

INTRO AND IMPORTANT TIPS

Do you ever need joyful, cooperative, uplifting, creative, educational and really fun games to play with your students or children? Teachers, parents, and caregivers of children and youth will discover a rich repertoire of games to promote unity in diversity, an awareness of our interdependence, many virtues, Baha'i concepts and so much more in this manual.

Just imagine the venues: children and youth classes, gym time, Ayyam-i-Ha parties, Holy day gatherings, family fun nights, birthday parties, scout meetings, camps, conferences, unit convention, summer schools, social portion of feast, and any party that has 4 or more people! Here are games that are appropriate for large and small groups, for Baha'i sponsored events with the public and games that are most suitable for Baha'is or near-Baha'is only. (Like games which teach the importance of teaching others about Baha'u'llah). Some of the games are wild, with lots of running and chasing, great for outdoors or a gym. Others are suitable for smaller spaces with less physical movement. Some are very loud and some are quiet. (For those of you who hold children's classes in a library). Some are suspenseful and intense, others are silly and goofy, some are cerebral and thought provoking. Many are metaphors for Baha'i teachings, complete with supporting quotes. Here are over 150 games for all kinds of kids and adults—young and old, wiggley and shy.

Most of the games can be used for a wide age range of children and adults and youth love them too. All the games selected are child tested and have high enthusiasm ratings, (i.e. kids ask to play them again and again). Written by a teacher of Baha'i children's classes for over 28 years—I've made most of the mistakes for you and picked out only the winners for this manual. These games have been used in numerous Baha'i and non-Baha'i settings with a huge variety of kids in many different countries.

You will notice 5 reoccurring themes in most of the games: Acquisition of virtues, Seeking/hunting, rescuing/freeing/helping, avoidance of or triumphing over the lower nature, and of course cooperation and interdependence.

Acquisition of power, things, fame, etc. is overemphasized in most cultures. Many of the games in this manual reinforce that the most important acquisitions of our lives are spiritual qualities, the virtues--and that it takes willful effort to do so. The desire to seek and search is implanted in every soul and this trait is so very valuable in spiritual growth and in our journey towards the Divine. One will find reference to seekers throughout all religious scripture, especially in the Baha'i writings. Thus, I feel it is important to encourage this inborn tendency in children. Many games also have rules that encourage players to rescue or help prevent others from being frozen by the lower nature, from the "prison of self", etc. I believe we should instill in our kids that even if they are safe, possess the sought after objects, etc., they should not rest until all are safe, all have what is needed. I think this not only relates to economic & social justice, but also to sharing God's sacred teachings with others. Many games also involve shunning, avoiding, or triumphing over a person(s) wearing an ugly mask that represents the lower nature or aspects of the lower nature such as greed, dishonesty, selfishness, disunity, ignorance, etc. This is a metaphor for what we should teach our kids--to recognize how ugly, unpleasant, and destructive the lower nature is to all of our well being and to shun those lower nature impulses. And finally, the dire need for humanity to cooperate and recognize our interdependence is undeniable. This theme is explored more thoroughly later in this introduction under the heading The Rationale for a Paradigm Shift in the Games We Play

Tips

- The games children love the most, of course, are the highly active and medium active ones. A good formula is to intersperse low activity games with the high/medium ones.
- Many of the games have numerous quotes which relate to the theme of the game. I do not recommend using all of them when explaining the game—the kids will shut down. For many of the games I go into rather long elaborate discussions/speeches that explain the metaphor of the game. (The games were often designed to support a theme we were studying in Baha'i children's classes). While these verbal lessons can promote thought and insight, they can also be too much to absorb in one session. Always intersperse these metaphorical elaborations with action-- and be expressive and ask questions if you want kids to stay engaged and grasp the significance of what you are trying to convey. Be aware that public parties are not good occasions to go into great detail or depth. I always provide an educational bent at parties,

but avoid the feel of a lesson plan. Children's party audiences are there to celebrate and have fun. They will not want to ponder deep issues and hold discussions.

