

Part 2

Play activities

**United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 31):
Children have the right to rest and leisure and to engage in play
and recreation and to participate freely in cultural activities.
The State has a duty to respect and promote this right.**

Using the play activities in this book

This book is intended primarily to help all those needing to organise and promote fun, constructive play and recreational activities for children. It has many activities to try out and many will remind you of your own play experiences as a child. New games and activities will extend your repertoire – don't be afraid to try them out!

We encourage you to add your ideas and favourite games to this book – use the blank pages at the back of this book to write them down.

Two aspects of play are addressed in this book: “organised play” which happens most often with children's groups, in schools and in more formally organised play sessions; and “free play” where children spontaneously organise themselves and choose what activities they would like to do. Often this involves their own sports games, fantasy play, traditional games and many other options.

- **Organised play**

Children love organised games and these are often the main activity of groups when they meet together. These activities require play leaders or coaches to develop programmes, organise the group, and find the space and equipment needed to play. Even though adults most often take on the role of “play leader”, allowance needs to be given to children's own abilities to learn to lead games and become “play leaders”.

Children usually need adult partners to coach skills, including leadership skills, and help in providing resources.

- **Free play**

Most of the time, children will not be in organised play sessions and will be on their own engaging in play in their own way. It is the responsibility of adults (parents, ward councils, school officials, parks and recreation officials, land owners, housing estate body corporates, and so on) to ensure that safe, stimulating spaces are available for children to express themselves in play.

Many games that are played and learnt in organised play often become part of children's free play as well.

Children need outdoor and indoor spaces to play in. Outdoor places include parks, sports areas, cleaned up vacant lots, public swimming pools, nature areas and green spaces, school playing fields and constructed play grounds.

Indoor spaces include toy libraries, classrooms and children’s club venues and homes. Families need to allow play spaces to happen in their homes – a “restaurant” in the kitchen, a “house” under a table, a hiding space in a cupboard or behind a couch, sometimes an old mattress as a gym mat, and so on. Not all play will be robust and energetic. Quiet and intimate places are needed for other kinds of play. A space for a game at the front doorstep may be as necessary as a space to play soccer.

Children also need “play stuff” – toys such as dolls, toy cars, sand play tools, play dough, cards, marbles, skipping rope; fantasy play things such as dressing up clothes; music for singing and dancing; story books to inspire; sports equipment including balls and bats; and if possible, things like bikes and skateboards.

None of this “play stuff” needs to be state-of-the-art or expensive, and this book gives ideas for finding homemade and easily available equipment for children’s play spaces and play needs.

Both organised and free play require that someone puts in effort, and often some monetary investment, to ensure it happens. More than ever, children need adults who believe in play and who help the “magic” happen!



Children need organised and free play in indoor and outdoor spaces.

Adapt the play ideas in this book to all ages

Many of the play ideas in this book can stretch across childhood. A toddler likes to climb, so does a teenager. A young loves to poke and play with play dough, so does a 10-year-old who makes a hat and big sunglasses! A little water slide is appropriate for younger children, while a gigantic, wide, plastic covered slope for daring slides and dives is needed for older children and teenagers. (See pages 17-21 for more information on what children need for play at different ages and stages of development.)

The key is to make activities age appropriate.

- **Pacing**

Younger children need time to understand instructions and get coordinated for the game. Speak slowly and demonstrate one step at a time. They enjoy repeating the game often and might only manage one or two of the games, whereas older children might manage many more games during a play session.

- **Simplify or increase the challenge**

Match the level of challenge to the age and capacity of the children. The youngest toddler finds it challenging to get both feet off the ground on the lowest rung of a climbing frame, while older children see what daring tricks of balance and coordination they can perform. Water play and art projects using musical instruments are appropriate for all children but need different challenges. In music making, young children enjoy simple shakers made from tin cans, while older children can explore making sounds with more complex instruments like the “sewage pipe organ”, or the making of xylophones and marimbas.

- **Avoid mixing children of different age groups**

A tug of war is enjoyed by all ages but pre-schoolers will be demolished by the robust energy and strength of older children. When all ages are together for a play activity, make sure there are play leaders to look after little ones in their own group, or ensure special affirmative action to protect and include them.

- **Observe your children’s abilities and needs**

Pitch the play at their level. If children have special physical needs consider how they can be included. You will need to experiment with pace and the challenge level of the activity, even taking some of the ideas in completely new directions to fit your context, need and resources available.

