping and I'm bringing a flashlight and a tent."
3. Keep going around. If someone forgets, the circle helps them, and they still add their item.
4. See how long the list gets before the group can't hold it.

SAFETY

- No safety concerns for this one.

LEADER TIPS

- Alphabet version: items must go in A to Z order (axe, bandana, compass...). That makes it easier to remember, not harder.

Night Sounds

also: Sound Map

2-30 people · 5-15 min · outdoors · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 6+

Everyone sits silently for a few minutes and counts every separate sound they hear, then compares lists.

YOU NEED

Paper and pencil, optional

SETUP

Sit in the circle or a short walk from the fire. Ask everyone to close their eyes or look at the ground.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The leader sets a timer for three minutes. Nobody talks.
2. Each player counts the different sounds they hear: wind, an owl, a car far away, someone's stomach.
3. When time's up, go around and share counts. The player with the most names their sounds and others say whether they heard them too.
4. Talk about which sounds were natural and which were people-made.

SAFETY

- Stay in the circle or a spot everyone can see. Headcount after any game away from the fire.

LEADER TIPS

- Sound map version: draw yourself as an X in the middle of a page and mark each sound where it came from.
- This settles a loud group better than asking them to be quiet.

Star Hunt

also: Constellation Hunt

2-30 people · 15-30 min · outdoors · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 7+

Teams race to find a list of bright stars and star patterns in the night sky.

YOU NEED

A red-light flashlight, a printed or app star chart

SETUP

Pick a spot away from the fire and lights, with a wide view. Give each team a list that fits the season, for example the Big Dipper, the North Star, and one bright planet.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Give eyes 10 minutes to adjust to the dark. Use red light only.
2. Teams find each item on the list and point it out to the leader.
3. The leader confirms with the chart. First team to find everything wins, but everyone keeps going until each team has found all of them.
4. End with a story: many cultures named the same stars differently.

SAFETY

- Stay in a cleared, flat area. No walking around looking up.
- Agree on how to get back to the campsite before anyone's eyes adjust.

LEADER TIPS

- Teach the pointer stars first: the two end stars of the Big Dipper's bowl point to the North Star. Everyone can do that on their first night.
- Don't hold up the game for clouds; switch to Night Sounds.

Skit Bag

also: Prop Bag Skits

8-40 people · 20-40 min · indoors or out · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 8+

Each patrol gets a bag of random props and 10 minutes to create a two-minute skit that uses every item.

YOU NEED

One bag per team with 4 or 5 random items

SETUP

Fill a bag per team with unrelated items: a spoon, a hat, a rope, a water bottle, a sock.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Teams open their bags and have 10 minutes to plan a skit using every item.
2. Each team performs for no more than two minutes.
3. The audience applauds every skit. Skip scoring, or give awards for things like "best use of a sock."

SAFETY

- Ground rules before planning: no skits that make fun of a real person, group, culture or disability, and no humor about bathroom accidents or injuries.
- Keep the stage area away from the fire ring.

LEADER TIPS

- The leader should approve each skit idea in one sentence before teams rehearse. It catches problems early.
- Teams that freeze can do a news report: one anchor, a weather person, a sports reporter, all using the props.

Cheers and Applause

also: Campfire Cheers

5-100 people · 5-15 min · indoors or out · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 5+

Short, silly applause routines the group does together to thank a skit or celebrate a team.

SETUP

Teach two or three to the whole group, then let teams invent their own.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Teach a cheer with a demonstration. Examples: the Round of Applause (clap while moving your hands in a big circle); the Seal (arms straight, slap hands together and bark); the Firecracker (pretend to light a fuse, hiss, then clap once loudly and throw arms up).
2. Use them after every skit or announcement through the evening.
3. Give each patrol two minutes to invent a cheer, then teach it to everyone.

SAFETY

- None, apart from the usual: stay seated or standing in place around the fire.

LEADER TIPS

- Cheers give quieter kids a way to join in without being on stage.
- Keep a list of the ones your group invents; they become your group's own traditions.

Flashlight Tag

6-25 people · 15-30 min · outdoors · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 9+

Hide-and-seek in the dark: the seeker tags hiders by catching them in the flashlight beam and calling their name.

