

## **Introduction to the First Edition**

**T**HERE WAS BIG TROUBLE ON THE PLAYGROUND at the local Waldorf School. Violence was present almost every day, and most of the first and second grade children had formed cliques. The parent who had the responsibility for monitoring the playground was getting angrier and angrier and lacked support for coping with the situation. The teachers acknowledged the problem, and saw it as an extension of difficulties in the classroom, but their every attempt to help backfired. The parents blamed other parents and other children for the problem, and the administration and other teachers were growing increasingly alarmed. It was at this point that we were called in. Was there any way to relieve the pressure short of major surgery?

Since this is an introduction to cooperative games and activities, we won't describe in detail the different means used to ease the tensions at this school. Cooperative games and activities weren't sufficient unto themselves, but they were the critical factor. They not only provided a common ground for all to meet upon, but allowed us to test the effectiveness of the other conflict resolution techniques being employed. The games served both diagnostic and remedial purposes.

The first time we met the class on the playground we had them play “Spaghetti.” This was our way of saying to them that we are all interconnected and, though sometimes relationships become knotted up, it is possible to find a solution. “Spaghetti” is played by having everyone stand in a circle, then each person taking the hand of someone not directly next to them. Each person must be holding the hand of two different people. The object is to recreate the circle while continuing to hold hands. This is not easy to do, and there is often no way to do it, but communication and patience are emphasized if there is to be any chance at all. Once children get the idea they want very much to have success. This class played twice, with manners no one would have believed possible, before finally “winning.”

Next, we played “Rolling Along.” In this game, children pair off, lie on their backs and have to roll down a field with their toes connected. At first we let them pick their own partners, then we chose partners randomly, and finally we deliberately matched certain students together. Of course there was dissatisfaction with both the random and deliberate methods of pairing, but the game was so much fun, and the release of energy so significant that the children cooperated.

Then, it was into group games such as “Chase in the Ocean” and “True or False.” Then we collectively made an obstacle course, and collectively navigated it. Finally, we played “Hug a Tree.” This was an important moment in the day, for this game requires a high degree of trust. Children are in pairs and one is blindfolded. Then, in a fairly dense wood, the sighted child leads the blindfolded partner to a tree by a circuitous route. The blindfolded child explores the tree with all senses but sight. Then, via

a different route, the child is led back to start, the blindfold removed, and the child tries to find the tree.

But how to arrange the pairs? If we put children together who had been having difficulty with one another and they violated trust, it was altogether likely that cooperative games would not be energized into healing intensity. If, on the other hand, we allowed the “best friends” who formed the core of the cliques to pair off, then there was the probability that those cliques would be reinforced.

The understanding of how the students were connected had been developing in us during the time the previous games were played. We relied on no other person’s judgment, not even that of the teacher. It is in the course of the games, while involvement is total, that the child will forget the more superficial aspects of image, and will react according to needs. For instance, two boys who were often the object of one another’s aggression had greatly enjoyed being paired in “Rolling Along.” They moved across the field so quickly that the other children were delighted and stopped to watch them. Everyone was surprised, and comfortable, when they realized the new roles these boys were living.

In every group there are those who have the capability of providing a “neutralizing” influence. Often, this capability is hidden, for there is great pressure to join one side or another. In this class of first and second graders, the neutralizers were well underground. Communication and “safe space” had deteriorated to that extent. But we had spotted them during the group games. They played the games for the enjoyment of it, and did not worry who was next to them. They looked to us for information as to how best to play, and were not afraid of telling those who interfered to be quiet.

The biggest clue to the identity of the “neutralizers” was their need to let us know they were not identified with any one group of children. They let us know in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. One child would deliberately stand apart from the group while awaiting the next round of play. Another would deliberately join in with a child or group she didn’t usually join, and would give us a verbal sign that she was doing so.

The “neutralizers” played a critical role in the games which followed. We split the more closely attached of the cliques among them. The rest we arranged so that they were with children they weren’t ordinarily with, or ones with whom they had moderate difficulties. It worked out very well. By now our allotted time was spent and it was with a groan of displeasure that the children returned to the classroom.

Over the next few weeks, the parent who was in charge of the playground was trained. Gradually, more and more complex games were introduced, each time expanding the children’s perception of safe space. Eventually we played games like “Cast Your Vote” and “Interview,” in which they could express their understanding of, and desire for, their classroom. To do so took great courage on their parts, and it was not readily forthcoming. There were other difficulties in the relationship of the classroom teacher and the parents, but finally the class reached a place where, at least in the playground, they could channel their energy into cooperation.

