

Back Pocket Game Guide: Library Edition

For Groups of 5 – 20:

Counting to 20 (5 – 10 min)

Divide into evenly-numbered groups. All participants in the group stand in a circle and are not allowed to communicate. The group members must take turns having each person say one number in order to collectively count to twenty. Each person must speak at least once, and if two people say the number at the same time, you must start over again. For example, Jimmy starts the group off by saying “One.” Jessica continues by saying “Two.” Jennifer and Billy both say “Three” at the same time, and the group must start over at one.

Zip Zap Zop (10 – 15 min)

The most basic form of the game involves a circle of people sending a “clap” or “impulse” or “ball of energy” to each other in turn, saying the word “zip” each time it moves in one direction. When “zap” is said, the player must direct the clap in the opposite direction. A player can send the clap across the circle by saying “zop” and pointing at the intended target. A player is out when they gesture in the wrong direction for a command, or when they speak out of turn. The last player in the game wins.

Ninja (10 – 20 min)

This game requires at least 6 players (though it can be played with as few as 2 – it’s just not as fun). Every player starts in a circle with a ninja pose. The object of the game is to slap the hand/lower arm of another player, which removes that player from the game. Each person may only move once per turn (one fluid motion), either changing his/her pose or moving in to slap an opponent. When it isn’t your turn, you must freeze in the position your fluid motion ends with. The only exception to that rule is if you are being “attacked” by another player, in which case you can shift positions (again, only by using one single fluid motion). Turns proceed in the order of the original circle, following the same order (but skipping over players that have gotten out).

The Mighty Wind Blows (10+ min)

Make a circle with everyone holding hands. One player stands in the middle and completes the sentence “The mighty wind blows...” with a descriptive statement about people. For example, the player might say, “The mighty wind blows for anyone wearing the color blue,” or, “The mighty wind blows for anyone that lives in Idaho.” Any person to whom that statement applies in the circle must run and find another open space in the circle. The last person in the middle is the next caller. The game may continue indefinitely, until the facilitator calls an end.

The Category Game (10+ min)

Start with the group standing in a circle. The leader/staff member chooses a category (i.e. “things that are sweet” or “things you do in the summer”), and each person in the circle must name something within that category. If you can’t name something within that category, you are out and must sit down. Items may not be repeated. The last person standing wins.

Celebrity/Fish Bowl (20 – 25 min)

Divide the group into two teams, and have each person write the names of “celebrities” (pop culture celebrities, historical figures, fictional characters, etc.) on a piece of paper. Each name goes into a hat/bowl. Each team takes turns sending up one person at a time to describe or act out the celebrity cards they draw. A turn lasts one minute, and the actor continues acting out/describing celebrities until the minute is up. The actor may not move on to the next card until his/her team guesses the celebrity they are trying to act out. Only the actor’s team may guess during his/her round. A traditional game of celebrity consists of three rounds; a round is defined as completing all of the cards in the hat. At the end of each round, the cards are replaced in the hat, and a new round starts (guessing the same celebrities). Round 1, actors may not use gestures, but must use descriptions of the celebrity without using any part of the celebrity’s name. Round 2, actors may not use gestures and must only use one word to describe the celebrity. Round three, actors must “charade” the celebrities – no verbal clues allowed! Teams should keep track of the number of guesses they have correct. The team with the most guesses wins.

Human Knot (5 – 10 min)

With at least five people, in a circle, each person puts their right hand in the circle. Each person should grab the hand of another person. Repeat the process with the left hand, making sure group members are not holding both hands of one person and nobody is holding the hand of a person they are directly next to. The goal is to become untangled and stand in a circle without letting each others’ hands go.

Silent Timeline (5 – 10 min, depending on age)

This can be played in 2 groups of 8 to 10 participants per group, or if you have the space, all together in one large group. Instruct players that they cannot speak to each other, but must arrange themselves in an order (i.e. by birthday, birth month, age, etc.).

For Large Groups of 20 or More:

Knee to Knee (10 – 20 min)

Divide into pairs, designating player A and B. Then have all the A’s in an inner circle, and all the B’s in a larger outside circle. The two circles are instructed to move along in opposite directions (one clockwise, the other counterclockwise) until a referee calls a command (allow enough time in between each command for the circles to rotate so the pairs are far from each other). When the command is called, the pairs must find each other as quickly as possible and perform the command the referee calls. For example, the referee might call “Elbow to elbow!” and the pair must touch their elbows together. The last group to perform the command is out; the last team in the game is the winner. Here are a few sample commands:

Elbow to elbow
Knee to elbow
Knee to knee
Hip to hip

Back to back
Palm to palm
Foot to foot
Pinky to pinky

Shipwrecked (15 – 20 min)

The more players, the better. The staff member is captain, and is responsible for calling out commands for the crew to follow. Until commands are called, players are to mill about in a blob in the center of the room. They must form groups using the appropriate number for each challenge (according to the commands list below). The last group/individual to complete the command is out; the last group/individual left standing wins. This game is best for older elementary, middle, and high school, because of the complex directions.

Hit the deck: all players must lie on the ground on their stomachs

Starfish: 5 players gather and make a star with their arms

Octopus: 4 players gather, backs together and arms waving like the arms of an octopus

Man Overboard: 2 players gather, with Player A on all fours, and Player B with his/her leg up on A's back mimicking looking through a telescope

Beached Whale: 4 players gather, with one player on the ground to resemble a beached whale while the others mimic throwing buckets of water on the whale

Row Your Boat: 3 players gather and sit on the floor in a line (like a boat), mimicking rowing and singing "Row Row Row Your Boat"

Mess Hall: 4 players gather and must sit facing each other, pretending to eat

Port: All players must run to the left side of the room

Starboard: All players must run to the right side of the room