



# TURNING GAMES INTO SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILL BUILDING

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## Abstract

Games are a popular activity in afterschool programs, clubs, project meetings, youth events, and camps. They're fun and also provide potential health benefits and social-emotional development opportunities. This Extension curriculum includes activity cards designed to support "life skills" development in youth. In addition to learning techniques of experiential education, practitioners gain skills in intentionally selecting games that support specific social-emotional development areas. Youth professionals equipped with discussion skills and a set of strategies increases successful outcomes for youth programs.

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# Turning Games into Social-emotional Skill Building

## Purpose of the Activity/Game Cards

These activity cards are for staff, volunteers, and youth leaders who want to maximize the effectiveness that games can have on youth development. They are written for 4<sup>th</sup> grade and above, but you may adapt them for younger youth by more explicitly telling the youth how life skills are tied to the games or challenges in which they are engaged.

Games are a popular activity in afterschool programs, clubs, project meetings, youth events, and camps (DeBord 1989). They provide fun, potential health benefits (Strong et. al. 2005), and social-emotional development opportunities (Durlack et al. 2010), or what 4-H programs refer to as “life skill” development. These activity cards have been used by groups that report youth being more active, developing life skills while having fun (Brandt 2013). Life skill development provides youth with coping skills (Lerner et al. 2005), skills for independent living after high school (Casey Foundation 2008), and supports future job success (Lemke 2003). In many instances, working on skills during these games provides opportunities for teambuilding, which in turn supports youth success in many social circumstances (Henderson 2012).

## Credits

Most, if not all of the included activities are the result of decades of sharing by experiential education practitioners. Over the years, various iterations of these activities have been published or simply shared through workshops and presentations, such as those sponsored by the international [Association for Experiential Education](#). Rather than having a traditional “scientific,” empirical basis, such activities are typically developed through a logical application of metaphorical development. That is, one takes an abstract concept such as “responsibility” and adapts a physical activity or “game” that *represents an example* of what responsibility might “look like” in daily activities (much like developing an “operational definition”). As mentioned above, these activities go through various iterations as they are shared from year-to-year, much like open-source code for computer programs. Over time, as with stories passed down across the years, the original source or developer for these various activities is lost in history, and therefore cannot be cited in a traditional manner. For an in-depth examination of the application of metaphors to experiential education, the reader is referred to an excellent book, *Book of metaphors: A descriptive presentation of metaphors for adventure activities – Volume II*, by Michael Gass (1995).

Thanks go out to the original authors, youth and adults, who have created, shared, recorded, and modified these games throughout the years.

Christina Murray is credited with testing early versions of the cards and adding input to early designs and trainings.

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## The Life Skills

The Washington State University (WSU) Extension program focuses on variations of these life skills with the youth:

- Decision Making
- Leadership
- Wise Use of Resources
- Useful / Marketable Skills
- Communication
- Healthy Lifestyle Choices
- Accepting Differences
- Self-Responsibility

Choices about which life skill to focus on with any particular group of youth or for a given situation depend on such factors as the age/grade level of the youth. Also, life skills the group may be developing could be good life skills to focus on during play. Some youth are able to select their own life skill to work on. Selecting specific skills supports each unique situation a group has.

## Experiential Education

Another purpose of these structured activities is for youth professionals to improve their discussion skills with a set of strategies from the field of experiential education, which increases successful outcomes for youth programs (Ripberger 2008, Torock 2009). In addition to learning the techniques of experiential education, practitioners gain skills in intentionally selecting games that support specific social-emotional development areas (Brandt 2013).

The activity cards are based on David Kolb’s Experiential Learning Cycle, which has four parts: (1) Concrete experience; (2) Observation & reflection; (3) Generalizing to other areas/situations in one’s life / thinking abstractly about other applications of the exercise; and (4) Applying concepts to new situations (Kolb 1984). To simplify and improve the cards, the

WSU 4-H Adventure Education program uses a modified, four-step process with prompting questions: (1) Frame; (2) What?; (3) So What?; (4) Now What? (Wallace, et al., 2015). See Figure 1 below for a graphic representation of this learning cycle adaptation. The intentional sequencing of which games work best for the group, the active nature of games, the focused debriefs, and explicit format of the cards align with a meta-analysis of what works in afterschool programs, intended to develop social-emotional skills (Durlack et al. 2010).