### **Principles of Application**

*Cooperative games are a tool, and like all tools, they must be used with skill and sensitivity.* One of the beautiful and exciting aspects of cooperative games and activities

is that they can be varied according to the ages and talents of the participants; they can be adapted to every learning situation. Vary the games to fit the profile of the participants.

*Age is a factor for each game.* Please do not take age guidelines literally; experiment, and enjoy as you go along. But it is important to consider age, and at a deeper level, the growth stage of the children.

*A thorough and meaningful understanding of the growth stages of children is one of the best tools for all education.* Success with these games depends in large measure on your understanding of child development. With this understanding, games can be chosen and applied with an efficacy that is astounding.

*The attitude of the game leader is critical.* Children are naturally attuned to accept guidance from leaders, and so are able to read us in disarmingly straightforward ways. If the leader does not genuinely wish for cooperation, or in any way exhibits prejudice or manipulation, the playing of cooperative games becomes hypocritical. *As you model, so you teach.*

*If a game does not work well the first time, come back to it later.* Sometimes it takes several attempts before children grasp the sense of the games. Cooperative games and activities are not woven into the fabric of American play. Children have not been watching the games on TV since they were born. Therefore, go slowly. Do not attempt too many variations immediately. That creates the image of desperation. It is better to try lots of different games. Be honest, be patient and enlist the children's help.

*If a child does not want to play, do not force her.* Do not allow her to disrupt the group, either. Our experience

has been that after observing, most children join, or find a different constructive activity. There is something about the cooperative nature of the event that increases a child's safe space. The atmosphere becomes gentler and the children sense it.

*Go ahead and play.* Read through the games once or twice, familiarize yourself with ones you are to play that day, and then go for it. Why not? You've got nothing to lose. Your ability to facilitate will come from experience, and will come rather quickly.

*Bring your sense of humor.* This is the most important point of all. Make jokes, even bad ones. Lighten up, play games and let everyone enjoy themselves. Humor is the most healthy environment for everyone, and one in which you will have access to the most information concerning the children.

## **Games in Different Situations**

Cooperative games and activities have been used successfully in all learning environments, at parties, within the immediate family and the extended family, and at large group gatherings. We have played them with whole communities, camps, public and private schools, the disabled and homeschooling collectives. They provide an excellent focus that allows appreciation of everyone's abilities in a friendly, comfortable way. Self-esteem grows; the inner sense of peace and interconnectedness comes alive.

There are games that serve as icebreakers, as a medium for feelings, as concentration intensifiers, as artistic and thinking enhancers, and as group and individual centering techniques. With a minimum of effort and a maximum of fun, cooperative games provide a way to recognize and integrate the rhythms of the participants.

In the experience described at the beginning of this introduction the situation was conflict within a large school group. We would like to close with descriptions of two more experiences, each of a very different nature. These three examples hardly exhaust all the situations amenable to the use of cooperative games. Hopefully, taken together, they will stimulate you to find your own approach to using them. If you require more information, feel free to write to us. We are sure we can create an application suitable for your situation.

We have the honor of guiding a group of children on a nature walk every Friday. There are about a dozen in the class ranging in age from 6 to 12. Our rhythm is to take an hour-long walk in the forest that surrounds our community, have a snack and then play cooperative games. We have lunch and then it is more games, or storytelling, or acting. The aim of the class is for the children to learn how to be friends. This aim they know. When conflict arises we stop our activity and work towards resolution. No cliques are allowed. We all agree that being friends is not all that easy. Every one of them is glad for the opportunity to learn. They are also angry that this skill is not usually taught for they clearly perceive the trouble grownups have relating.

Surprisingly, nature is not the primary attraction for the children. That honor belongs to cooperative games and activities, and the social dynamic arising there from. When we come across the red-tailed hawk doing a mating flight, or examine coyote scat to determine its diet, or surprise a flock of wild turkeys, or collect wildflowers to press, there is always great delight, wonder and appreciation of nature. But these are not sought. The children would rather play cooperative games. This, to us, is something

of a shock, but a tribute to the power of these games in satisfying a genuine need of the children.

