



# *10 Games to Prevent Challenging Behavior!*

Activities That Foster Community  
Building & Self-Regulation

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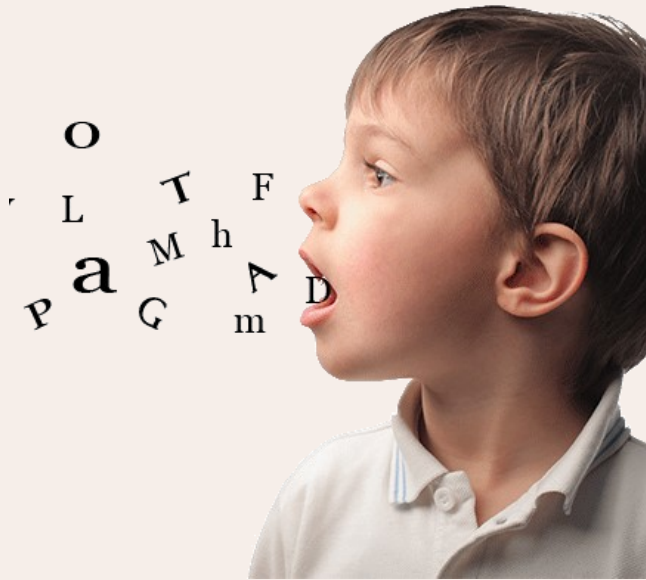


## *Circle Games for Building Community*

There's nothing like a circle to bring about a feeling of togetherness and to create a sense of community. And, of course, creating a sense of community is vital to avoiding behavior challenges.

The circle allows participants to see and hear everyone else. When everyone moves or sings in synchronization, the feeling of belonging is enhanced, even for the child who may be shy or who may be uncomfortable in other group activities. Each individual in a circle is significant.

To remain part of the circle, children must accept the rules and roles assigned. Also, if we look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs, an individual's primary need is for safety. The second is love and belonging. These two needs are especially essential to young children. Because the circle games here involve all of the children participating (no one is ever eliminated), circles meet both of these needs. And once these needs have been met, there is far less cause for acting out. With all that in mind, here are some circle games for you and the children, beginning with two that help children learn one another's names.



## *Say It, Sing It*

- Sit with the children in a circle.
- Starting with the child on one side of you, say his or her first name. Repeat that, with everyone joining in.
- Next, sing that child's first name. The rest of the group then does the same.
- Follow this by whispering the child's name. The final step is to simply mouth the child's name, with no sound. The children love this!
- If you'd like, you can add shouting the children's names to the mix.

## The Name Game

Sit in a circle with the children and clap the syllables of each child's first name while saying the name aloud. For example, Sam-u-el would have three claps. After clapping each name, invite the group to mimic you.

## Bug in the Rug



This game is great for helping the children get to know one another better. You'll need a sheet or a parachute to play it.

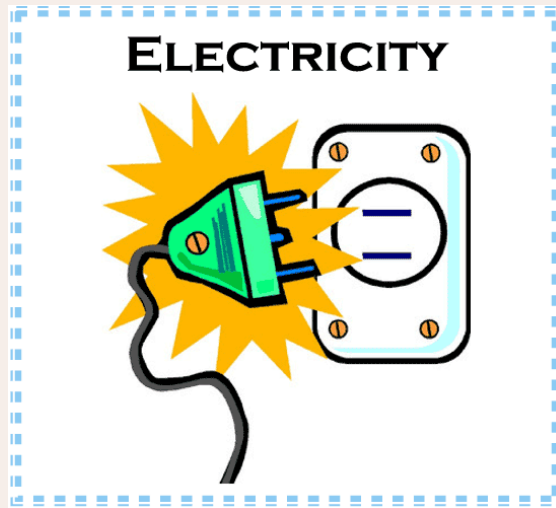
- The children sit on the floor around the sheet, spaced so that they're not touching one another.
- All of the children close their eyes while you choose one to leave the circle and hide under the sheet.
- When the children open their eyes, they have to guess who's the "bug in the rug!"
- To help the children become more familiar with one another, after identifying the bug in the rug, the other children have to tell you one thing about her or him.



## Make It Rain

I'm a big believer in the importance of touch – especially for children! This game gives children a reason to touch one another in a friendly way.

- The children stand in a circle, one behind another, each placing their hands lightly on the shoulders of the child in front of him or her.
- When you tell the children that the rain has begun to fall softly, the children patter their fingertips very gently on the shoulders of the person in front, while simultaneously tiptoeing around in the circle.
- Eventually explain that the rain is beginning to fall a bit harder, which means their movements should become a tiny bit more forceful.
- You can continue this process until there is a thunderstorm. (Be sure the children use their fingertips only, and not their hands.)