- It always helps to have children sit down and be relatively still before you explain the game. They will absorb your words much better.
- And if you want their full attention, wait until after you are done with the explanation and quotes before handing out any supplies. Insist on quiet while you are talking. Refuse to continue explaining unless kids are quiet.
- It's always best to demonstrate the rules physically or least give a trial run of a game before beginning in earnest, unless the game is very simple. Also, don't take questions until after you have explained the rules—you will have covered most.
- It's important to really know and understand the rules of a game *before* explaining them to players. You will hold their attention much better if you come off confident and enthusiastic, rather than perplexed and bumbling!
- I have to confess that some of the games are competitive and involve attempting to be first or get the most resources (for example water or points) for your team or yourself. I think these types of games have the potential to reinforce a materialistic, individualistic, prideful, and self-centered attitude. In order to counteract some of this, I always proclaim the no gloating or exulting rule and never praise or reward the winners. When I play these types of games with children I emphasize teamwork. Kids really can enjoy them unless there is obsessive keeping track of who is ahead or has more. Like sugar, use competitive games sparingly, knowing that they can create an unhealthy state--disunity.
- It is important to read your group and be sensitive to differences in cultural standards of touching and of public demeanor. If you are working with the public, and do not know your players well, go easy on games that involve a lot of close physical contact and silliness. Especially if the players don't know each other very well or at all, they can be really threatened by some of the physical closeness or levels of uninhibited-ness that some of the games require. If you are working with teenagers or adults, know that many of them are not used to being playful and uninhibited or silly. Never force people to let down their shields. With more reserved groups, choose games that do not require them to be goofy or do unusual things. And always be aware of the whole sexual awareness thing in kids 10 and up—don't pair boys and girls in physically intimate games unless they are really good buddies and know each other. Even then, remember standards of modesty. Being able to read your group and prescribe the appropriate game takes experience and a willingness to take risks and make mistakes!
- If possible, it is always best to have a mature person play the lower nature. Otherwise, the kid playing the lower nature does not learn the positive messages in the game, or how to cooperate, and they can get an ego trip from trying to dominate the others. Also, and this is very important, a less mature person focusing on winning or showing off, does not know when to pull back to equalize the competition and can totally sabotage the game. For example, in *Flower Virtue Rescue*, the person playing the lower nature needs to play the part in such a way that the players get plenty of opportunity to snatch flowers—like lunging onto his stomach and lingering there for a few seconds so kids on the other side can grab the flowers. Also, with kids under 6 or 7, monster masks should **NEVER** be used.
- Masks should not be gory or too scary. Just ugly. For younger kids we use a Dr. Seuss Grinch mask to represent the lower nature.

THE RATIONALE FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE GAMES WE PLAY

Games are extremely popular and ubiquitous. They play a large role in the life of most children. They can be and are played in a multitude of settings: Stadiums, back yards, parks, schools, birthday parties, religious holidays, homes, and within families. We must be very attentive to the types of games we play because when you have a group of children, perhaps diverse, in a social interchange such as a game, the rules and goals of the game define the nature and quality of that interchange, the nature and quality of their relationship to each other. Therefore, games can reinforce a pattern or paradigm for all other social relationships. I have witnessed in my own classes and also read social experiments that provide evidence that this is true. The social dynamic reinforced in games fosters attitudes and behaviors that carry over in to other social exchanges. When kids are competing on a regular basis this fosters alienation, one-upmanship, feelings of threat and dislike, lack of compassion and disunity. On the other hand, when kids are primarily engaged in cooperative play, the opposite happens. When they work together for a common goal whether in a game or class lesson, it promotes fellowship, friendship, altruism, unity, dialogue, and caring. Not that kids can't get annoyed or frustrated with team mates, but those very feelings and the expression of them undermine their chances of succeeding, and they know it. Actually, built into most cooperative games is the fact that if you don't work in unity with your partner or team, you will definitely fail. There is an element of this in traditional sports too, of course, but cooperative games do not promote ill will between teams and do not produce super stars.

Essentially, games are a form of socialization, and it is no accident that cultures all over the world use them to teach values and cultural standards.

To this end, most of the games in this manual are cooperative in nature. Relatively very few pit kids against each other. If there is competition, it's usually with a person or persons who represent the lower nature or some aspect of it. In this case, they would wear an ugly mask. This really adds to the thrill and is a good metaphor of how ugly the lower nature can be--- which our higher nature should always compete against in real life. Students very rarely get to play the bad guy because I want them to practice engaging in cooperative endeavors, as opposed to getting an ego trip because they get to wear the mask and chase everybody else. There is another form of competition: kids vie to be the first to serve humanity or to acquire the most virtues. I think this is acceptable because there are quotes by Abdu'l-Baha encouraging vying in this context. (These quotes are used with those games and are in this manual). I explain to the kids that being first or having the most is not spiritually praiseworthy, but being the first to serve others, to show a virtue, or acquiring the most virtues is.

