

# T1691 Sample Pages

## Introduction

### *Why encourage organised games in the playground*

In the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century there have been a number of reports which have shown that increasing numbers of children are suffering increasing levels of stress. In one survey in 2004 25% of children aged 4 to 6 reported symptoms of stress. By the age of 16 the percentage rises to 50%.

Three explanations are available as to what is going on.

1. One says that such stress has always been there. The only difference is that we notice it more because we now classify it as a concept in its own right and talk of it openly. Previously it was just part of life.
2. Another explanation says that we are simply looking for problems – and through this searching we either create problems or enlarge issues that are in essence trivial. This argument can be developed further by suggesting that children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have very soft and easy upbringings. As a result it can be argued that they should learn to pull themselves together and buck their ideas up. If they had to work from an earlier age, or if they had to show more respect, or if they were wary of getting a beating or at least being told off in a way that meant something to them, they would not have time to worry about being stressed.
3. The third explanation suggests that children today are indeed suffering higher levels of stress – stress which comes from living in a world in which change happens at a pace far faster than ever before. The old securities have gone. In return we have more freedom, but the price we pay is ever greater levels of stress.

Part of the problem in having this debate – in deciding which of these explanations is correct - is that there is a long history in the UK of being suspicious of emotion and feeling. The Enlightenment stressed the value of logic, of mankind's understanding of the world, not our susceptibility towards something that happens inside our heads. From this we get a tendency to feel that what goes on in our heads - the feelings of stress, lack of self-esteem, of inadequacy in the face of endless change, etc - are not real. Hence the desire in some quarters to say "buck your ideas up" or "It is all in the mind" retains that sense of something being "not real".

If either of the first two explanations of the perceived level of stress is true, then there is not too much we can or even should do about it. One says the problem has always been there – it is part of growing up – so we should stop making a fuss. The other says there is no problem; it is all invented because of the soft life that children have these days.

But if the third explanation is right – if children really are suffering from much greater levels of stress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than they were in much of the 20<sup>th</sup>, then surely this needs to be addressed in educational terms.

For most of us life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not an issue of security, it is an experience of uncertainty – what many commentators now call the endless roller coaster ride. We have so much more freedom, but we have no explanation of why life is as it is. We have so much more power to control the world, but famine and war, inequality and total differences of opinion on what we should do, are as much part of the world as ever. On an individual level much is inexplicable, and we are left asking “why did this happen to me?” Many of the institutions which previously had the authority to answer that question no longer have such an authority. There is no one to ask. Just surviving everyday life becomes a great achievement.

Within such a context personal, social and health education has everything to offer. It is self-evident that people do need to interact with each other, and that those who interact most successfully, and particularly those who interact in a creative non-stylised way, have a greater chance of a happy and fulfilled life. Successful interaction with others which is inventive, free flowing, light-hearted and forever changing not only gives happiness, it builds self-esteem. It gives a sense of fun and purpose to life that is difficult to find in any other way.

Games are a perfect way to achieve this experience. Many adults lose the ability to play later in life, but just a cursory glance at those who do continue to play (be it through sport, through the arts or through the more complex intellectual games that adults play, such as bridge or chess), will show that these people often tend to be those who maintain a better sense of self-esteem and fun in later life. The only proviso that needs to be given is that the game must genuinely interact with others, face to face, in a way that constantly changes. Playing computer games, just like playing on ones own in a games arcade, doesn't seem to do anyone much good.

Children have playtime and lunch breaks in order to play – and they do play, often very inventively – but they sometimes need some help in knowing what games to play and how to organise them, especially where they come from homes in which no one plays any more. Research continuously suggests that fewer and fewer children are playing together after school. Increasingly they go home, close the door and watch television. It is not the same thing at all.

The games in this book offer starting points for creative exploratory activities that children in primary schools can engage in. They also offer a great source of information for teachers who wish to observe children playing games.