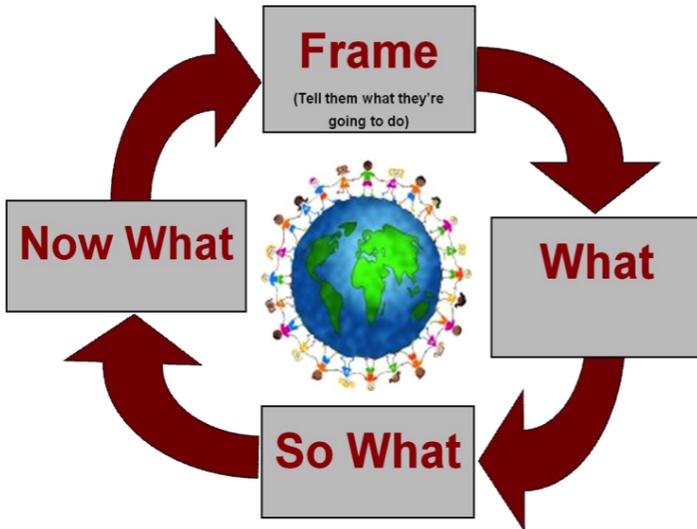


Figure 1. Adapted Kolb model, used for WSU 4-H Adventure Education program.

**Frame:** The Frame, referred to in brain research as a “schema,” is presented in order to increase the brain’s ability to access prior knowledge and focus attention that will improve learning (Medina 2010). The “Frame,” takes place at the beginning of the activities. The purpose is to discuss the social-emotional skill that youth will be practicing during the game and to explain the details of the game. This enhances learning by helping to focus the participants’ attention on the purpose, instructions, and sometimes, the intended goals/outcomes of the activity.

**What?** These questions help the participants remember and organize their thoughts about what happened during the game, what their or others’ roles were during the game, and other details such as what life skill was being addressed through this activity. Example questions include: “What just happened?” “What did we just do?” “Tell me a story about the game we just played (just the facts!)” and others.

**So What?** These questions help participants identify what they learned about the life skill that was the focus of the activity in which they just participated. Example questions might include: “How did the activity help you learn about the \_\_\_\_\_ life skill?” “Where else in your life have you *used* this skill?” “Think of a time in your life when you had a challenge like the one we just did. What happened then? What did you do?”

**Now what?** These questions ask participants the very important question of what they will do with their learning. Questions used here provide an opportunity for youth to plan how to apply their learning in or out of the youth program. “In what situations could you use this skill in the future?” “How would you change the skill for that situation?”

## Structure of the Activity Cards

The card format includes basic instructions about how to structure the game, materials needed, recommended setting, introducing the game and reflection questions. The Frame area is where you write in the life skill youth are practicing or developing. Some common life skills your group could work on are:

- Cooperation
- Accepting differences
- Leadership
- Concern for others
- Communication
- Goal setting
- Problem solving
- Personal safety
- Self-responsibility
- Teamwork

After you select the life skill to work on, there are blank spots to write it in at the “What” and “So What” phases of the cycle. There are also a suggested Frames and questions on the back of the cards. Also included are examples of the games with selected life skills of respect, caring, honesty, and responsibility. These work well for groups wanting to work on one skill over a period of time.

## Hints on Using the Cards

- Explain to youth why life skills are added to games to increase their learning. (See the *Prepare Youth for Improving Life Skills Through Games.*)
- Feel free to remove cards that don’t work for your population or group due to age, maturity, level of focus, or your skill level. Use your own judgment to exclude games or modify the games to adapt to your situation.
- Use blank cards to convert games that you have used that work well with your group into life skill building opportunities. Pick the life skill and add to the Frame and question sections.