YOU NEED

One flashlight for the seeker, glow sticks for each player, optional

SETUP

Pick an open area well away from the fire and the tents, that the group has walked in daylight. Mark a home base with a lantern.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The seeker stands at base and counts to 30 while others hide inside the boundaries.
2. The seeker walks around with the flashlight. To tag someone, shine the beam on them and call their name.
3. Tagged players come back to base and become extra seekers (without lights) who help spot.
4. Hiders who reach base without being tagged are safe for that round.

SAFETY

- Walking only. Running in the dark is how ankles get sprained.
- No hiding near the fire ring, tents, water, cliffs or roads. Adults stand at the edges of the play area.
- Every player wears a glow stick, so leaders can count them at a glance.

LEADER TIPS

- Short rounds with a headcount at base after each.
- If the group's never played in the dark, play it once at dusk first.

Blindfold Tent Pitch

4-8 people · 20-40 min · outdoors · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 11+

Each patrol pitches a tent while everyone except one guide is blindfolded; the guide can talk but not touch.

YOU NEED

One tent per patrol, blindfolds for all but one per patrol

SETUP

Each patrol starts with a packed tent in its bag. Every member except the guide wears a blindfold.

HOW TO PLAY

1. On "go," the blindfolded members unpack and pitch the tent, following the guide's spoken instructions.
2. The guide may not touch the tent, poles or stakes.
3. When the patrol thinks it's done, the leader inspects: taut, stakes in, door zipped.
4. Swap guides and pitch again, or compare times between patrols.

SAFETY

- Hand out stakes only when the tent is laid out, and use a rubber mallet, not a hatchet.
- Blindfolded players stay on their knees when staking.

- Pick flat, clear ground with no sticks or rocks.

LEADER TIPS

- The real lesson is in how guides give directions. Ask afterward what instructions worked.
- Run it after the patrol has pitched the tent normally at least once.

String Burn Challenge

also: Fire-Building Race

3-6 people · 20-40 min · outdoors · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 11+

Teams build a fire from scratch that's big enough to burn through a string stretched above it.

YOU NEED

A fire ring or fire pan per team, two sticks and cotton string per team, tinder, kindling, fuel wood, a bucket of water per fire

SETUP

At each fire site, tie a cotton string between two sticks pushed into the ground, about 18 inches above the base of the fire. Give each team the same amount of wood and matches.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Teams gather or are given tinder and kindling and lay their fire.
2. On "go," they light the fire with the matches allowed (three is common).
3. Teams feed the fire until the flame burns through the string.
4. The first string to break wins. Every fire is put out cold afterward: drown, stir, drown, feel for heat.

partygamebook.com/troop-games/#string-burn

SAFETY

- Only in a site where fires are allowed and fire danger is low. Check local burn bans.
- An adult at every fire, a full water bucket at every fire, long hair tied back and sleeves pushed up.
- Follow your group's own fire-safety rules and training. This game is practice for trained youth, not a first lesson.

LEADER TIPS

- Teams that build a good tinder bundle win. Teams that pile on big wood early lose.
- Smokey Bear's campfire guidance is a good refresher before you start: smokeybear.com.

Free to print and copy for your group. Anyone may sit out any activity.

cut

Tarp Shelter Race

3-6 people · 20-30 min · outdoors · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 10+

Teams build a rain shelter big enough for everyone to sit under, then the leader tests it with a bucket of water.

YOU NEED

One tarp, a length of rope and stakes per team

SETUP

Give each team a tarp, rope and stakes, and pick a site with trees or poles.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Teams have 15 minutes to pitch a shelter all of them can sit under.
2. Every rope must be tied with a knot your group has learned. Leaders check knots.
3. When time's up, the team sits under the shelter while the leader pours a cup of water on top.
4. Score: dry team, sturdy shelter, good knots.

SAFETY

- Keep ropes below head height or flag them; ropes at neck height are a hazard in the dark.
- Don't tie to dead trees or branches.

LEADER TIPS

- Let teams look at a picture of an A-frame and a lean-to before they start, then let them choose.

partygamebook.com/troop-games/#tarp-shelter

Free to print and copy for your group. Anyone may sit out any activity.

