

## Classic Outdoor Games

### **Hide and Seek:**

Everyone has played this one. Most parents have played with their kids, since hiding and finding is a common interest of small children. I've heard of all kinds of variations on this game. Sometimes you count to twenty, sometimes ten, sometimes one hundred. Sometimes there is a home base that you can run to and tag, becoming "safe," sometimes you just wait to be found. The general idea is that one person is "it," that person closes his or her eyes and counts to a certain number without looking and then he or she tries to find the others.

**Number of Players:** Ideally at least three.

**Equipment:** None.

### **Kick the Can:**

This game is a variation of tag and hide & seek. One person or a team of people are designated as "it" and a can is placed in the middle of the playing area. The other people run off and hide while the "it" covers his or her eyes and counts to a certain number. "It" then tries to find everyone. If a person is tagged by "it", they go into a holding pen for captured players. If one of the un-captured players manages to kick the can, the captured players are released. The game is over once all the non-"it" players are in the holding pen.

**Number of Players:** Ideally at least three.

**Equipment:** A metal can.

### **Capture the Flag:**

This game is most fun when played with a large group. Split the group into two teams, each team having a flag or other marker at the team's base. The object of the game is to run into the other team's territory, capture their flag and make it safely back to your own territory. You can tag "enemy" players in your territory, sending them to your jail. They can be sprung from jail by a member of their own team running into your territory, tagging them and running back, with one freed person allowed per jail break. It is sometimes played that all the people in jail could hold hands and make a chain back

toward their own territory, making it easier for members of their team to tag them. We also played a similar game called Steal the Sticks. It had almost the same rules, but several sticks were used instead of one flag.

**Number of Players:** A large group.

**Equipment:** Two flags or other markers.

**Parachute:**

Fun for kids of all ages, this game involves a large round parachute, preferably with handles, with people holding the parachute all around the edges. It helps if someone is in charge telling people what to do. Players can just ruffle the parachute up and down a little bit, they can go all the way up and all the way down, or all the way up and then run underneath, sitting on the edge of the parachute, which can create a bubble of air with everyone inside. Players can also place light objects such as wiffle balls or beanbags on top of the parachute, and make them jump by ruffling the parachute. Also, one person can sit in the middle of the parachute and everyone ruffles it near the ground. If there is a smooth floor and a light child, the child can sit in the middle on top of the parachute and everyone else can walk partway around still holding the parachute edge. Then everyone pulls backward, spinning the child. There are countless variations.

**Number of Players:** Depends on the size of the parachute, but usually eight to ten.

**Equipment:** A play parachute. These aren't as hard to find as you would think. Try here and here.

**Traffic Cop:**

This game works best on a street with little to no traffic, or in a large paved area of some kind. You need bikes, wagons, pedestrians, scooters or whatever is available. One person directs traffic to make sure kids don't run into each other. It is more fun than it sounds, and helps kids learn about waiting to cross the street and about traffic safety.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** Bikes, wagons, scooters, anything on wheels.

### **Four Square:**

This ball game is played on a square court further divided into four smaller squares, numbered one through four. One player stands in each of the squares, with the highest ranked player in number one, lowest in number four. You bounce the ball among the players, bouncing once in the other person's square before that person catches it. When I played this as a kid, we had countless additional rules to choose from. The person in square one got to choose the rules. Anyone who violates the rules will have to move down in the ranking, or be eliminated with another player rotating in to square four.

**Number of Players:** Four, unless you take turns.

**Equipment:** A four square court or sidewalk chalk, a playground ball.

### **Hopscotch:**

Use some sidewalk chalk and make a hopscotch grid. Number the squares from one to nine. Pick a rock that is good for tossing. Small ones can bounce too much, and larger ones are hard to throw. Start by tossing the rock onto Square 1. Hop over the rock and hop with a single foot or both feet (to follow the hopscotch pattern) all the way to the end. Turn around and come back, stopping on Square 2. Balancing on one foot, pick up the rock in Square 1 and hop over Square 1 to the start. Continue this pattern with Square 2. And so on. If you toss your rock and miss the correct square, your turn is over. This game can be played with any number of people, but only one person can go at a time. If it's raining or dark or too cold, you can get indoor hopscotch mats or foam pieces, or just find a pattern on the floor to follow, perhaps using a beanbag instead of a rock.

**Number of Players:** One at a time.

**Equipment:** Hopscotch grid, rock or beanbag.

### **Jump-Rope and Double Dutch:**

One of the biggest ways I spent my recess time as a young girl was jumping rope. I got quite good at it for my age, both in speed and in skill. It was fun to jump by myself, but it was even more fun to have a long rope and jump with a couple of friends. That's where jump-rope rhymes come in. They turn a simple exercise into a fun game, to compete against yourself and others. Then there's double dutch. I was always in awe of the older girls who could do double dutch. The first time I tried it, I got tripped up almost

immediately. However, once you understand how to do it, it isn't as hard as it looks.

