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## Foreword

Here is a wonderful selection of singing and movement games for 3–7 year old children.

Easily accessible for the adult who will get lost in the joy of playing, many of the games are characterized by a singing story that allows every single gesture to arise out of a picture full of meaning to the young child. When adults ‘make their gestures simple and clear,’ children will imitate the imaginative, rhythmic, repeating movements of the body, and learn through their large muscles. Some of the games are traditional, some are adaptations of traditional games, and some are original. What they have in common is a reflection of the authors’ deep understanding of early childhood, the preschool/kindergarten’s love of activity, predictability, repetition, and playing with friends but still most frequently playing in parallel. The games in this book are structured while maintaining space for individual children’s self-expression, excitement and exuberance.

Following the natural development of the young child, the games in this collection require no waiting or turn taking. Rather, everyone is busy all the time, moving quickly or slowing, watching or waiting with the thrill of anticipation (Hunt the Cows p53). In choosing which game to play with a group of children, adults will do well to take their cues from the children themselves. Some of the games invite liveliness (Jump Jim Joe p54) and some invite settling. Rather than telling a group to settle, simply play My Pigeon House (p25). Repeated phrases, rhymes, and made-up words bring pleasure to the young child who is interested in trying out language. ‘Heel and toe, jolly rumble-o’ (Heel and Toe p51) has the kind of catchy cadence that will ring through a child’s play all day long. Five Little Bunnies p50 is a counting exercise wrapped up in a magical game package.

Little Cherry Stone (p42) is an early childhood natural science lesson. An integrated curriculum lies inside the pages and games of this book. *Waldorf Games Handbook for the Early Years* is an inspiring and useful gem for anyone who works and plays with young children. Learn a new song from this collection and you’ll be warmed, uplifted, and nourished just as the children you play with will be.

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## Introduction

*Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting;  
The Soul that rises with us, our life’s star  
Hath had elsewhere its setting,  
And cometh from afar;  
Not in entire forgetfulness  
And not in utter nakedness,  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
From God who is our home;  
Heaven lies about us in our infancy.*

Wordsworth

*A man once asked a fish:  
‘What’s it like to live in water?’  
The fish replied: ‘What water?’*

*The fish then asked the man:  
‘What’s it like to live in space?’  
The man replied: ‘What space?’*

Kim John Payne

### WHY PLAY GAMES WITH CHILDREN?

An infant is born and as Wordsworth sees, is still enveloped in ‘heavenly’ forces. In the journey through childhood, each young person encounters and passes through what may be called ‘thresholds’. This book is about those thresholds; about how children experience them and how we their helpers can identify and give them expression.

### WHAT MAKES THIS BOOK DIFFERENT FROM OTHER BOOKS ON CHILDREN’S GAMES?

*The long journey to reveal or discover ourselves  
and our life’s tasks is our life story; we can look  
upon games as the spaces or punctuation in this  
story, that give the text meaning.*

Kim John Payne



The aim of this book is not only to outline ways of organizing children's games, but also to give the reader a full and fascinating insight into why the game is appropriate for a particular age or stage of development. In this way it may be read both as a guide to child development and as a practical book about games.

Games often go wrong. Throughout the book examples are given of ways to help children who find it difficult to join in – whether they express this by withdrawing, or disrupting and even sabotaging; such children need to find a creative way of playing and also relating in a healthier way both to other children and adults.

Some children experience isolation and ridicule in games. Self-esteem is badly affected and often has lasting negative effects in other areas of life. The games in this book have been specifically developed to value all players regardless of their varying degrees of physical ability. An enjoyable and satisfying role can be found for all those who play. In many of the games, examples will be given of how to work with introverted, unfocused, over-dominant or stubborn children.

## THE JOURNEY

We often say that children 'grow up' – as indeed they do. What would you think, though, if you were to hear that children also 'grow down' and 'grow in'?

Children grow through games. They first learn as infants about the world around them, and at times their gaze seems to look far beyond the new physical environment that they have come into. They exist partly in the periphery. Then as the years go by they spatially 'come closer' to themselves. They play finger games,

clapping games, skipping, romping and running games. They grow more skilful as they learn about space and how to move in it; the games become more demanding, involving greater social complexity and negotiation. The journey from the young child playing finger games to the teenager playing basketball is a process of coming 'in' and 'down', of growing heavier within the body. A dynamic exists between growing 'up' and 'down'; and also between 'growing in' to oneself and 'growing out' into the world.