Pack Your Pack Relay

4-8 people · 15-25 min · indoors or out · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 8+

Teams race to pack a day pack from a pile of gear, leaving out the items that don't belong and packing heavy items in the right place.

YOU NEED

A pile of gear per team: real items and a few things that don't belong

SETUP

Make identical piles at the far end of the room: rain jacket, water bottle, first aid kit, snack, map, flashlight, sunscreen, plus decoys (a pillow, a video game controller, a frying pan).

HOW TO PLAY

1. Teams line up. One runner at a time goes to the pile, packs one item, and runs back to tag the next.
2. Any runner may also take a decoy out of the pack instead of adding an item.
3. When the team thinks the pack is done, they bring it to the leader.
4. The leader checks: nothing missing, no decoys, heavy items close to the back.

SAFETY

- Use fake or empty items instead of anything sharp or heavy.

LEADER TIPS

- Base the list on whatever gear list your group uses for its hikes.
- Debrief with one question: what's the one thing you'd never leave behind?

Tripod Lashing Challenge

3-6 people · 20-40 min · outdoors · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 11+

Teams lash three poles into a tripod that holds a full bucket of water off the ground.

YOU NEED

Three staves or poles per team, lashing rope, a bucket of water

SETUP

Each team gets three poles of the same length and rope.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Teams lash the three poles together near one end with a tripod lashing, then spread the legs.
2. They hang the bucket from the top using rope.
3. The leader times how long it holds, up to two minutes.
4. Fastest stable tripod wins.

SAFETY

- Nobody stands or climbs on the tripod, and nobody stands under the bucket.
- Use poles you can lift easily; this is not a pioneering tower.

- Teach the lashing first. The game is practice, not instruction.

LEADER TIPS

- Teams that get frapping turns tight win. Show a loose one and a tight one first.
- For younger groups, use a smaller load: a water bottle in a bag.

String Cup Stack

4-8 people · 15-25 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 8+

Teams build a cup pyramid using only a rubber band controlled by strings; no hands may touch the cups.

YOU NEED

One rubber band with 4 to 8 strings tied on per team, 10 paper cups per team

SETUP

Tie strings about three feet long to a rubber band, one per player. Scatter 10 upside-down cups in front of each team.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Each player holds one string. By pulling outward together, the team stretches the band wide enough to fit over a cup.
2. Letting the strings slacken tightens the band so the team can lift the cup and place it.
3. Build a pyramid: four, three, two, one.
4. If a cup falls, it stays where it lands until the team picks it up with the band again.

SAFETY

- Don't stretch the band toward faces. Snapped bands sting.

LEADER TIPS

- Teams that pick one caller do better than teams where everyone talks. Point that out after.

Marshmallow Catapult

3-6 people · 30-45 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 9+

Teams build a catapult from craft sticks, rubber bands and a spoon, then compete for distance and accuracy.

YOU NEED

10 craft sticks, 6 rubber bands, a plastic spoon and 5 marshmallows per team, a target

SETUP

Give each team the same materials. Set a target (a bucket or a hula hoop) 10 feet away.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Teams have 20 minutes to build.
2. Each team gets five shots. Score 1 point for landing within a step of the target, 3 for in the target.
3. Then a distance round: the longest launch wins.

SAFETY

- Launch toward the target only, and never at people. Anyone in front of the launch line stops the round.
- Check for food allergies before using marshmallows, or use pom-poms.

LEADER TIPS

- Share a picture of a simple lever catapult only if a team is completely stuck after 10 minutes.

Camp Scavenger Hunt

4-60 people · 30-60 min · outdoors · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 6+

Teams work through a list of things to find, photograph or do around camp, with no picking of live plants.

YOU NEED

A printed list per team, a bag per team, a phone or camera for photo items, optional

SETUP

Write a list of 15 to 25 items that fit your site: a pine cone, a feather, something smooth, a track in the mud (photo), a leaf with jagged edges (photo), the north side of a tree. Set boundaries and a return time.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Teams get the list and the return time.
2. Teams collect natural objects already on the ground, take photos of living things, and complete action items (all members balance on one log).
3. Back at base, teams present their finds. One point per item, plus bonus points for the best find.
4. Return natural items where they were found.