**Number of Players:** One for single jumping, three with a longer rope or for double dutch.

**Equipment:** One or two jump-ropes.

### **Chinese Jump-Rope:**

This game requires three people, or just one or two people with really good chairs. It is easily done inside, assuming a sturdy floor. This game resembles regular jump rope in that you jump. A lot. But you jump in a pattern. Two people (or chairs) put their feet inside the rope and stretch them out, standing far enough apart for the third person to jump between them. The third person, or jumper, faces one of the people holding the rope and jumps in a pattern of left, right, inside, outside and on the ropes. What pattern you use is up to you, but all the players should use the same one. The game is started with the rope around the ankles. Once the jumper does the jump correctly, the rope is moved up to the calves. Then to the knees, then the thighs. Usually it doesn't get any farther than that. Once you miss, it is someone else's turn.

**Number of Players:** Preferably three, but it can be done with one or two.

**Equipment:** A stretchy-type rope or 5 to 6 meters of rubber bands tied together in a circle.

### **Jacks:**

This game can be played on any flat surface, indoors or out. The player scatters the jacks on the playing surface, often by just tossing them out of one hand, as if rolling dice. The ball is then tossed up, is allowed to bounce once, and is caught before the second bounce. The player tries to scoop up jacks and catch the ball with one hand before the ball's second bounce. The number of jacks to be picked up goes in order. First you pick up one ("onesies"), then two ("twosies"), then three and so on. There are many variations to the rules of this game including things like "pigs in the pen" and "double bounces."

**Number of Players:** Any, taking turns.

**Equipment:** A set of jacks and a small rubber ball.

**Marbles:**

The general rules specify that you draw a circle in the sand or on the sidewalk, and then take turns trying to knock each other's marbles out of the circle with your one large marble. As with the other games, there are countless variations. I haven't played this game at length, though, because I always seem to hurt myself flicking the large marble into the ring! You can also use a marble mat which contains different point zones.

**Number of Players:** At least two.

**Equipment:** Chalk, large and small marbles.

**Red Light, Green Light:**

With enough room, this game can easily be played inside. One person is the traffic light at one end, and the other players are at the other end. When the traffic light faces the group, he or she says, "Red light!" and everyone must freeze. The traffic light then turns his or her back and says, "Green light!" while the group tries to get as close to the traffic light as possible. The traffic light turns around quickly, again saying, "Red light!", and if anyone is spotted moving, they have to go back to the starting place. The first person to tag the traffic light wins and gets to be the next traffic light.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** None.

**Mother, May I:**

This game is set up in the same way as Red Light Green Light. One person in the group asks the person in the front, "Mother, may I take <insert number> steps forward?" The person at the front then says, "Yes, you may." or "No, you may not." You can vary your requests by including options such as taking baby steps, spinning steps, leaps or whatever strikes your fancy. Again, the first person to tag the person in the front wins and is the next person in the front.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** None.

**Simon Says:**

This game can be played anywhere, even in a car or other small space. One person is Simon and starts by saying, "Simon says, '<insert action here>.'">

Everyone must then do the action. However, if Simon makes an action request without saying, “Simon says” to begin the request, anyone who does that action is out. The last person still playing in the end will be Simon for the next round.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** None.

**Tag:**

It seems that everyone knows how to play tag, but just in case it wasn't in your childhood game playing repertoire, here is how you play. A group of kids decides who will start out as being “it.” That person chases the other people around, trying to tag one of them with their hand. The newly tagged person is now “it.” There is often the rule of “no tag-backs” where you can't tag the person who just tagged you. The game ends when everyone is tired of playing.

**Number of Players:** Any size group.

**Equipment:** None.

**Shadow Tag:**

In this fun version of Tag, you tag each other's shadow with your feet instead of tagging their body. Thus, it must be played on a sunny day. The closer to noon, the greater the difficulty.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** None.

**Freeze Tag:**

This is a variation of Tag where if the person who is “it” tags you, you have to freeze where you are. Another participant can tag you to unfreeze you.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** None.

**TV Tag:**

A variation of Freeze Tag where the person unfreezing the frozen player has to call out a TV show title. That show then can't be used again during that game.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** None.

**Marco Polo:**

This variation of tag is played in a swimming pool. Whoever is “it” closes their eyes and yells “Marco!” The other players then yell “Polo!” The “it” person has to tag one of the others, and then that person is “it.” Be sure to play in a pool that is not too deep for any of the players.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** A swimming pool.

**Blind Man’s Bluff:**

A favorite game in Tudor and Victorian England, this game is yet another variation on tag. The person who is “it” wears a blindfold and tries to tag the other players. Be sure to play this in an area safe from obstructions and other hazards.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** A blindfold.

**Red Rover:**

Divide everyone into two teams, each forming a long line, holding hands, facing the other team. The two teams should be around 20 or so feet apart. The teams take turn calling out, “Red Rover, Red Rover, let <insert child’s name> come over!” That child leaves their team’s line, runs as fast as they can toward the other line and tries to break through the held hands. If they break through, they get to take someone back to their team. If they don’t, they join the new team. When a team only has one person left, that person tries to break through the other team. If they do not, then their team loses. If they do, they gain a player and play continues.