Their favorite game will not be found listed in this book. They created it themselves and, to be honest, we do not know all the rules. It is called “Wild Horses,” and it has something to do with play acting horses, mountain lions, people, sheep, and whatever or whomever any participant wants to be. This game has evolved from a game they invented about the Greek myths. All we ask is that everyone be included, that there be no real violence and that no cliques form. At first there was some resistance to these guidelines, but now they need not even be mentioned. Every now and then we check in with different children to make sure they are included in a satisfactory way. We’ve yet to be disappointed.

“Wild Horses” did not appear until the class had been together over a year. We had gone through many games, most of them with success. Most games had their moment of being preferred, but, on the whole, each has had a similar amount of consideration. Often the children came up with their own variations.

One last experience concerns a mother and her six-year-old boy. We were asked to help when the mother was just concluding a painful and violent divorce from the boy’s father. The boy — bright, energetic and sensitive — was having a difficult time in school. He is strong and likes the spotlight. His classmates had seized upon this to use him to personify their own negative tendencies. As a result, he was often dared and taunted. Like his father, he responded violently. The label of “bad” was hung on him and any time the others needed to participate in “badness,” this boy was the chosen object.



And, to be sure, part of him liked it. It was attention and power, and even those who did not like him needed him. One boy, frail in body and underdeveloped emotionally, particularly enjoyed leaning on him, getting hit, and both of them being punished.

While work with this family proceeded on many levels, one small but important part involved cooperative games. We wanted to reawaken the boy's sense of belongingness. If he could feel that he belonged on this planet and in his family, then his life would be of value and destructive behaviors would diminish.

Two cooperative games were chosen and both worked very well. First, to give the mother the information on the disposition of the boy each day, an animal game was introduced around the breakfast table. The mother had many pictures of animals. Each morning she would hold one up and each person would say how they resembled that animal that day. She had everything from rearing cobras to cuddling koalas. There was a younger sister in the house, and the three of them would play together. Often they acted out their animal feelings. Of course, their moods became family knowledge and that instantly released some tension. And the mother had a much clearer picture of how to apply other remedies we were using in our attempt to improve the overall situation.

The other game was a morning family stretch game. Like the one above, it was very simple. Everyone meets by the fire for a five-minute stretch together, with each family member being the leader on a rotating basis. They soon added the variation of a hand coordination game. They now started their day taking a relaxed breath together. The connection that the boy needed to experience was

present. He responded favorably and his good health was soon restored.

Friends, thank you for giving us the opportunity to write about cooperative games and activities. We truly hope you will experiment with them and find them as useful as we have. In this critical juncture of human evolution, they can help teach cooperation, respect and friendship. These are qualities that go a long way, and of which we can never get enough.

If we can be of any help to you, please do not hesitate to write.

Peace,

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## **Preface to the Second Edition**

WHEN NEW SOCIETY PUBLISHERS called to say they wanted to put out a new edition of this book, we were overjoyed. Since its first publication more than twenty years ago, *Everyone Wins* has had a profound impact on an incredibly diverse group of readers and their practices. Specifically, as reported by teachers, camp counselors, family coaches and youth group leaders, these games, activities and initiatives have had great value in evaluating interpersonal dynamics, teaching social justice, and assessing developmental capacities. In addition, the book has been used by child psychologists, dyslexia therapists, developmental psychologists and family therapists. It has been sold in many countries, is included in the national data bank on conflict resolution, and won the Parent's Choice Award. We never would have guessed that a little book that began on scraps of paper in my back pocket would have such an incredible impact on so many great people.

When this book was first published we were just beginning our nonprofit work. Starting with the Center for Educational Guidance our nonprofit, now called EnCompass, has grown tremendously. Over the years we have lead hundreds of parenting workshops, established

the field of experiential learning programs for whole families, and given lectures and talks around the world. EnCompass is now operating out of Portland, Oregon where we are poised to actualize our ultimate vision: The EnCompass Institute.

The EnCompass Institute is a powerful vision of education built to strengthen the American family. The Institute uses Natural Learning Rhythms, the nationally recognized developmental model created by Ba and Josette Luvmour, as its philosophical basis. With its Lab School, Family Learning Center and Research Core, the EnCompass Institute integrates child development, family dynamics, teacher training, parent education, whole-family experiential learning and parent-teacher communication. The synergy of these parts come together in one place to create a powerful community of families experiencing optimal well-being and capable of changing the world.

We wish to dedicate this second addition to all the children. May they actualize their ultimate potential and live in well-being.

Enjoy!

Ba and Josette Luvmour, 2006  
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