More resources

For even more ideas for games and play activities, check out these useful resources:

Parrot on my Shoulder

Published by the International HIV/AIDS Alliance, this book can be downloaded from www.aidsalliance.org

Schools In Motion – A games manual

Produced in South Africa by the Children’s Resource Centre in Cape Town, this book is written for children to use in their schools. It promotes play in play grounds and children as leaders of their own play. For more information or to order a copy, call 021 689 6884, e-mail crcchild@telkomsa.net, or visit their website at www.childrensmovement.org.za.

5 Planning ongoing play programmes

If you are responsible for an ongoing play programme for children, use this book's table of contents as a "menu" to plan a varied and stimulating programme for your daily after-care programme or weekly club, or for a daily holiday programme. Additional variety can be introduced with themes (such as food on special events), and environmental projects, cultural events, outings, and so on.

Your play project might incorporate non-play activities for a specific purpose such as a community service activity or a chance for serious discussion, as in a faith-based programme or in children's support groups for chronic illness. Play offers space for sheer good fun, laughter, release of energy and the building of a warm relationship between players and play leaders.

A term has approximately 10 weeks and each week could have a different activity theme. For a programme that runs every afternoon you could, for example, have a theme for each day:

- Monday – park sports (volleyball, hockey, cricket, soccer)
- Tuesday – art activities
- Wednesday – drama, dance, music
- Thursday – games (traditional and indigenous games)
- Friday – food, environment theme or outings, board games

A play programme such as the one below was used to keep a weekly YMCA Kids Klub going in the Durban inner-city for over 12 years!

Example of a play programme menu

Activity themes	Activities
	<i>Choose one of these activities for your weekly programme. Do something different the following week.</i>
1. Sports and games (see Chapter 10)	Park volleyball; rounders; cricket; hockey; soccer; four square; Frisbee; swimming; bat and ball.
2. Game sets (see Chapter 7)	Games using a particular piece of equipment or theme such as: rope; elastics; water; newspapers; balloons; duster hockey; relay games; circle games.

3. Treasure hunts (see Chapter 7)	Match box; colours; categories; area treasure hunts; “Amazing Race”.
4. Artistic activities (see Chapter 20)	Chalk pavement art; drawing; wax crayon and food colour resist; papier-mâché work; play dough, clay or sand clay; use chunks of charcoal on newsprint; nature dyes (use leaves, flowers, mud, charcoal); collages with stuff collected from a park or the veld; junk recycling; art making.
5. Food themes	Make a camp fire and have a simple braai or bake bread on a stick over the coals (use scone dough). Remove the stick and fill the hole with jam or margarine, syrup, condensed milk or a Vienna sausage. Bake biscuits in a close-by oven (make the dough in advance and let children shape and decorate it). Make pancakes in electric frying pans. Pizza making (make your own scone or yeast dough); soup making; potjiekos competition. Hold a travelling supper (soup at one home, hot dogs at the next, dessert at another).
6. Drama, music, singing (see Chapter 16, 18)	Skits and plays; charades (acting out words and themes for others to guess); shadow plays. Also include dance; poetry; music making; singing; puppets.
7. Team building and cooperative games (see Chapter 9)	Games that help the group to think about how well they work together. For example, the group could make a human sculpture involving every “body” to be part of a giraffe or a bull-dozer.
8. Round robin games (see Chapter 7, 10)	Water games; match stick towers; skittles; sticky dough; ping pong target.
9. Entertainment (see Chapter 7)	Camp fires; game shows; your own “Fear Factor”; prick-a-balloon challenges; talent shows; story telling (get hold of good African stories – find Gcina Hlope books – and many others). Encourage children to learn stories in groups and to tell or dramatise them around a camp fire.
10. Environmental projects	Clean ups; hikes/walks; visit a park, water way or beach, hill or mountain or animal farm; plant vegetables in the ground or in old tyres; bird watching; camp fire and camp out; make shelters to sleep in.
11. Outings	Local swimming pool; library; theatre; museum; zoo; movies; botanical garden; park; game reserve; ice skating; beach.
12. Traditional games (see Chapter 12)	Hopscotch; skipping; elastics; marbles; tops; hide and seek; catch games.
13. Indigenous games (see Chapter 13)	Dikete; morabaraba; shumpu.
14. Board games and cards (see Chapter 14)	Chess; draughts; cards; Pictionary; Snakes and Ladders; Ludo; puzzles; “kerem”; Monopoly.
15. Special events	Public holiday theme activities; special days such as International Play Day (28 May); Environment Week (31 May - 6 June); and International Children’s Day (20 November); religious holidays.

Energisers and attention-getters

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Energisers and attention-getters are short games where everyone follows the directions of a leader. They can be used to start a play session, to energise a group if they seem bored during quieter sessions, or to quieten children when they are distracted and noisy. These games are useful to focus everyone's attention.

