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Cooperative Games for Preschoolers

Organized activities can be fun and contribute to children's learning and development. But many traditional games, such as Musical Chairs and Duck, Duck, Goose focus on competition and eliminate children from the fun. In contrast, cooperative games help preschoolers learn to work together, follow directions, listen, and develop problem-solving and movement skills. Here are some examples.

1 **Help!** Children move around while balancing a paper napkin on their head. If the napkin falls, a child is frozen and must stand in place. Another child can touch the frozen player to unfreeze her.
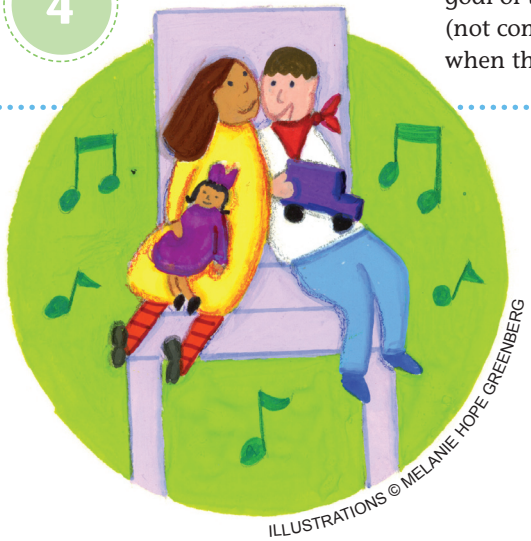
2 **Robots.** Pairs of children take turns being the robot and the commander. The commander tells the robot how to move (forward, backward, stop, go) so he or she can get around obstacles, such as cones, to reach a predetermined goal.



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Balloon keep up. Children work together to keep one or more balloons up in the air so they do not fall to the floor. Try playing this game outdoors or in a gym.

4



Cooperative musical chairs. The goal of this game is to find ways to *share* (not compete for) the remaining chairs, when the music ends.

5 **Roll it.** Children sit close together on the floor with their legs apart and feet touching those of the children on either side, forming a tight circle. Roll out one ball in the center of the circle and ask the children to catch it and then roll it to someone else, keeping the ball moving at a steady pace. When children have mastered this, add more balls. The goal is for the players to keep as many balls as possible rolling while maintaining control.

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Islands. Create a group of "islands," made up of hoops, rings, carpet squares, or large pieces of butcher paper taped to the floor. Children move around and between the islands while music plays. When the music stops, everyone must find an island. Encourage children to share the islands. For variety, remove an island, ask children to visit a different island each time, or have everyone wearing a certain color go to the same island.

7 **Cows and ducks.** Whisper *cow* or *duck* in each child's ear. Then, tell the children to moo or quack while walking around. Children making the same sound should gather and form a group, then move together like cows or ducks. Variations include frogs and dogs, cats and snakes, or chickens and goats.

8 **Cooperative Duck, Duck, Goose.** Instead of sitting, children stand in a circle and walk in place. To ensure everyone gets to move, have the child who is "it" choose someone who has not yet been the goose. The chosen child can then walk, run, or skip around the circle once or twice before choosing the next goose.

9 **Find it.** Call out a color to children as they walk, hop, or skip around the room or playground. Tell them to find something that color and touch it with their own hand or by holding hands with someone else. For example, the first child to reach the blue chair will extend his hand to the next child, who can hold hands with the next child, and so on. When all the children are connected, one round ends, but the game can continue with a new thing to find.



Sources

M. Torbert & L.B. Schneider, *Follow Me Too: A Handbook of Movement Activities for Three- to Five-Year Olds* (Washington, DC: NAEYC, 2005). Activities adapted with permission. (This book is available through the NAEYC online store.)

R. Pica, "Learning by Leaps and Bounds. What Makes a Game Developmentally Appropriate?" *Young Children* 64 (March 2009): 66–67. (This article is available at www.naeyc.org/yc/columns.)