I highly encourage teachers to not play the traditional sports in Baha'i children's classes. Most kids get plenty of exposure to these types of games in school and out. These games can teach discipline, teamwork, loyalty, good sportsmanship, commitment, responsibility, endurance, etc., but they also teach undesirable characteristics as well, such as vainglory, domination, attachment to winning above all else, and the desire for others to fail. I think we can be more creative in our play.

I would like to share this quote by the Universal House of Justice again to assist in explaining the need for a change in the games we play:

"For in essence, peace stems from an inner state supported by a moral or spiritual attitude, and it is chiefly in evoking this attitude that the possibility of enduring solutions can be found."---The Universal House of Justice from The Promise of World Peace

Think about most of the games and sports our children play through organized sports teams and school gym class. Do they create or nurture an inner state of joy, affinity, unity, respect, oneness, or spiritual and moral attitudes conducive to peace? Do they awaken the spiritual or moral instincts in children? Or do they stimulate feelings, values, and attitudes which undermine an inner state of joy and affinity, or which interfere with the development of noble virtues?

Children's understanding of oneness derives from concrete activities which promote synergy, cooperation, unity, and an experience of interdependence---all of which are inherent properties of cooperative games. Cooperative games are a concrete metaphor in action for unity in diversity and oneness.

My personal opinion is that under most circumstances, most competitive games tend to promote values and attitudes that directly undermine unity and the oneness of humanity paradigm. Children can't learn oneness and unity when they are being taught to dominate, to control, to be superior, to succeed at the expense of others. Think of the themes found in typical competitive American board and group/team games:

Us versus them

Play to overcome and beat others

Were number one, we're the best

Exulting in other's failures, depending on it for own success, feeling good when others have faults, weaknesses, or make mistakes

Yay winners, boo losers---lack of respect and exclusion of the weaker and less coordinated. (Think of "last one there is a rotten egg")

Being first, or having the most is the criteria that establishes the winner

Remember, the themes in games influence formation of our social attitudes. And it is easy to see how the themes described above have played out in our social and international relationships:

Us versus them: It used to be the Americans versus the Russians, now its USA versus the United Nations, Liberals vs the Conservatives, citizens vs the immigrants, West vs the East, rich vs the poor, Christianity vs Islam, etc.

Play to overcome and beat others: This is how governments currently try to resolve challenges. The world is full of power hungry leaders who thrive on dominating, controlling and overcoming targeted populations. Any expression of forced domination over another human being reflects this theme on some level.

Were number one, we're the best: Nationalism, excessive patriotism, ethnocentrism, racism, and superiority complexes abound in political groups and individuals.

Exulting in other's failures, depending on it for own success, feeling good when others have faults, weaknesses, or make mistakes: We have a system of economics and privilege that benefits and rewards a relatively few elite, at the expense of the less fortunate. And few in power seems to be bothered by the inherent immorality of this. Could it be b/c we are socialized that this is just the natural order of things?

This attitude of exulting in other's failures and faults probably also contributes to the epidemic of back-biting and gossip in our culture.

Yay winners, boo losers—lack of respect and exclusion of the weaker and less coordinated: It seems that it is always the powerful and rich who get respect, get their way, and are included in big decisions. In many cultures the clumsy, the disabled, the ones who lose, are devalued. When we devalue people enough, it is easy to abuse and oppress them. Children learn early that winning earns them respect, popularity, and attention, and as they grow older, money and other rewards. Children who are raised with excessive competition feel and equate happiness and security with being better than others, getting ahead of others. What kind of society does that lead to? This can easily translate into the desire for superiority in general, which of course endangers unity.

Being first, or having the most wins criteria establishes the winner. If that is not a recipe for excessive consumerism and materialism, I don't know what is. Games in our culture can really reinforce the whole "Me first" attitude. Getting to the finish line or the end of path on a board game first is often the criteria for winning. We see this self-centered orientation flagrantly demonstrated in the putting of a country's interests (especially economic) ahead of the welfare of the whole planet.

In the pursuit of being first or having the most, (as well as of superiority and dominance, which typical games also reinforce) people will belittle others, step on them, be unconcerned for their welfare, and become alienated to make it easier to ignore their rights. This process greatly undermines unity and justice, and we can see how it has infiltrated the world's national and international politics.