## ***It's Electric!***

This game also involves touch. Because it's cooperative, it falls under the content area of social studies. And because it's about electricity, science is also addressed!

- Explain to the children that electricity is energy that flows through a wire. Then stand in a circle with the children, with everyone holding hands.
- Squeeze the hand of the child next to you, explaining that the squeeze represents electricity flowing from one place to another. Have the child next to you squeeze the hand of the next child, and so forth all the way around the circle. When the "electricity" reaches you again, say, "It's electric!"
- Repeat this activity several times, letting the children take turns starting and ending the process.
- When they're comfortable with the game, invite them to add an electrical sound effect, like "ZZT," and a little vibration to their bodies as they squeeze the hand of the next child.



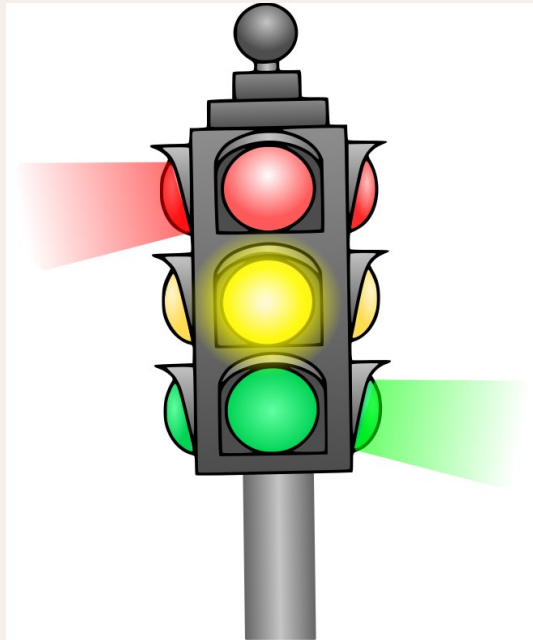


## *Games That Foster Self-Regulation*

Self-regulation refers to the ability to regulate oneself without intervention from an outside source, like another person. In the case of young children, it means adults don't always have to be telling them how to behave; they've learned to control their emotions and resist impulsive behavior. Obviously, that's a good thing! The ability to regulate oneself is something we want for every individual – the sooner, the better!

This might surprise you, but one of the best ways for children to learn to regulate themselves is through movement! As with anything else, if it's fun for them, they're much more inclined to want to do it! Take Statues, for example – often known as "Freeze." If you ask children to stay still, it ain't gonna happen. But if you're playing this game, allowing them to move in any way they want while the music is playing and then freezing into a statue when the music is paused, they'll want to stay still — because pretending to be a statue is fun!

Following are 5 more games that help promote self-regulation.



## Traffic Lights

To play this, you'll need three large pieces of paper: one green, one yellow, and one red.

- Hold up the green paper and invite the children to walk around the room or outdoor area, pretending that they're driving cars.
- When you hold up the yellow paper, they walk in place.
- When you hold up red, they come to a complete stop.
- Only the green paper can get them "driving" around again.





## Body-Part Boogie

- Ask the children to stand in a circle or have them scatter throughout the room.
- Tell them they must stand completely still – like statues.
- Play a piece of music and designate just one body part for the children to move to the music (for example, a head, an arm, a foot, a leg, fingers).
- When you pause the music, they must freeze again.



## Finding a Balance

Challenge the children to balance by holding as still as possible on the following body parts while you count to five:

- hands and knees
- hands and feet
- knees and elbows
- feet and bottom
- hands and bottom

When you think they're ready, ask the children to balance on their bottom, knees, one foot, or toes only.



## Mother, May I?

In the traditional game, the person acting as “mother” gives direction to one player and then, depending upon her whim, decides whether to allow that player to follow. If she decides to allow it, the player must ask, “Mother, may I?” If he forgets, he has to go back to the starting line. The first player to reach Mother wins. Not only can this version involve favoritism on Mother’s part; also, it involves a great deal of waiting for the rest of the children. The version here remedies all of that.

- Acting as Mother, stand facing the children, about 20 feet away.
- Give an instruction for the children to take a certain number of a certain kind of movements. For example: “Children, take five steps on tiptoe.” Or: “Children, take three jumps backward.”
- The children then ask, “Mother, may I?” before doing as directed.
- The game continues until the children reach you. You can then start again with someone else acting as Mother.