SAFETY

- Teams of at least three, with an adult or older youth for younger groups.
- Nothing from living plants; photos only. Teach any poison ivy or oak in the area before you start.
- Return time is firm. Late teams lose points, so nobody hurries back through the woods.

LEADER TIPS

- Mix easy and hard items so every team scores.
- For more clue ideas you can adapt, see our scavenger hunt clues for kids.

RAINY DAY

Balloon Volleyball

6-30 people · 10-20 min · indoors · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 5+

Volleyball with a balloon over a rope or a line of chairs; anyone can play, sitting or standing.

YOU NEED

Balloons, a rope or a row of chairs as the net

SETUP

String a rope at shoulder height across the room or line up chairs as the net. Split into two teams.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Serve the balloon over the net with a tap.
2. Each team may hit it as many times as it likes, but no player twice in a row.
3. A point goes to the other team when the balloon touches the floor on your side.
4. Play to 11.

SAFETY

- Check for latex allergies. Latex-free balloons exist and cost about the same.
- Clear the floor and push tables to the walls.

LEADER TIPS

- Play the whole game seated on the floor so everyone is on the same level, including kids with mobility differences.
- Two balloons at once makes it chaos in a good way.

Paper Airplane Contest

2-40 people · 20-40 min · indoors · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 6+

Everyone folds a plane, then competes in distance, time in the air, and accuracy rounds.

YOU NEED

Printer paper, tape measure, masking tape for a launch line

SETUP

Mark a launch line on the floor. Give everyone two sheets of paper.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Ten minutes to fold. Leaders can show one basic dart design for anyone stuck.
2. Distance round: three throws each, best one counts.
3. Hang time round: count seconds from release to landing.
4. Accuracy round: land in a box or on a taped target.

SAFETY

- Throw only from the line, and only when the landing zone is clear.

LEADER TIPS

- Awards for each round mean three different winners, not one.
- Ask what changes made planes go farther. It's an easy way into a talk about how wings work.

Paper Snowball Fight

8-60 people · 5-10 min · indoors · energy: high · no touching · ages: 6-16

Two teams throw crumpled paper balls into each other's half; when the whistle blows, the side with fewer balls wins.

YOU NEED

Scrap paper, crumpled into balls, a rope or tape center line

SETUP

Split the room with a center line. Give each team a pile of paper balls.

HOW TO PLAY

1. On the whistle, everyone throws balls into the other team's half.
2. Pick up any ball on your side and throw it back. Nobody crosses the line.
3. After 60 seconds, the whistle blows and everyone freezes.
4. Count balls on each side. Fewer balls wins.

SAFETY

- Paper only; no tape inside the balls, no wet paper.
- Underhand throws for younger groups.

LEADER TIPS

- Have everyone write one fact they learned at the meeting on their paper before crumpling. At the end, each person opens a ball and reads it.

Sketch Relay

also: Relay Drawing

6-40 people · 15-25 min · indoors · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 7+

Teams race to guess drawings: one runner at a time gets a word from the leader and draws it for the team.

YOU NEED

A whiteboard, chalkboard or big paper per team, markers, a list of words

SETUP

Teams sit across the room from the leader. Each team has a board.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The first runner from each team comes to the leader and gets the same secret word.
2. They run back and draw it. No letters, numbers or talking.
3. When the team guesses right, the next runner goes to the leader for the next word.
4. The first team through the list wins.

SAFETY

- Walk, don't run, if the floor is crowded with chairs.

LEADER TIPS

- Use words from your group's world: tent, canoe, compass, marshmallow, raccoon.
- Easy and hard words alternate so no team gets stuck forever.

Hot Potato

6-25 people · 5-10 min · indoors · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 5-12

Players pass an object around the circle while music plays or a timer runs; whoever holds it at the stop gets a funny task.

YOU NEED

A beanbag or soft ball, music or a timer

SETUP

Sit in a circle.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Start the music or a hidden timer. Players pass the beanbag around the circle as fast as they can.
2. When it stops, whoever is holding the beanbag does a small task: name an animal for every letter of their name, or make a sound effect.
3. Nobody is out. Start the next round.