How many games do our children play in which the goal is to get the most for themselves? Monopoly is only one among thousands. This attitude of desiring the most for oneself breeds a value system where things or resources are more important than people. Of course this obstructs peace, justice, and unity. Think of the well known American game "King of the Mountain". It is really just a simplified version of the sad world scene: The purpose is to possess and control a resource and prevent others from having access to it. "Musical Chairs" is the same. Why not play cooperative versions like "People of the Mountain" or "Chair Island"? (Both are in this games manual). If one reads the rules and goals of these cooperative games and ponders the dynamic that these rules and goals will produce on the relationships, as opposed to the traditional versions, it is so easy to see how cooperative games promote Baha'i principles and how many traditional competitive games undermine them.

Although competitive games may not directly cause injustice and wars, I would venture to say that they contribute to these evils on a very basic level: Governments are composed of individuals with personal values, beliefs, and attitudes—which were developed as children on the playground, in the backyard, and in the family room. It is not inconceivable that these values, beliefs and attitudes will eventually find expression in the political arena.

Negative themes and aspects, such as being first, "us versus them" and "we're number one" are intrinsic to most competitive games. On the other hand, cooperative games have a wholly different set of themes:

Playing together with one another for common ends rather than against each other for mutually exclusive ends. The values inherent in these games the world needs desperately---mainly cooperation for the good of the whole.

In cooperative games, one person's strengths affect everyone's and one person's weakness or mistake is everyone's weakness or mistake. There is a theme of interdependence so all strive for everyone to do well. There are no losers or all lose. Is this not the situation of our planet with the threats of nuclear war and environmental destruction? If we do not work together in unity to prevent these disasters, eventually, even the most advantaged few will go down with the rest of us. We are all interconnected, all on one planet only.

The world is, in truth, moving on towards its destiny. The interdependence of the peoples and nations of the earth, whatever the leaders of the divisive forces of the world may say or do, is already an accomplished fact. Its unity in the economic sphere is now understood and recognized. The welfare of the part means the welfare of the whole, and the distress of the part brings distress to the whole. ~Shoghi Effendi, The Promised Day is Come, p. 122

If one reads the quote above and the ones below, it is easy to ascertain what types of games could best convey the perspective, wisdom, attitudes, beliefs and values they contain. Don't they all suggest the well being of one is dependent on the well being of all, that we should teach our children to play together in unity for the benefit of all?

He Who is your Lord, the All-Merciful, cherisheth in His heart the desire of beholding the entire human race as one soul and one body. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 213

Beware lest the desires of the flesh and of a corrupt inclination provoke divisions among you. Be ye as the fingers of one hand, the members of one body. ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 140

It is obvious that all created things are connected one to another by a linkage complete and perfect, even, for example, as are the members of the human body. Note how all the members and component parts of the human body are connected one to another. In the same way, all the members of this endless universe are linked one to another. ~Abdu'l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha, p. 47

.....this limitless universe is like the human body, all the members of which are connected and linked with one another with the greatest strength. How much the organs, the members and the parts of the body of man are intermingled and connected for mutual aid and help, and how much they influence one another! In the same way, the parts of this infinite universe have their members and elements connected with one another, and influence one another spiritually and materially.

For example, the eye sees, and all the body is affected; the ear hears, and all the members of the body are moved. Of this there is no doubt; and the universe is like a living person. Moreover, the connection which exists between the members of beings must necessarily have an effect and impression, whether it be material or spiritual. ~Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, p. 245

Were one to observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that co-operation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly. ~Abdu'l-Baha: Compilations of Compilations, Vol. 1, page 71

For all beings are connected together like a chain, and reciprocal help, assistance, and influence belonging to the properties of things, are the causes of the existence, development, and growth of created beings. ~Abdu'l-Baha, Baha'i World Faith, p. 302)

The body politic may be likened to the human organism. As long as the various members and parts of that organism are coordinated and cooperating in harmony, we have as a result the expression of life in its fullest degree. When these members lack coordination and harmony, we have the reverse, which in the human organism is disease, dissolution, death. Similarly, in the body politic of humanity dissension, discord and warfare are always destructive and inevitably fatal. All created beings are dependent upon peace and coordination, for every contingent and phenomenal being is a composition of distinct elements. As long as there is affinity and cohesion among these constituent elements, strength and life are manifest; but when dissension and repulsion arise among them, disintegration follows. This is proof that peace and amity, which God has willed for His children, are the saving factors of human society, whereas war and strife, which violate His ordinances, are the cause of death and destruction. ~Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 98

So, if the nature of life and of human civilization is fundamentally connected & interdependent like the human body and

No power can exist except through unity. ~Baha'u'llah: Consultation, page 93

and*mutual helpfulness and cooperation are the two necessary principles underlying human welfare.* ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Promulgation of Universal Peace, page 150

and *The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.* ~Baha'u'llah, Gleanings, p. 286

.....then why wouldn't we use every possible medium to teach these concepts to our children? Given how influential games are in socializing children, and given how humanity seems so resistant to learn and apply the principles of unity and oneness, why on earth would we play games that encourage kids to develop values and attitudes that directly undermine unity and oneness?

