

Tips for Leading Great Games!

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No doubt about it – **KIDS LOVE GAMES!** Ask kids if they'd like to learn something, and some will say "ok," *but* ask a group of kids if they would like to play a game, and they will all say "YES" with cheers!! Tap into the fun and power of games and guide kids into learning at the same time. Games are great, but games that teach are even better! A few weeks ago, while out with a first grader named Colin sharing Happy Meals at McDonald's, I asked him what he liked best about our Kid's Church program. As with most boys, his first answer was Toy box Tales, so I had to ask what he liked second best. His answer amazed me! He said, "I like the games because they are fun and when they are over I always think I was just having fun but then you end up teaching us something that the game showed us." And this from a first grader! (a future children's pastor, perhaps?)

Games are an ideal way to introduce a topic, demonstrate an illustration, or create in the kids an emotion or reaction that relates to the lesson! Become a master of games and you will become a sure favorite of the kids! As I often say, "If you don't have a plan for the kids, then they will have a plan for you!" Leading effective games can be easy, but there are some basic steps that need to be followed in order for a large group of kids to be tracking with you. Often game leaders stumble through the game and struggle to get the instructions out in the right order and the kids end up frustrated or confused or the impact of the teaching point can be minimized. Here are the basic elements and steps for leading a successful game:

1. Lead clearly, strongly, loudly and enthusiastically.

Be excited about the game! Your demeanor sets the tone for the entire game. The more fun you have the more the kids will enjoy playing the game.

2. Give the name and main "objective" of the game.

The name of the game is significant. It gives the kids their first impression of what they can expect. Before you get into rules, tell the kids the primary objective of the game. If you start with rules the kids won't know how to apply the rules, give them the objective of the game first and then the rules will make more sense.

3. Tell how many teams/people needed to play and choose the players.

Be careful to choose kids that are the right age for the difficulty, or the right age for the anticipated response you are going for. Boys against girls are ok, but don't overuse it. You can also break it up by doing odd grades against even grades.

4. Position the game so that the audience can see.

Be sure that the audience can see, sometimes game leaders block the view of the audience or the game is arranged where the kids playing block what they are doing from the audience. Make sure all the kids can see and enjoy!

5. Repeat the object of the game then give the other rules.

Keep the rules simple, just enough to guide the game and keep it going smoothly. Too many rules and you will bog it down. If they must be more than 2 or 3 then it might be helpful to explain them visually as well as tell verbally

6. Rabble rouse the audience (so they are included).

How? With cheers, ask who they think will win, etc. Build up the anticipation. Make it exciting!

7. Use appropriate music in the background.

Game music is the best! It adds to the excitement. Make sure it's on before you start.

8. Start with a BANG!

Have a count down, and on 'GO!' maybe have different music at the start!

9. Reward first and second place (Never last or loser) and thank them for participating.

Focus on the fun, not the winning, though I don't think competition is a bad thing, you should award and thank all of the participants.

10. Review what happened and give the point of the game.

Once the game is over and the kids have been rewarded and thanks, review what they just saw and experienced and relate it to the lesson using the same key words from the game that relate to the lesson. Now the game becomes an object lesson, a highly interactive and experiential one! If you follow these steps, your games will be a hit! Every game we play is fun, but more importantly introduces or reinforces the lesson. Here is one example, and how I set it up:

EXAMPLE:

Hey, Kids! (Enthusiasm) **Have I got a cool game today!** (The name) **It's called STACK ATTACK!** (The object) **The object of the game for your team is to build the highest pyramid of stacked cups while tossing bean bags at the other teams pyramid!** (The teams) **I'm gonna need two teams with four kids on each, boys against the girls! Who thinks the boys will win?** (Boys cheer!) **Oh, yeah, who thinks the girls will win?** (Girls scream!) **OK, lets choose the teams, raise your hands if you think you are a great builder and aren't afraid of bean bags flying at you!** (Choose the kids; choose older ones less likely to be upset by their cups being knocked down, littler kids might cry, but you know your kids.) (Describe equipment) **OK, I have taped lines on the stage here, you each can kneel and line up behind the line. You see I have given you each 5 sets of speed stack cups. I have also given you each 3 bean bags.** **When I say "GO!" you will race to build a high pyramid while trying to knock down the other teams.** (Review objective, then rules) **You are going to race to build a towering pyramid on the line , height is what you are after, I will only count how many rows up to the highest cup, so keep that in mind. You can also TOSS the bean bags at the other teams Pyramid. You can NOT block their throws, and you can't reach in front of your pyramid to get bean bags. If they land between your lines a helper will get it and give to the closest side. If you throw the bean bag hard, you will be immediately removed from the game and**

will not be picked again for games, so toss the bean bag. You are only knocking over cups, not trying to strike out Sammy Sosa, got it? OK, ready? (Build up tension before starting)
Man your cups! 10, 9, 8... 3, 2, 1 “GO!” (Music starts)

Round One: The kids race to build a pyramid on the tape to see who can build the highest tower. BUT they can also TOSS bean bags at the other teams' tower to knock it down. They can NOT block the throws or each over the tape that they are building on, cups or bean bags in the middle are out of play. (Helpers can remove from center and give to the side closest to) Give them 2 minutes to build their tower while destroying the other side, it is quite exciting. At the end, announce the winner! (Ours had only 2 cups high!)

Round Two: Remove the bean bags, this time they only build, no throwing. Go only ONE minute. Award the highest. (Ours went 14 cups high!)

Round Three: Return the bean bags, but *ask* them not to use them. (Be careful NOT to say it is against the rules, just nicely ask them not to use them.)

The Point: Taking time to toss at the others costs you. If both teams just work on building, they would do so much better. Note when they will building and throwing neither did very well. When they built only, both did great, even the team that didn't win, did WAY better! Say *“On the third round, notice that I didn't say it was against the rules to throw the bean bags – you could have, but I simply asked you not to. I was proud of you that you didn't. If you had, they would have probably thrown back, and it would have been like the first round again!”* That's how life is – we have the ability to hurt and tear others down, but God asks us not to. Instead work on building yourself and everyone will improve! Let's have a big round of applause for our SUPER STACK ATTACKERS!