SAFETY

- Pass, don't throw.

LEADER TIPS

- Reverse direction at random to wake people up.

- Questions in a bowl work as tasks too: "What's your favorite thing we did this year?"

Paper Football

also: Table Football, Flick Football

2-30 people · 10-30 min · indoors · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 7+

Two players flick a folded paper triangle across a table and score when it hangs over the opposite edge.

YOU NEED

Paper folded into a small triangle, a table

SETUP

Fold a strip of paper into a tight triangle. Two players sit at opposite ends of a table.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Players take turns flicking the triangle across the table.
2. A touchdown is when part of the triangle hangs over the far edge without falling. Touchdowns are worth 6.
3. After a touchdown, the scorer tries a field goal: the opponent makes goalposts with their fingers, and the scorer flicks the triangle through from the edge of the table for 1 point.
4. If the triangle falls off the table, the other player takes the next turn from their end.

SAFETY

- Flick goalposts are a target. Aim low and don't flick at anyone's face.

LEADER TIPS

- Run a bracket tournament on a whiteboard; it keeps 20 kids busy for an hour.

KIM'S GAME AND SKILLS

Kim's Game

also: Memory Tray, Observation Tray

2-40 people · 10-20 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 6+

Players study a tray of objects for one minute, then list as many as they can remember.

YOU NEED

A tray, 20 to 30 small objects, a cloth to cover them, paper and pencils

SETUP

Lay 20 to 30 small, different objects on a tray and cover them: a button, a key, a pine cone, a coin, a pencil stub, a spoon, a bead. Make an answer list.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Gather players around the tray and uncover it for one minute.
2. Cover it again. Players write down every object they remember. Younger kids can whisper their lists to a leader.
3. Uncover the tray and check. One point per correct item.
4. Play again with new objects. Most players improve on the second round.

SAFETY

- Leave out anything sharp, any medicine, and small items if very young children are present.

LEADER TIPS

- The game takes its name from Rudyard Kipling's 1901 novel Kim, where a boy is trained to notice and remember. Baden-Powell's 1908 book on scouting describes it as a memory game for patrols.
- Teach a trick between rounds: group objects in your head by type (metal things, natural things) or make up a story that links them.
- Use it for review: put real first aid kit items on the tray and ask what each is for.

VARIATIONS

- What's Gone: show the tray, cover it, take one object away, and uncover. Who can name what's missing?
- Outdoor version: lay objects along a short trail, and players list what they passed.

Feely Bag

also: Touch Kim's Game

2-30 people · 10-15 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 5+

A Kim's Game for the hands: players reach into a bag without looking and identify objects by touch.

YOU NEED

A cloth bag or pillowcase, 10 to 15 objects, paper and pencils

SETUP

Put 10 to 15 objects with different textures in a bag: a pine cone, a shell, a key, a cotton ball, a walnut, a smooth stone, a feather.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Pass the bag around the circle. Each player feels inside for 30 seconds without looking.
2. Players write down or whisper what they felt.
3. Empty the bag and check. One point per correct object.

SAFETY

- No sharp, sticky or breakable items. Nothing alive.

LEADER TIPS

- Ask players to describe the object without naming it: rough, cold, ridged. It's a good warm-up for describing an injury or a plant to someone else.

Sound Kim's Game

also: What's That Sound?

2-40 people · 10-15 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 6+

A leader behind a screen makes a series of sounds; players identify each one.

YOU NEED

10 objects that make sounds, a screen or a tarp to hide behind, paper and pencils

SETUP

Hide behind a screen with your objects: paper tearing, a zipper, keys jingling, water poured into a cup, a stick snapping, a match box shaken.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Number each sound out loud, then make it for three seconds.
2. Players write what they think it was.
3. Reveal each object at the end. One point per correct answer.

SAFETY

- Keep matches in their box; don't strike them for this game.

LEADER TIPS

- Finish with outdoor sounds recorded at camp, if you have them.
- Pair it with Night Sounds at the campfire later the same day.