Whether its over a ball on a football field or over land on a battle field, aren't the goals fundamentally the same? Both sides are desperately trying to obtain control over a coveted resource and prevent the opposing side from having it. Are sports these days really capable of nurturing the nobility of the human spirit? I am sure there are teams whose coaches and players value integrity and team spirit. There may even be teams that out of altruism and kindness would be willing to risk losing so that even their worst player can participate. Let us honor and support them.

I am not calling for the abolition of traditional sports; just a new type of game in Baha'i education. A critical concept that all teachers and parents should learn is that what children learn and experience in the microcosm of the family and community, will eventually play out in the macrocosm of the world. How children are treated and allowed to treat others become the blueprints for larger settings later in life. In a cooperative game, where everyone is supporting each other for a common goal, even the most overweight, underweight, disabled, weakest, shortest, slowest and loneliest of children can feel valued and play their part. They are like the poor and disadvantaged of our world; they need to be allowed to play a role in a common vision, a unified endeavor--the healing of the world. We need to include and respect them and listen to them and do our best to help them succeed in life. We need to realize that ultimately, their afflictions are our afflictions, their triumphs are our triumphs. And the athletically gifted are like the privileged elite--they need to sacrifice some of their advantage to uplift and include the weaker ones. They need to make a noble effort to assist their less fortunate brethren so that all will prosper. We are all one family, and we need to play games that train us to promote our brothers' and sisters' well being, not just our own.

Regarding reciprocity and cooperation: each member of the body politic should live in the utmost comfort and welfare because each individual member of humanity is a member of the body politic and if one member of the members be in distress or be afflicted with some disease all the other members must necessarily suffer.....Although the body politic is one family yet because of lack of harmonious relations some members are comfortable and some in direst misery, some members are satisfied and some are hungry, some members are clothed in most costly garments and some families are in need of food and shelter..... ~Abdu'l-Baha, Foundations of World Unity p. 38

The second attribute of perfection is justice and impartiality..... This means to have no regard for one's own personal benefits and selfish advantages..... It means to see one's self as only one of the servants of God..... It means to consider the welfare of the community as one's own. It means, in brief, to regard humanity as a single individual, and one's own self as a member of that corporeal form, and to know of a certainty that if pain or injury afflicts any member of that body, it must inevitably result in suffering for all the rest. ~Abdu'l-Baha, The Secret of Divine Civilization, p. 38

The body politic today is greatly in need of a physician. It is similar to a human body afflicted with severe ailments.....The disease which afflicts the body politic is lack of love and absence of altruism. In the hearts of men no real love is found, and the condition is such that, unless their susceptibilities are quickened by some power so that unity, love and accord may develop within them, there can be no healing, no agreement among mankind. Love and unity are the needs of the body politic today. Without these there can be no progress or prosperity attained. Therefore, the friends of God must adhere to the power which will create this love and unity in the hearts of the sons of men.

~Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 171

The rich among you must show compassion toward the poor, and the well-to-do must look after those in distress. ~Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 215

.....man was created to be a man - to be fair, to be just, to be merciful, to be kind to all his species, never to be willing that he himself be well off while others are in misery and distress - this is an attribute of the animal and not of man. Nay, rather, man should be willing to accept hardships for himself in order that others may enjoy wealth; he should enjoy trouble for himself that others may enjoy happiness and well-being. This is the attribute of man. This is becoming of man. Otherwise man is not man - he is less than the animal.

The man who thinks only of himself and is thoughtless of others is undoubtedly inferior to the animal because the animal is not possessed of the reasoning faculty. The animal is excused; but in man there is reason, the faculty of justice, the faculty of mercifulness. Possessing all these faculties he must not leave them unused. He who is so hard-hearted as to think only of his own comfort, such an one will not be called man. ~ `Abdu'l-Baha: Foundations of World Unity, page 42

The supreme need of humanity is cooperation and reciprocity. The stronger the ties of fellowship and solidarity amongst men, the greater will be the power of constructiveness and accomplishment in all the planes of human activity. Without cooperation and reciprocal attitude the individual member of human society remains self-centered, uninspired by altruistic purposes, limited and solitary in development like the animal and plant organisms of the lower kingdoms.

~`Abdu'l-Baha, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, p. 337