- When beginning to use this approach, you are encouraged to select a couple of life skills to work on over a period of time (Hendricks 1996) rather than trying to address a large number of life skills all at once. After becoming proficient with the basic 3-question structure, more advanced debriefing techniques can be learned and practiced.
- Within a single group session, it is more effective for the group to *sequence* the games into related activities and not to do too many unrelated games during the one session. Doing so can be confusing to the participants as they struggle to deepen their understanding and application of one or two life skills. Youth can get overwhelmed by covering too many life skills at once.
- Be careful not to have Frames and questions after all games, as sometimes games are just games and nothing more. Especially when sequencing games in such a way that each address a single life skill, a single reflection discussion can pull from the different games to focus on that life skill or skills.
- If possible, have the *youth* select the life skill for the group to work on improving. By including them in the decision-making, participants tend to be more committed to the process.
- When asking questions, expect silence. One technique is to count to five before asking another question to allow members to speak up. In-depth research by Rowe (1974) showed gains in learning when waiting three or more seconds for responses. Also, as the group becomes familiar with the new format, discussions will become quicker and more detailed.
- The activity cards are designed to be used by someone with basic skills in leading games. Users without much experience leading games may need additional support understanding and modifying some of the games.
- If you are training others to use the cards, one technique is to have the group play the games and debrief them just like you would with a youth group. The training becomes a growth opportunity and a real experience of what it's like to pair life skill learning to a game. After the group is debriefed, you can then lead the discussion on how the trainees would use this with their groups. After some experience as participants, you can turn over the framing and debriefing process to the trainees. Finally, trainees create a plan of how they will use the cards with their own youth groups. This includes selecting which life skills to focus on, and how to use the blank cards to convert games they currently use to focus on life skill development.

## How to Prepare Youth for Improving Life Skills Through Games

Youth do not naturally *debrief* an activity (review/analyze the activity upon completion). It is up to you as the facilitator to prepare them for the discussions. As an example of how to share the process with youth, tell them, “Throughout the course of the program, we are getting better at certain skills. What are some skills we are getting better at?” Most youth will talk about the team sport, art, or whatever your program does. “What team skills do we need to practice to help us do the other activities well? Maybe it’s cooperating and getting along. What are some others?”

You might have a little pep talk with them, such as, “We’ll be working on some of the skills that you mentioned. Think of it like this: When you want to strengthen a muscle in your arm, you have to work it, practice, lift weights, etc. It can be hard at first. Developing life skills is similar. We have to practice the skill, kind of like lifting weights. The better our life skills are, the better our time together will be, and the more success you’ll have with your friendships, relationships, school, and more. Before a game, I will share which life skill we will be working on during the game. Afterward, the group will answer some simple questions to help us get better. So get ready, and let’s have fun.

# The Activity Cards

## Memory Circle

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**Materials:** Stuffed animal

**Setting:** Open space

**Frame:** During this game we will work on learning names and the life skill \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- Provide a soft object, like a stuffed animal, to toss around the group.
- Give the kids the following directions:
  - *When you receive the tossed object, you say your name and one piece of personal information – such as favorite food or number of siblings, and toss it to another person so that person can introduce themselves.*
  - *Then you will toss it to someone by calling his/her name and making eye contact. The person who receives the object continues by calling someone else's name and throwing the item to him, and so on.*
- After this has gone on for a while, start throwing an additional object, then another. Make sure they keep throwing to people until they know everyone's name.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame on including everyone:** During this game, we are practicing including everyone and getting to know *everyone's* name.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened with including everyone? What went well?

**So What:** So what did you learn about including everyone? Benefits?

**Now What:** Now what can you do today to include people? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What did the group do to include everyone?

**So What:** How do you feel when you are included? Left out? So what does it mean to include others? What did you learn?

**Now What:** Now how/where can we include everybody during activities this week?

## Circle Up

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** None

**Setting:** Open space

**Frame:** During this game, we will get in a circle quickly and practice the life skill \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- Count until the group is circled up, shoulder to shoulder, and ask everyone to be quiet.
- Participants need to remember who is on their left and right.
- Then have them randomly move around or mingle
- The leader then calls out, “Circle up,” and they form a circle with the same people on their left and right.
- With the leader in a different place, they have to realign. They will soon realize that the circle will move around and they need to form it based on where the leader is standing.
- Try it a few times while counting and see how quickly they can do it. Make it fun and use it when you need them to quickly circle up.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_? Where else in your life do you sometimes have to remember how to line things up?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will work on following directions.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened with following directions? What went well?

**So What:** So what did you learn about following directions?

**Now What:** Now what can we do to practice following directions here? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What happened when everyone followed directions? When directions weren't followed?

**So What:** So what did you learn that can help you and the group be successful at getting in a circle quickly and safely?

**Now What:** Now what/where else at your program is it helpful for the group to follow directions quickly?

## ***Play Hard, Play Safe, Play Fair, Have Fun***

**Life Skill:** Responsibility

**Materials:** None

**Setting:** Open space

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- Break up into 4 small groups.
- Each group is secretly given one of the following options: “Play hard,” “Play safe,” “Play fair,” or “Play fun.”
- The group generates examples of what that looks like at camp.
- Groups can do a skit showing one example.
- Other groups guess which part of the phrase they are responsibly demonstrating.