Knot Relay

4-40 people · 10-20 min · indoors or out · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 8+

Teams race to tie a list of knots correctly, one runner per knot, with a leader checking each one.

YOU NEED

One rope per team, about 6 feet, a list of knots your group has learned

SETUP

Teams line up at one end. A leader with the ropes stands at the other end, one rope per team.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The leader calls the first knot, for example a square knot.
2. The first runner from each team runs to the rope and ties it.
3. The leader checks it. If it's right, the runner unties it and runs back to tag the next player. If not, they try again.
4. The leader calls a new knot for each runner. The first team through the list wins.

SAFETY

- Ropes stay on the ground or in hands; no swinging them.

- Never tie a rope around anyone's neck or body for this game.

LEADER TIPS

- Use only knots the group has already been taught. Speed comes after accuracy.
- Call out the use, not the name, for older groups: "a loop that won't slip" instead of "a bowline."

VARIATIONS

- Blindfold round for older groups who already know the knots well.

Knot Chain

also: Rope Chain Challenge

4-40 people · 10-15 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 9+

Teams join short ropes into the longest working chain they can in three minutes, using the right knots for joining ropes.

YOU NEED

Several short ropes per team

SETUP

Give each team the same number of short ropes.

HOW TO PLAY

1. On "go," teams join their ropes end to end with knots meant for joining two ropes.
2. After three minutes, stop. Leaders test each chain with a firm pull.
3. The longest chain that holds wins. Knots that slip don't count, and the chain is measured to the first failed knot.

SAFETY

- Test pulls are done by leaders, not tug-of-war.

LEADER TIPS

- A good moment to show why a square knot isn't for joining ropes of different thickness, and what to use instead.

First Aid Scenario Relay

6-40 people · 20-40 min · indoors or out · energy: moderate · light touch · ages: 10+

Teams rotate through stations where they must respond to a written first aid scenario; leaders score each response.

YOU NEED

Scenario cards, a first aid kit per team, a stopwatch

SETUP

Set up three to five stations. At each, place a scenario card ("A hiker has a blister on their heel," "Someone has a nosebleed") and supplies. Put a trained adult at each station.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Teams start at different stations. The first job at every station is to say how they'd check the scene is safe.
2. The team reads the card and shows what they'd do, using a teammate as the patient.
3. The station leader scores: scene safety, calling for help when needed, correct care, and comforting the patient.
4. Teams rotate on a signal every five minutes.

SAFETY

- Scenarios must match what your group has been trained to do. Station leaders should be trained in first aid, and should correct mistakes on the spot.
- Ask before touching. Patients may say no, and a backpack can stand in as the patient.
- Never practice rescue breathing or chest compressions on a real person; use a manikin.

LEADER TIPS

- Base scenarios on what actually happens at your camps: blisters, splinters, scrapes, insect stings, minor burns, dehydration.
- The American Red Cross offers first aid courses for adults leading youth activities.

Improvised Stretcher Relay

6-30 people · 20-30 min · outdoors · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 12+

Teams build a stretcher from poles and jackets, then carry a weighted pack (not a person) around a short course.

YOU NEED

Two poles and two jackets or a blanket per team, a backpack weighted to about 20 pounds per team, cones for a course

SETUP

Lay out a short course with cones. Give each team two poles, jackets or a blanket, and a weighted pack as the patient.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Teams build a stretcher: slide the poles through the sleeves of buttoned or zipped jackets, or fold a blanket around the poles.
2. Load the pack. Four carriers lift together on a count.
3. Carry it around the course. Anything that falls off means you go back to the start and reload.
4. Fastest clean run wins.

SAFETY

- Use a weighted pack, never a person, for the race.
- Lift with legs, on a count. Carriers swap if anyone tires.

LEADER TIPS

- Talk about why real rescues move slowly: the race is the fun part, but in real life, steady wins.

Compass Triangle

also: Bearing Walk

2-30 people · 20-30 min · outdoors · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 10+

Pairs follow three compass bearings and distances that, done right, bring them back to the coin they started at.