Sometimes when you start a group of children off playing a game you will find that they continue the game as you described or explored it with them in the classroom. But often the game will change. Sometimes it will become unrecognisable. Sometimes you will find the most unlikely children playing a game. During the research for this book we

found a group of year 5 boys – the “tough” gang already asserting their laddishness in the playground – playing “hedgehog”, a game taught to the year 1 and year 2 children. The boys had amended the game a little, but it remained essentially the same, and they were screaming with laughter as they re-ran it over and over again. Let me stress, they were not laughing at anyone, they were not making fun of the year 1 children and they most certainly were not interfering with anyone else. They were laughing between themselves as, for them, the game got sillier and sillier, and their imaginations became wilder and wilder. No harm was done, no one was hurt. It was just a bunch of young children remembering what it is like to be silly together as a group and to let their imaginations run riot.

Children who enjoy playing, keep playing. Although these games are very much for primary school children, we did in passing watch a group of very able academic sixth formers, all predicted to get very good grades in their A levels, all going on to university, developing a game which involved dropping a tennis ball on a flip top desk, and raising the desk just enough to make it knock the ball forward onto the next desk where the action was repeated. Five flips and the final teenager caught the ball in the dustbin - to much celebration and dancing about.

Of course they were reprimanded when caught – the sixth form classrooms were for study at lunchtime, not for “larking about” – and yes, had they devoted every lunchtime to further study maybe the subsequent grade Bs could have become As. But as a result of that game something else was learned which potentially was just as valuable as the academic study.

### *Encouraging children to play more*

#### *56. Pussy Wants A Home*

All the children form a circle with “Pussy” in the middle. The children all have numbers.

The position of each child in the circle must be clearly noted. For example if there are eight children in the circle they can be at the eight points formed by a + and a X on the circle. If there are four, they can be at the compass points.

If it is hard for the children to remember the positions, then a chalk mark might be put on the ground.

Pussy stands in the centre of the circle and says, “**Pussy wants a home 1 and 3**”. Children numbered one and three have to swap places and pussy tries to get to one of those two places before the children are back in position. Pussy can also say “**Pussy wants a home mice mice**”. At this call all the children must change places, but they must move more than one place around the circle. Pussy tries to get a place.

The last child to get a place becomes Pussy.

### ***57. Hello, My Name Is...***

The child says, “**Hello my name is..., and I’m a ....**” The child starts by saying the truth (“my name is Alice and I’m a pupil at St James school.”)

The game then goes through two phases.

- In the first phase other children ask questions – and the answers are all true. For example they ask, “What’s your favourite food?” and “What’s your brother’s name?”
- Phase B is used when the children are used to this approach. The child starts with a totally untrue statement, such as: “Hello my name is Jack and I live at the North Pole.” The questions then follow and the child has to answer immediately with answers that make sense.

### ***58. This Is My Friend***

In the classroom or at home each child finds a picture in a magazine, and cuts it out. At playtime or at lunchtime each child in the game takes their photo in turn and shows it to the others. The child introduces the person in the photo as “my good friend...” The child then has to give as much information as possible about the person in the picture, all said as if the person really was a good friend of the child.

The aim is not to tell real facts about real people – the game is not particularly interesting if they bring in pictures of pop stars or footballers they all know. Rather the child should be influenced by the way the person is in the photo – how they look, what clothes they wear. That should be the starting point for the story.

### ***59. The Sound Story***

Each child says a sentence in a story but replaces words where ever possible with sounds. The other children have to guess what each sound does for the story.

The first child might start, **“I went up to my room and bang.”**

The others immediately guess, “closed the door”.

Then on to the next child: **“I click”**.

Everyone guesses “turned on the radio?” “turned on the light?”.

The next one says **“My mum came into the room and Yah Yah Yah”**

Everyone guesses “She shouted at you”.

**“I click”**

Everyone guesses “You turned the radio off.”

**“I thump thump thump”**

“You walked down the stairs”

And so on.