**Number of Players:** Any decent size group.

**Equipment:** None.

**Heads Up, Seven Up:**

Dating back to at least the 1950s, this game is one we played in elementary school. In my experience, it was usually done in the classroom with everyone at their desk. To start the game, seven players go to the front and the teacher says, “Heads down, thumbs up!” Everyone still at their desk puts their head

down, extends an arm and sticks their thumb up. The seven kids that were at the front go around and each press one person's thumb down. Then they all go back to the front of the room and the teacher says, "Heads up, seven up!" The players at the desks raise their heads and the seven whose thumbs were pressed down stand up. Each in turn names the person they think pressed down their thumb. If they are correct, they change places with the presser. Then the game can start again.

**Number of Players:** Minimum of 14.

**Equipment:** Desks at which to sit.

### **Spud:**

This outdoor game is a lot of fun. Every player gets a number and crowds around the person who is "it" for that round. "It" then tosses the ball straight up and the other players run away. As the ball reaches the top of its toss, "it" calls out the number of one of the other players and then runs away also. The player whose number was called must run back and catch the ball (or chase after it if it is bouncing around). Once that person has the ball, they yell, "Spud!" Then everyone else must freeze. The person with the ball must try to hit one of the players with the ball. If they do, that new person gets a letter (first S, then P, then U, then D) and is now "it." If they miss, the person who threw the ball is "it" for the next round.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** Playground ball.

### **Cat's Cradle:**

This incredibly portable game can be played anywhere. If you are playing alone, you can make various string shapes on your own hands. With two people, you can play a bit of a game, transferring the shapes back and forth and creating new ones. Learn from someone if you can, but otherwise there are some good books on the subject. Make your own string, or buy a book on how to do it, which often comes with a string!

**Number of Players:** One or two.

**Equipment:** A string, approximately 36 inches long, tied in a circle (length varies, so find one that works for you!).



### **Button, Button, Who's Got the Button?:**

Played inside or outside, the group sits or stands in a circle and holds their hands together in front of them. One person takes the button and goes around the circle, pretending to put the button in someone else's hands. They actually deposit the button in one person's hands, but then continue the rest of the way around the circle, pretending to put it in everyone else's hands. Then going around the circle, each player tries to guess who has the button now. Before each person's guess, the group asks together, "Button, button, who's got the button?" Then the player can state their guess. Once the player with the button is finally guessed, that person distributes the button during the next round. Because a button is used in this game, be sure that all the kids playing are old enough so as to not choke on the button. In another version of this game (and the one that I am more familiar with), one child stands in the middle of the circle, and the button gets passed around the backs of the rest of the group. Those without the button pretend to pass it. When the passing stops, the player in the middle has to guess as to who actually has the button.

**Number of Players:** Any size group.

**Equipment:** A button.

### **Hand-Clap Games:**

The first hand-clap game most people have played is Pat-a-Cake with their parents. Songs and patterns get much more complicated from there. Usually there are two people involved, doing a series of clap patterns on their own and each other's hands while singing or chanting a rhythmic song. There are many rhymes listed online, but if you can learn from someone else or see it in a video, that is best, so that you can get the notes of the song and the rhythm of the clapping. From "Miss Mary Mack" to "Miss Susie" to "Say, Say, My Playmate," there are countless hand clap games to learn.

**Number of Players:** Usually two, but creativity can allow for a third or fourth person.

**Equipment:** None.

### **Crack the Whip:**

Though often played on ice while wearing skates in the winter, this game is much safer, though possibly less fun, when played on grass. All the players

hold hands in a line. The person at one end of the line skates or runs around, changing directions quickly. The tail of the “whip” of players tends to get moved around with a lot more force than players closer to the front. The longer the tail, the harder it is to hold on. If the players at the end fall off the end of the tail, they can attempt to get back on, perhaps in a position closer to the front.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** None.

### **Musical Chairs:**

In a circle, arrange chairs facing outward to total one fewer than the number of players. An additional player needs to be in charge of the music. When the music starts, the players walk around the chairs. When the music stops, players sit down in the nearest chair as soon as they can. The one player who does not have a chair is out. One of the chairs is then removed, and the game continues in this manner. The player that sits in the final chair is the winner. This game is traditionally played inside, but it can also be played outside with outdoor furniture and a portable music player.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** Music player or person making music, chairs.

### **Freeze Dance:**

Choose one person to be in charge of the music. When the music starts, everyone else dances, the crazier the better. When the music stops, the dancers must freeze in their position. Anyone caught moving after that is out. Play continues until there is one person left, the winner.

**Number of Players:** Any number.

**Equipment:** Music player or person making music.

### **Telephone:**

This game is one in which most people end up laughing quite a bit, so if you're in the mood for silliness, give it a go. Players sit in a circle. One person thinks up a sentence or phrase and whispers it to the next person. That person repeats it to the person on their other side. This continues around the circle. When it finally reaches the last person, that person says the sentence out loud. Hilarity ensues. The ending sentence is usually quite

changed from the beginning sentence, since errors tend to compound as they go around the circle.

**Number of Players:** A small group.

**Equipment:** None.