YOU NEED

A baseplate compass per pair, a coin or washer per pair, a card with three bearings and distances

SETUP

Each pair drops a coin in the grass as their start point and gets a card, for example: 60 degrees for 30 paces, 180 degrees for 30 paces, 300 degrees for 30 paces.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Pairs set the first bearing on the compass, face it, and walk the paces.
2. At the end of each leg, they set the next bearing and walk again.
3. After the third leg, they should be standing on or near their coin.
4. Measure how far off each pair is. Closest wins.

SAFETY

- Use an open field with no hazards along any leg.

- Hold compasses away from phones, belt buckles and car hoods; metal throws the needle off.

LEADER TIPS

- Three bearings 120 degrees apart and equal distances make an equilateral triangle. Older kids enjoy working out new courses on paper.
- Teach how to take and follow a bearing first. The game is practice.

Compass Point Call

also: Points of the Compass

4-40 people · 5-10 min · indoors or out · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 7-14

The leader calls a direction and everyone turns to face it; it builds direction sense fast.

YOU NEED

Four signs for N, E, S, W

SETUP

Find north with a compass and post the four signs on the walls. Players stand spread out.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Call a direction: "North!" Everyone turns to face it.
2. Add the in-between points as the group improves: northeast, southwest.
3. Remove the signs after a few rounds.
4. Last to turn the right way does a silly task, then rejoins.

SAFETY

- Space players out so nobody spins into a neighbor.

LEADER TIPS

- Move to degrees with older groups: "Face 90!"

Pace and Estimate

also: Pacing Contest

2-40 people · 20-30 min · outdoors · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 9+

Players measure their own pace on a known distance, then estimate distances to landmarks and check them.

YOU NEED

A 100-foot tape measure or a measured course, cones, paper and pencils

SETUP

Measure and mark a straight 100-foot course.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Each player walks the course at a normal step, counting every second step (one pace = two steps). They repeat it and average.
2. They divide 100 by their count to get feet per pace.
3. Players pace to three landmarks you choose and write their estimates.
4. Measure the real distances. Closest total wins.

SAFETY

- Choose landmarks in open ground, not across roads or parking lots.

LEADER TIPS

- Have players guess each distance by eye before they pace it. The gap between guess and pace is what sticks.

Trail Signs Tracking

also: Follow the Signs

4-30 people · 20-40 min · outdoors · energy: moderate · no touching · ages: 8+

Teams lay and read short trails built from simple trail signs made of sticks and stones.

YOU NEED

Sticks, stones and grass found on site, a card showing the trail signs your group uses

SETUP

Teach five signs: straight on, turn right, turn left, not this way, and end of trail with a message hidden nearby. Use whatever set your group's handbook shows; consistency matters more than the design.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Each team lays a trail of eight to ten signs within a set area and hides a note at the end.
2. Teams swap and follow each other's trails.
3. When they find the note, they bring it to the leader.
4. Teams then return along the trail and scatter the signs, leaving no trace.

SAFETY

- Trails stay on paths and inside boundaries.

- Teams of three or more.

LEADER TIPS

- Build signs only from loose material already on the ground, and scatter them afterward.
- Hare and Hounds uses the same signs at a run, so play this first.

Silent Ball

also: Silent Speedball

6-30 people · 5-15 min · indoors · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 6-14

Players toss a soft ball to each other in complete silence; anyone who talks, drops a good throw or makes a bad throw sits down.

YOU NEED

A soft foam ball or beanbag

SETUP

Players sit or stand spread around the room, or sit on desks and chairs.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Toss the ball to anyone. Nobody may make a sound.
2. If you drop a catchable throw, talk or laugh out loud, you sit down. A bad throw means the thrower sits.
3. The leader is the judge, and their decision is final (and silent: just point).
4. Last two standing win. Everyone back in for the next round.

SAFETY

- Soft ball only. Underhand tosses.

LEADER TIPS

- It's a great reset after a loud game: two rounds and the room is calm.
- Players who sit down stay silent too, which keeps the room quiet even late in the round.

Heads Up, Seven Up

also: Thumbs Up, Seven Up

10-35 people · 10-20 min · indoors · energy: calm · light touch · ages: 6-13

Seven players secretly press down the thumbs of seated players, who then try to guess who picked them.