**What:** What did we just do? What worked? What didn't work?

**So What:** What was it like having to do this with others? What can we learn about working with others?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will practice teamwork and/or cooperation.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened with working with others? What went well?

**So What:** So what did you learn about working with others?

**Now What:** Now what can we do to practice working with others here? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** How was it like to work with so many different people?

**So What:** So what are positive ways to work with people who are different?

**Now What:** Now what can we do to help different members feel more comfortable?

## *Unique Partners*

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** None

**Setting:** Anywhere

**Frame:** During this game we will know each other a little better and practice the life skill \_\_\_\_\_.

### Instructions:

- Tell the kids, “Our jobs are to be responsible and remember the group and action.”
  - Give them a number of members per group and assign them a task.
  - They are responsible to remember the group and the unique task. After each round, they need to find others they haven’t been in a group with yet, as best they can.
1. (Group of 2) Each group creates a unique handshake/body shake.
  2. (Group of 3) Create dance move.
  3. (Group of 4) Unique high-five.
  4. (Group of 5) Unique noise or positive phrase.
- After everyone has learned their group and task, tell them their job is to walk around the room and listen for you to call out the group. When you do, they need to quickly find the group and do their task (handshake, dance, high five, and positive phrase).
  - Go from one category to the next, with some time in between for them to find their groups. This is fast and fun.
  - You can use this at any time to create groups.

**What:** What was that like for you – creating those special activities with others?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will practice teamwork and/or cooperation.

### Basic reflection

**What:** What happened with working with others? What went well?

**So What:** So what did you learn about working with others?

**Now What:** Now what can we do to practice working with others here? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

### More in-depth reflection

**What:** How was it like to get so many directions?

**So What:** So what can we learn about being successful when getting so many directions?

**Now What:** Now what can we do with this learning?

## *Everybody's It*

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** None

**Setting:** Open space

**Frame:** During this game we will practice the life skill \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- When I say, "Go," everybody's "It."
- When tagged, you sit, kneel down, or squat.
- When I say, "Freeze," everyone freezes (stops moving) and looks at me with your most serious looking face.
- When I ask the name of the game everyone says, "Everybody's *It*," then everyone is unfrozen and begins tagging each other again.
- At times, say, "Freeze" in a soft, quiet voice.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will get better at following directions.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What did you observe when I said, "Freeze?"

**So What:** So what did you learn about following directions?

**Now What:** Now what/where can you do with your improved following direction skills here? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What happened with following directions? What went well? What didn't go so well?

**So What:** So what did you learn about the importance of listening and following directions? Where else in your life do you sometimes struggle with these issues?

**Now What:** Now what/where are the times and places during our program to work hard at freezing or stopping when asked. How will you apply this learning in other areas of your daily life?

## Stop, Fall, Go

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** None

**Setting:** Open space

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

### Instructions:

- Tell the kids:
  - Walk slowly when I say, “Go.”
  - Stop when I say, “Stop.”
  - Fall when I say, “Fall.” (**Safely** – you don’t have to go to the ground, and remember to watch out for others.)
- Play
- If group is working well, then turn over the control to the group.
- Explain this time *they* call out the commands.
- If it is working, compliment them and change the rules again; this time the *whole group* does it without words. They have to watch each other.
- The group can also create their own directions like “Spin”, “Hop”, etc.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will get better at the skill of communication.

### Basic reflection

**What:** What happened with communication? What went well?

**So What:** So what did you learn about communication? Where else does communication get challenging like this in your life?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your improved communication skills in other areas of your daily life?

### More in-depth reflection

**What:** What was it like when I called out the directions? What was it like when the group called out the directions? How did you decide if you were going to call out the directions or follow them?

**So What:** So what did you learn about different people talking at once? No clear leader?

**Now What:** Now what/how will you communicate better during your program?

## **Brain Break**

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** None

**Setting:** Anywhere

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- This tool helps change energy, celebrate, and/or create an energy boost. When the group energy or participation is dragging, you yell, “Brain Break.”
- As quickly as possible, all the participants put both hands up and high-five anyone in the group and say, “you’re the best,” three times.
- Then have them do it with four other people. Make sure that if this activity is used to diffuse an issue, that issue is still addressed.
- You can also do a large circle and have people put palms to palms with people next to them and all at once proclaim, “we’re the best!”