## Slow Going

Want children to learn to move slowly? Give them a reason to move slowly! Invite them to pretend they're the following:

- a cat stalking a bird
- a person walking through peanut butter
- a person walking through deep snow or mud
- a turtle
- a snail
- a sloth
- a car with flat tires
- an astronaut floating in outer space





# How to Keep 'Em Off the Walls!

Avoid Challenging Behavior in Your Early Childhood Setting



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These games are excerpted from my online course, “[How to Keep 'Em Off the Walls!: Avoid Challenging Behavior in Your Early Childhood Setting.](#)”

The course demonstrates how you can:

- create a sense of community among children – vital if you want to avoid challenging behavior.
- show children the good feelings that come from working toward a common purpose or goal.
- foster self-regulation in a way children will enjoy!
- prevent restlessness with brain breaks.
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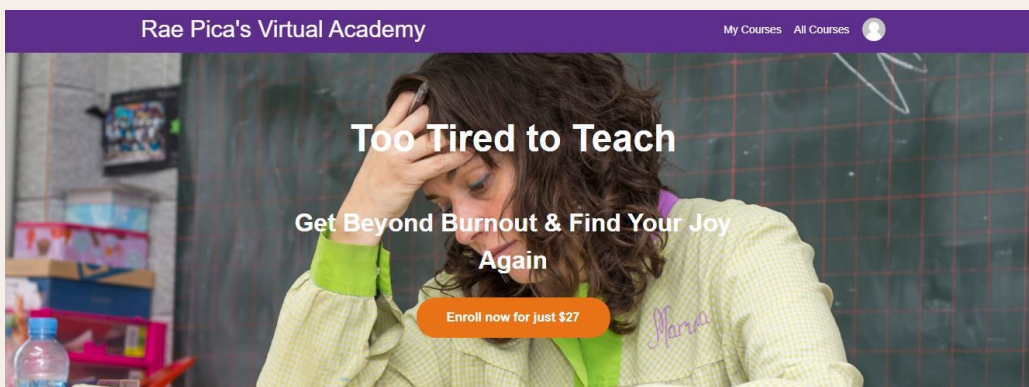
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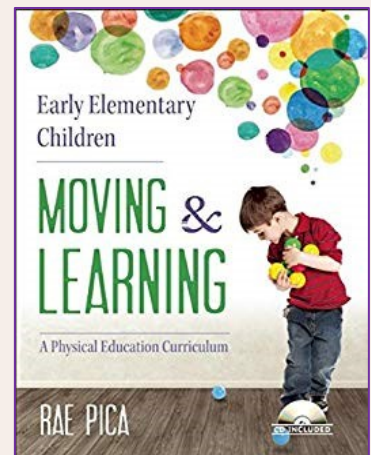
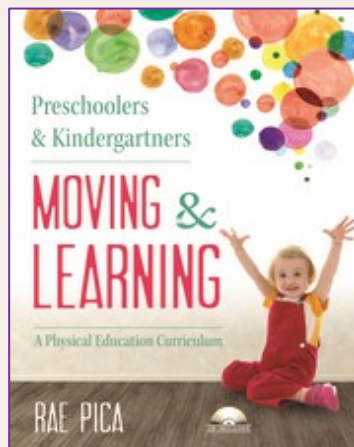
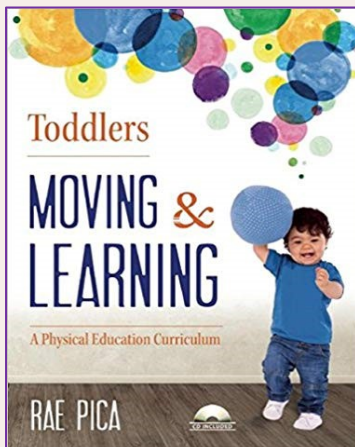
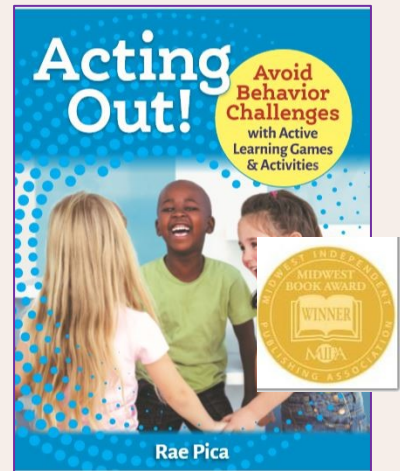
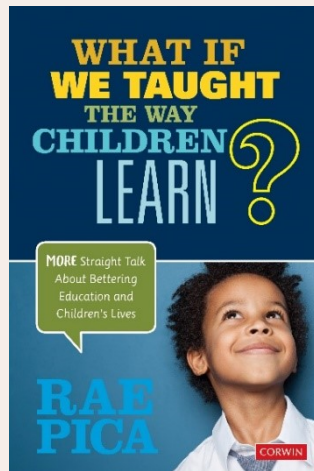
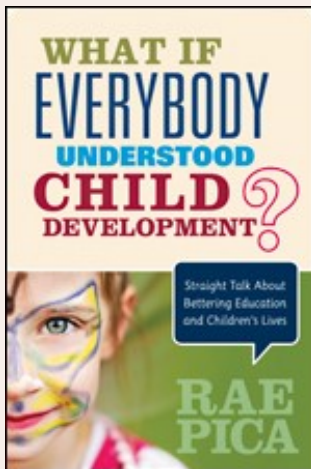
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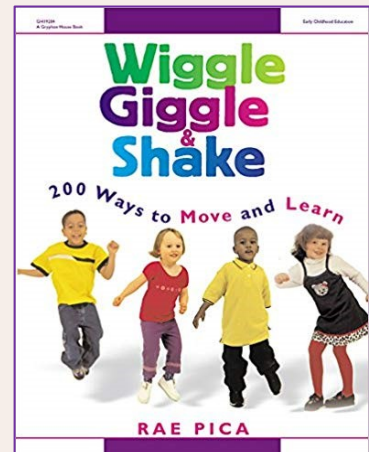