Birds Fly

You flap your arms and call out "Birds fly!" or "Bees fly!" or anything else that flies and the group must copy the action. But at random you flap your arms and call the name of something that does NOT fly, such as "Cats fly!" and then anyone who flaps their arms is out and must stand still.

Traffic Lights (robot)

The group stands in the centre of the room. With a sense of anticipation, the leader calls out one of the robot colours: "red" – the group must stand dead still; "orange" – they rotate the top part of their bodies; "green" – they run on the spot. Vary the speeds at which the different colours are called, and get the children running fast on the "green" to use up their energy!

Simon Says

Players must copy the leader's action but only if the command comes from "Simon".

If the leader says (for example), "Simon says put your arms out to the side!" everyone must do just that. If the leader merely says "put your arms out to the side", nobody must move or they are out!



Gotcha (catch me if you can)

- **Catch my hands**

Work in pairs. One person holds their hands together with palms touching. The other person holds their hands apart and then claps them together trying to catch the partner's hands. The partner has to avoid this by moving his or her hands quickly. When hands are caught, partners change roles.

- **Palm up; finger pointing down**

Stand in a circle. All players put out their left hand with palm facing up, right hand with forefinger pointing down into the palm of person next to them. With their open hand they try to catch the finger of the other person while at the same time not allowing themselves to be caught!

- **Rock, Paper, Scissors (a traditional game)**

Players choose to shape their hand in three different ways: Rock (hand shaped as a fist, can crush scissors); Scissors (hand formed like scissors, can cut paper); Paper (flat hand, can cover rock).

Both players put their right hand behind their backs. On the count of three, both players bring out the hand they've shaped as a rock, paper or scissors. You score if you can crush the scissors, cover the rock or cut the paper.

Pairs can also stand in a line. Whoever wins moves up the line. The line keeps changing. At the end of the line, the loser moves back to the start.

Action songs

- **The more we are together**

Players walk about, mingling with each other, singing: "The more we are together, together, together; the more we are together the happier we'll be." They then shake hands with the nearest person singing: "For your friends are my friends; and my friends are your friends; the more we are together, the happier we'll be!"

They then walk with this "new friend", repeating the song, and shaking hands with another pair of friends. Then four friends walk around to join up with another four, and so on until it becomes impossible to move!

Make up other lines, themes and actions like: "The more we play together ...".



- **I'm alive, awake, alert, enthusiastic**

Players sing: "I'm alive, awake, alert, enthusiastic (x2); I'm alive, awake, alert (x2); I'm alive, awake, alert, enthusiastic!" Emphasise "...stic" – and players make appropriate "enthusiastic" movements.

- **Booma chikka boom**

This chant is sung rhythmically and with expression!

Leader says: "I said a booma chikka boom"; group replies: "I said a booma chikka boom" (repeat x2)

Leader: "I said a booma chikka, rocka chikka, rocka, chikka boom"; group: "I said a booma chikka, rocka chikka, rocka, chikka boom"

Leader: "Aha"; group: "Aha"

Leader: "Oh yeah!"; group: "Oh yeah!"

Leader: "Just one more time"; group: "Just one more time"

Leader: "This time a little bit... softer..." (each time choose a new way of saying this chant such as louder, faster, deeper, squeakier...); group: "This time a little bit softer..."

... and now repeat the entire chat a little more softly.

Ajuka Jive

This game can be used as an ice breaker or just to have fun or draw everyone's attention. Players all stand up and face the leader who asks them to copy what he or she does and says.

Round 1:

Leader says: "Thumbs up"

(leader demonstrates and puts thumbs up)

All repeat: "Thumbs up"

(everyone puts their thumbs up)

Then all say twice: "Ajuka Jive"

(and do a little jive!)



Round 2 (and from now onwards keep adding an extra action):

Leader says: "Thumbs up, elbows together" (leader puts thumbs up and elbows together)

All repeat: "Thumbs up, elbows together" (everyone puts thumbs up and elbows together)

Then all say twice: "Ajuka Jive"

Then ...

Round 3: Thumbs up, elbows together, knees together

Round 4: Thumbs up, elbows together, knees together, toes together

Round 5: Thumbs up, elbows together, knees together, toes together, bums out

Round 6: Thumbs up, elbows together, knees together, toes together, bums out, tongue out

To keep the game going longer, other body actions can be added such as wrists together, chests out, chin down – usually the tongue is last because once the tongue is out players can't pronounce "Ajuka Jive"!