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, let’s work on giving great compliments.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What was it like giving a compliment?

**So What:** So what did you learn about giving compliments?

**Now What:** Now what can you do to practice giving compliments today? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What did this do to our energy level?

**So What:** So what did you learn about what we can do to change the energy level of the group?

**Now What:** Now how/ where can you change the energy of the group or apply this to other groups you might be part of in the “real world”?

## **Gossip**

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**Materials:** Clothespins

**Setting:** Open space

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- Each participant has three clothespins.
- Tell the kids:
  - The goal is to get your clothespins attached to the back of someone else while attempting to keep clothespins from getting on you.
  - If you have clothespins on you, take them off and try to pin them on someone else.
  - By the end, you want the least number of clothespins either on your clothes or in your hands. Establish what is safe to pin on: clothing on arms or back, loose clothing, etc.
- Because there tends to be a lot of running around, facilitator should ensure that there are no dangerous objects in the environment that could cause injury.
- Facilitator needs to say, “Go!” when ready, and, “Stop!” after a reasonable amount of time (depending on how tired the participants get, or how many are successful at getting rid of all their clothespins, etc.)

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will work on understanding gossip.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened when going after others?

**So What:** So what did you learn about how you feel when members are is focused on getting others? How is this like gossip?

**Now What:** Now how can you apply this to your daily lives, when tempted with gossip?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** When playing this game, where is your focus? Giving or defending? What was it like trying to get rid of your clothespins with people trying to get you?

**So What:** How is this like gossip? What effect does gossip have on a group?

**Now What:** What decisions can you make to prevent/stop gossiping from happening at your program? How can we include others?

## ***Pass Me the Chicken***

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** Rubber chicken or stuffed animal

**Setting:** Open space

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- One person is picked to be *It* and he/she chases others to tag them to get rid of being *it*.
- If tagged, the person jumps up and says, “I’m it, I’m it, I’m it”.
- A person can’t be tagged if they have the chicken. However, if the person who has the chicken can’t move their feet. Give a player the chicken.
- If a person wants the bird, they can yell, “Pass me the chicken”. The person with the bird can choose to keep it (5 second max) or pass it to the person asking for it.
- Depending on how many people are playing, there can be multiple people that are *It* and/or multiple chickens.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, you’ll get a chance to see what it’s like asking for help.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened with asking for help?

**So What:** So what did you learn about asking for help?

**Now What:** Now what can you do today to ask for help if you need it? Where will you use this tonight? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What did you do to stay safe and not get tagged? What worked and didn’t work? What feelings came up for you?

**So What:** What did you learn about asking for help? What did you learn about *how* to ask for help? Respond to someone’s request for help?

**Now What:** Now what for/where will you ask for help? Where can you give help to others when asked?

## Structures

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** Materials to build a structure – straws, toothpicks, tape, paper, sticks, whatever objects can be easily manipulated

**Setting:** Anywhere

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

- Divide participants into smaller groups.
- Distribute the materials.
- Participants agree on and build a structure, picture, or sculpture using available objects.
- The group can lay out objects horizontally or build something vertically – it is up to the group.
- Decide on a time limit and don't forget to leave enough time for each group to be able to present their finished projects and for processing/debriefing the experience.
- With younger groups, simple materials and less time is appropriate.
- When the groups finish, have them share their creations.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we'll be working as a team, cooperating, and listening to others.

### Basic reflection

**What:** What happened with your experience of cooperating/using teamwork/listening to others? What worked? What didn't?

**So What:** So what did you learn about cooperating/using teamwork/listening to others?

**Now What:** Now what/where can you do use these skills? How can you apply them tonight? At home? At school?

### More in-depth reflection

**What:** What happened with talking without interrupting?

**So What:** So what did you learn about talking without interrupting?

**Now What:** Now where can you use your improved talking without interrupting skills? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

## ***Wizards and Elves***

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** None

**Setting:** Open space

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- A creative story of Gelflings (which are a type elf) is told. No description is given here, so you get to be creative. Either way, the Gelflings want to help each other stay away from wizards and be free.
- There can be more than one wizard.
- The wizard(s) tag an elf and he/she is then frozen.
- The Gelfling sets off a universal elf distress beacon, “Help me, help me, help me!”
- The Gelfling can only be set free when two free Gelflings join hands in a circle over them, do a dance and say, “Be free little elf, be free.”
- Demonstrate the actions and distress beacon.
- Play until you’re out of elves or losing the fun energy.
- For larger groups, you can have two or three wizards.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will get better at showing our concern for others and also what it’s like to ask for help from others.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened with helping others?