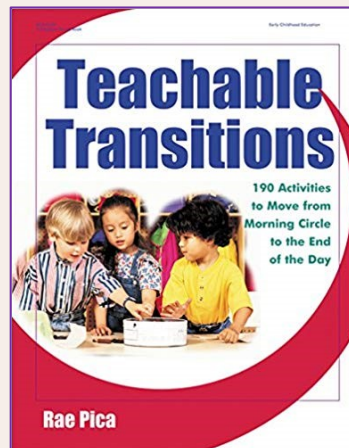
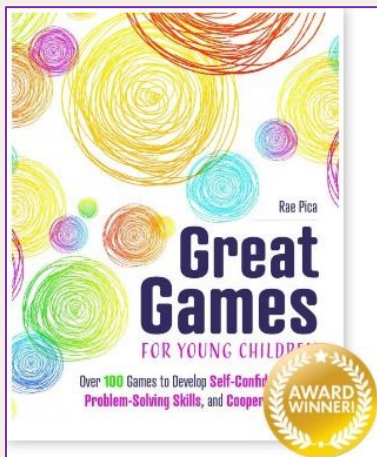
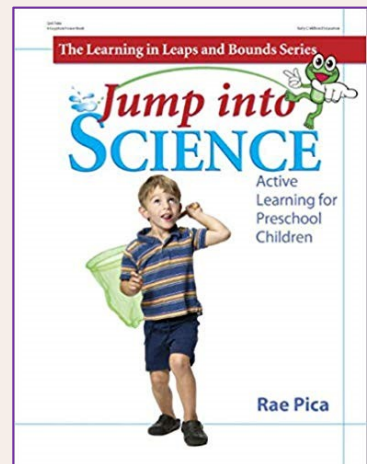
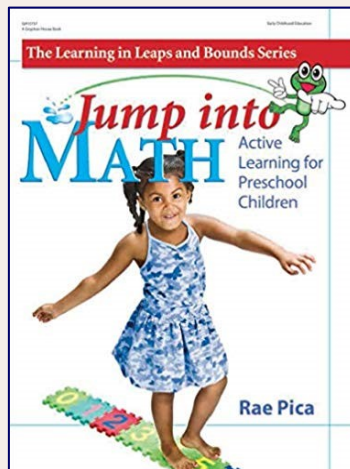
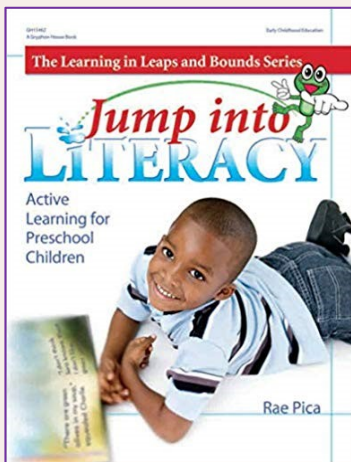
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# RAE PICA



Rae has been an early childhood education consultant since 1980. Dedicated to developing and educating the whole child, she is the author of 22 books, including the text *Experiences in Movement & Music* (in its 5<sup>th</sup> edition), and two of her latest, *What If We Taught the Way Children Learn?* and *Acting Out! Avoid Behavior Challenges with Active Learning Games & Activities*.

Rae is a former adjunct instructor for the University of New Hampshire and is currently a blogger, online course creator, and popular virtual presenter. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association for Family Child Care, Eric Jensen's Learning Brain Expo, state WIC organizations, education conferences, resource and referral agencies, and schools in 46 states and Canada are among those who have invited Rae to address their groups.

As a consultant, Rae has shared her expertise with such groups as

- |                                     |                             |
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| ✓ Head Start Bureau                 | ✓ Mattel                    |
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