YOU NEED

Tables or desks

SETUP

Choose seven players to come to the front. Everyone else sits with heads down on the table, eyes closed, one thumb up.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Each of the seven quietly presses down one person's thumb, then returns to the front.
2. The leader says "Heads up, seven up!"
3. Players whose thumbs were pressed stand and each guess who picked them.
4. If they guess right, they swap places with that person.

SAFETY

- A light press on the thumb only.

LEADER TIPS

- Use fewer pickers with a small group: Heads Up, Four Up works fine with 12 people.
- Peeking ruins it. If it happens a lot, swap to Silent Ball.

Sleeping Lions

5-40 people · 5-10 min · indoors · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 5-10

Everyone lies perfectly still as a sleeping lion; the hunter tries to make them move or laugh without touching them.

SETUP

Players lie on the floor in a comfortable position. Choose one or two hunters.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Lions must stay completely still, eyes closed.
2. Hunters walk among them and try to make them laugh or move with jokes and funny faces, but may not touch.
3. Lions who move or giggle become hunters.
4. The last lion still asleep wins.

SAFETY

- Hunters may not touch anyone at all.

LEADER TIPS

- Run it at the end of a meeting while waiting for parents. Kids love it and the room gets quiet.

Keeper of the Keys

also: Sleeping Pirate, Guard the Treasure

6-30 people · 10-20 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 6-16

A blindfolded keeper sits in the middle of the circle guarding a ring of keys; players try to sneak in and steal them silently.

YOU NEED

A ring of keys, a blindfold

SETUP

The keeper sits blindfolded in the center with the keys on the floor in front of them. Everyone else sits in a circle.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The leader silently points to one player, who tries to creep in and take the keys back to their place without a sound.
2. If the keeper hears them, the keeper points at the sound. If they point at the thief, the thief goes back.
3. A thief who gets the keys back to their spot becomes the next keeper.

SAFETY

- The keeper points; they never lunge or swing an arm.
- If anyone doesn't want to be blindfolded, they can close their eyes or face away from the circle.

LEADER TIPS

- It's a calm, focused game for the campfire circle or the last minutes of a meeting.
- Older kids like a rule that the keeper gets three points per round, so guessing randomly costs them.

Who's Missing?

8-30 people · 5-15 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 5-12

One player leaves the room; another hides under a blanket; the first player comes back and guesses who's missing.

YOU NEED

A blanket

SETUP

Players sit in a circle.

HOW TO PLAY

1. One player leaves the room or turns away with their eyes closed.
2. The leader points to someone who hides under a blanket. Everyone else swaps seats.
3. The guesser comes back and has three guesses to name who's under the blanket.
4. The hider becomes the next guesser.

SAFETY

- The hider decides if they're comfortable under a blanket; a jacket over the head works too.

LEADER TIPS

- Great for the first meetings of a new den; it's a name game in disguise.

Signal Drill also: Silent Signals

4-60 people · 5-10 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 6+

The leader gives silent hand signals and the group responds; it practices the signals your group uses for real.

SETUP

Teach three or four signals your group will use all year: quiet (a raised hand), gather around me, form a line, form a circle.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Give signals one at a time without speaking.
2. Groups respond as fast as they can, still silently.
3. Mix them up and speed up. If the group does all five right in a row, they've earned a game of their choice.

SAFETY

- None.

LEADER TIPS

- Most youth groups already have a quiet signal. Use yours, so the practice carries over to real meetings.
- The best groups respond to the signal in under five seconds. Time it, and let them beat their record.

What Changed?

also: Spot the Difference

2-30 people · 5-15 min · indoors or out · energy: calm · no touching · ages: 6+

Partners look at each other for 30 seconds, turn around and change three things about their appearance, then try to spot the changes.

SETUP

Players pair up, standing face to face.

HOW TO PLAY

1. Partners study each other for 30 seconds.
2. They turn back to back and each changes three things:
untie a shoe, roll a sleeve, move a watch.
3. Turn around. Each tries to spot all three changes.
4. Swap partners and go again with four changes.

SAFETY

- Changes are to clothing and accessories only, nothing that involves undressing.

LEADER TIPS

- A quick observation drill that pairs well with Kim's Game.