**So What:** So what did you learn about helping others?

**Now What:** Now what can you do today to help others? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What happened with asking for help?

**So What:** So what did you learn about asking for help?

**Now What:** Now what do you need to ask help with today? Where will you ask for help tonight? Home?

## *Human-made Machines*

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** None

**Setting:** Anywhere

Frame: During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- A group of 3-6 people act out an everyday machine and have others guess what it is.
- Participants have a predetermined number of minutes to choose a machine and plan how to act it out. Some examples might include: lawnmower, egg beater, microwave, television, washing machine, etc.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will work on listening to each others' ideas.

### **Basic reflection**

**What:** What was it like to act out machines like that?

**So What:** So what did you learn about listening to others' ideas?

**Now What:** Now what can you do today to better listen to other's ideas? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

### **More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What happened with respecting others' ideas during your planning?

**So What:** So what did you learn about respecting others ideas?

**Now What:** Now how/where can you work on respecting others ideas today?

## Group Poems

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** Note cards and pens/pencils

**Setting:** Anywhere with a surface to write on

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and share how we show \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- Ask a question and have people write a short response of one to two lines on a note card.
- Collect the cards, mix them up, and read as a poem. Let the group know the poem will not rhyme and that's o.k.
- With younger groups, keep it reasonably brief.
- Possible topics (or choose any other that may be more relevant for your group):
  - What does it mean to treat others with respect?
  - How do you feel when someone listens to you?
  - How do you feel when you are helped?
  - What was your favorite part of the day?
  - If you could change one part of today, what would it be?

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn from the group about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will improve giving positive feedback to the group.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened with the feedback from the group that was heard in the poem? What did you hear is important to the group?

**So What:** So what did you learn about giving feedback?

**Now What:** Now what ways can you give positive feedback to others today? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What happened when your writing was read? How did it fit with the poem?

**So What:** What did you learn about this group?

**Now What:** Now how/where can you practice your learning?

## ***Feelings Cards: Charades***

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** Feelings cards. An example of the cards is included below. You can make your own set or have youth in the group make them.

**Setting:** Anywhere

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- Divide the group into smaller groups of 4-6.
- Give each group a stack of feelings cards, set face down.
- Each group member takes turns choosing a card and acting it out for the group members to guess.
- If the group is having a hard time guessing, you can ask one person in the group for help or show them the card and pick a new one.
- Variation: Give them a scene to act out and they can only use a certain emotion. For example, they find a broken bike and one person can only be silly and the other only angry.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will become better communicators.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened with trying to nonverbally communicate your feelings?

**So What:** So what did you learn about nonverbal communication?

**Now What:** Now how/where can you practice your nonverbal communication skills today? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** How easy/difficult was it to figure out others' feelings?

**So What:** Is it possible to misinterpret what someone is feeling without them speaking to you? What are you learning?

**Now What:** How what can you do to understand someone's feelings better today?



SAD



INDIFFERENT



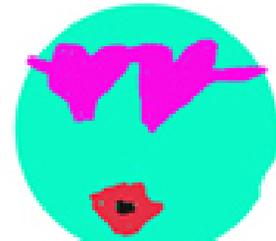
HAPPY



MAD



SLEEPY



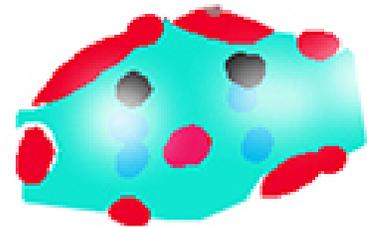
LOVEABLE



COOL



SHY



HURT



SILLY



ENERGIZED



HELPLESS

## ***Martian/Politician/Tiger/Salmon***

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**Materials:** None

**Setting:** Large space

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- Teach the motions/ sounds, or make up your own:
  - *Martian* – fingers on head like antennae and make a, “doodle, doodle, do” sound
  - *Tiger* – hands out like claws and growl
  - *Politician* – reach out to shake hands and say, “hello there”
  - *Salmon* – arms close to sides and jump from side to side and say, “whoosh, whoosh”
- Tell the kids:
  - The object is to try and do the same creature as another person with whom you are paired.
  - First pick a creature you will do, find another person, each count to three, and do your creatures.
  - If you both do different things, then nothing happens, and you go on to find someone else to try again.
  - If the creatures match, join up, link elbows, and as a group select a new creature for all of you to do against the next group.
- Everyone keeps repeating the process till the whole group is all doing the same creature.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will have fun and build communication skills.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened with communication?

**So What:** So what did you learn about communication?

**Now What:** Now what can you do today to practice your communication skills? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What happened with deciding on the creature as a group? What strategies did you use?

**So What:** What did you learn about making decisions together?

**Now What:** How when/where will you work with others to make decisions?

## *Laughing or Screaming Toes*

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** None

**Setting:** Open space, best with larger groups

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

Instructions:

- Everyone gets in a circle, shoulder to shoulder.
- Leader tells group to “look down and pick someone’s toes to look at.”
- When leader tells group to “look up,” each participant follows the person’s toes up to their eyes, and stares.
- If two participants are looking at each other their responsibility is to scream, laugh out loud at each other, or yell a positive statement about the group.
- Repeat “Look down” and “Look up” after the screaming or laughing stops.
- Can play a variation where the matching and screaming/laughing pairs are eliminated until none are left.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will learn more about each other, and respect another person while having fun and being silly.

### **Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened with having fun together?

**So What:** So what did you learn about having fun as a group?

**Now What:** Now what can you do today to have fun?

### **More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What happened when you connected with someone you didn’t expect and got to laugh together when you connected?

**So What:** What did we learn about good times to laugh with each other?

**Now What:** Now what/where are good times to laugh with each other today?

## *Speed Rabbit*

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** None

**Setting:** Open space

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- Have the kids circle up.
- The purpose is for a person in the middle to get out by catching members not doing their assigned action.
- The person pointed to has a specific action as well as the people on the right and left.
- Tell the kids:
  - When I point to one of you and say the name of an animal, each of you has a role.
  - Do your action right and you won't end up in the middle. If the action is wrong or not done in 10 seconds, the person switches with the person in the middle.

Practice first with the different animals until they learn them, and then play.

- Rabbit: Middle person puts hands up on each side of their head to represent ears. The right and left people lean towards the middle person and use their outside leg to thump up and down.
- Elephant: Middle person puts hands together and extends arms out like the trunk. The right and left people make ears by forming the letter C, to look like ears.
- Road kill: Middle person squats down on ground. The right and left people gently put foot on top.
- Have group make up more as they get better.
- Speed up to 5 seconds after group understands the game.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will support others under stress and manage our own.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened with helping others?

**So What:** So what did you learn about helping others?

**Now What:** Now what can you do today to help others? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What was it like being in the middle? Stressful?

**So What:** So what did you learn about ways to be more comfortable in the middle?

**Now What:** Now how/where can you help yourself or others feel more comfortable?

## ***Triangle Tag***

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_.

**Materials:** Place an object on the ground for the group to move around (paper plate, stuffed animal, etc.)

**Setting:** Open space

**Frame:** During this game, everyone selects a team skill we can work on.

**Instructions:**

- Three people hold hands, forming a triangle. One person is selected as the one to protect.
- A fourth person on the outside tries to tag the protected person without going under or over the arms of the protectors, but around.
- Put the object on the ground to mark a spot for the group to stand around. This prevents them from going all over the place.
- As play begins, they go round and round trying to protect or catch the person.
- After playing once, have the members select a team skill that represents the person they are protecting, such as caring.
- Have the team share two things that support that team skill, which represents the other two people in the triangle, such as friends and support.
- Then select something that gets in the way of the team skill, which represents the person trying to tag, such as jealousy.
- Rotate players with different team skills to protect.

**What:** What happened with protecting team skills?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will have fun while working on cooperation skills.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened when cooperating to protect the person

**So What:** So what did you learn about cooperation?

**Now What:** Now what can you do to increase cooperation here? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What did you do to protect the person from what gets in the way of cooperation”?

**So What:** What did you learn about protecting others?

**Now What:** In what ways do you or could you protect others as they try to have fun or learn? Here? Home? School?

## ***Peek-a-Who***

**Life Skill:** \_\_\_\_\_:

**Materials:** Tarp or blanket

**Setting:** Open space

**Frame:** During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

- This activity works after groups get to know each other.
- Divide the group in half. Two people will hold a tarp or blanket up between the two teams.
- Both teams hide behind the tarp and choose one person to be placed with his/her back to the tarp, facing the rest of the team.
- When ready, the tarp is dropped.
- The team's goal is to appropriately describe to their person who the person behind them is, without saying a name.
- The person who first calls out the name of the person behind them wins. The reward is that person joins their team. Repeat. You may add rules to make the game more challenging, such as no gender words. End while still fun and engaging.

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_ ?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_ ?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

**Optional Frame:** During this game, we will work on communication skills.

**Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened with listening to others?

**So What:** So what did you learn about listening to others?

**Now What:** Now what can you do today to listen to others? Where will you use the listening skills tonight? Home? School?

**More in-depth reflection**

**What:** What happened with respecting others' ideas during your planning?

**So What:** So what did you learn about respecting others' ideas?

**Now What:** Now how/where can you work on respecting others' ideas today?

## ***Game Template***

(NOTE: Make copies of this template for future use.)

### ***Game Title***

**Life Skill:**

**Materials:**

**Setting:**

**Frame (Life Skill for Game Focus):**

During this game we will have fun and practice \_\_\_\_\_.

**Instructions:**

**What:** What happened with \_\_\_\_\_?

**So What:** So what did you learn about \_\_\_\_\_?

**Now What:** Now what can you do with your learning?

### **Basic reflection**

**What:** What happened with working with others? What went well?

**So What:** So what did you learn about working with others?

**Now What:** Now what can we do to practice working with others here? Where will you use them tonight? Home? School?

### **More in-depth reflection**

**What:** How was it like to work with so many different people?

**So What:** So what are positive ways to work with people who are different?

**Now What:** Now what can we do to help different members feel more comfortable?

## Games Suitable for Specific Life Skills

### ***Four Games for Working on Respect***

Within these four activities, consider using an *alternative Frame*: “Today we are practicing respect during this game.” Intent is to respect others’ ideas and/or respect others’ differences in how they express having fun.

Also, you’ll want to incorporate the intended life skill as a focus of your debriefing questions. For example, during the *Now What* phase, you might ask, “Where else in your life can you practice showing more respect for others?”

#### [Peek-a-Who](#)

#### [Laughing or Screaming Toes](#)

#### [Human-made Machines](#)

#### [Structures](#)

### ***Four Example Games for Working on Caring***

Within these four activities, consider using an *alternative Frame*: “During this game we are practicing caring.” Intent is to explore how we can care for others during our daily activities.

Also, you’ll want to incorporate the intended life skill as a focus of your debriefing questions. For example, during the *So What* phase, you might ask, “Where else in your life do you have opportunities to show caring for others?”

#### [Brain Break](#)

#### [Circle Up](#)

Additional prompts during the activity might include: “We are going to do this fast, so we need to be caring to each other. What can we do to care for everyone in the group when moving faster?”

#### [Stop, Fall, Go](#)

If you think it is appropriate during the activity, you can ask the group how they can show caring when doing this in silence.

#### [Pass Me the Chicken](#)

### ***Four Example Games for Working on Honesty***

Within these four activities, consider using an *alternative Frame*: “During this game we are practicing honesty.” Intent is to explore how behaving honestly can affect our daily activities.

Also, you’ll want to incorporate the intended life skill as a focus of your debriefing questions. For example, during the *So What* phase, you might ask, “How does maintaining honesty affect other areas of your life?”

#### [Screaming or Laughing Toes](#)

#### [Wizards and Gelfings](#)

#### [Group Poems](#)

*Alternative Frame*: Today we are practicing honesty in writing. Sometimes it’s challenging to be honest about what is positive in a group. I’ll ask a question and you write a one to two line answer on the note card. Collect the cards, mix them up, and read as a poem.

#### [Everybody’s it / Freeze](#)

### ***Four Example Games for Working on Responsibility***

Within these four activities, consider using an *alternative Frame*: “During this game we are practicing responsibility.” Intent is to explore how behaving responsibly can affect our daily activities.

Also, you’ll want to incorporate the intended life skill as a focus of your debriefing questions. For example, during the *Now What* phase, you might ask, “How will you act more responsibly when you are at home? At school?”

#### [Speed Rabbit](#)

#### [Unique Partners](#)

#### [Play Hard, Play Safe, Play Fair, Have Fun](#)

#### [Feelings Cards: Charades](#)

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