Such a view is of special interest to the teacher or therapist; it increases our ability to perceive when a child has become 'stuck' in a particular stage, and to help her overcome the obstruction simply by getting involved in certain games and activities. This may be a controversial approach, but is also a fascinating concept worthy of exploration. Time and again I have witnessed difficult emotional and behavioural problems eased when the right activity is offered and taken up by the child. Suspicious or guarded reactions that may have existed in conversation begin to fade when a particular game is introduced. The barriers to healing then also begin to fall away.

## CHAPTER 2

### Age 6–7 Years

#### 72. Who's under the Blanket? (Farmer's Seed)

EQUIPMENT: A large blanket

This is a very simple game that is a favourite of the five- to seven-year olds.

The children sit in a circle. A farmer is chosen and goes outside the door and waits to be called in, after being given a moment to take note of all the other children who are sitting in the circle. A 'seed' is chosen from amongst those remaining. This child hides under a blanket lying in the middle of the circle. The farmer is called back in while the children say:

A little seed in the ground,  
Along a farmer came.  
It comes into the sunshine,  
When he calls its name.

The farmer must guess who has left the circle and is now hiding under the blanket. If she guesses rightly, a different farmer is chosen who briefly leaves the room while another seed is chosen, and the game begins again. If she cannot guess, some hints may be given; for instance, colour of hair, or whether the hidden child is tall or small. Although the form of this game could hardly be simpler, it calls upon the power of observation. Until this age, children feel at one with their environment and do not seem to notice details with anything like the clarity of 7–8 year olds. This game challenges them to gently awaken to the world around them.

*As related by Alison Brooking-Payne.*

#### 73. Grandma's Slipper

EQUIPMENT: Slipper or shoe for Grandpa/Grandma

One child is chosen to be Grandma (or Grandpa). She stands at one end of the play area, with her back to the others, and her slipper on the ground behind her (closest to the other players). The other children try to steal Grandma's shoe, without being caught out.

Grandma starts the game by calling out,  
'Grandma, Grandma! Grab my shoe!'

Then she quickly turns round and looks to see if anyone is still moving. The others are allowed to move towards Grandma when she is speaking, but must stand as still as statues when she turns round. If Grandma sees anyone moving, all the children must return to where the last child is standing, before moving forward again.

When a child has got to Grandma's slipper, she picks it up, and runs back to the far end of the area. Grandma chases the children and tries to tag them. Then the game has ended, and another Grandma or Grandpa is chosen.

##### VARIATIONS

- Only the person who Grandma sees moving is sent back to the starting line.
- When the slipper is stolen, Grandma tries to tag the person with the slipper.
- When the slipper is stolen, the children try to sneak it back across the starting line. They retreat backwards in the same way (moving only when Grandma's back is turned), but now they pass the slipper behind their backs from player to player. Grandma is allowed 1–3 guesses to find who has the shoe; and sends children back to the starting line if she sees them move. (An extra guess can be awarded to Grandma every time she sees someone move.) If the children get the shoe across the starting line without Grandma guessing where it is, they win; and the game begins again.



## 74. Mr Wolf

Instead of Grandma and her slipper, Mr Wolf stands with his back to the others. They begin by saying,

‘What’s the time, Mr Wolf?’

He calls out a time, e.g. ‘Six o’clock!’, then turns to see if anyone is moving. This is repeated until quite a few children are close to him, then Mr Wolf answers, ‘Supper-time!’, upon which he turns and chases the children to the starting line and tries to tag a straggler.

## 75. K.I.N.G.

Instead of Mr Wolf, the King stands at one end of the play area. He says,

‘K.I.N.G. spells king!’

*He turns around to check if anyone is moving, then turns his back again.*

When the first player touches the king, he chases them back to the starting line.

These games help children become more aware of moving their bodies; by trying to stop moving, they learn control over their limbs. Grandma’s Slipper is also a game that gives children the opportunity to face the consequences of their own natures. For instance, I have seen a sanguine child constantly move forward too eagerly – only to be sent back time and time again. Phlegmatic and melancholic children, on the other hand, tend to move so gradually that they are never caught by Grandma – but they also never get the chance to grab the slipper: they tend to miss out on the fun. Sending all the children back to where the cautious melancholic is standing, gives value to her – as well as giving her a chance to move forward once more with the vanguard! The melancholic who often feels left out of games can, through this rule, become the ‘saviour’ of the group and may even receive congratulations from some of the other players who normally either ignore her or make her uncomfortable with their comments.

The last variation is also very popular. Smuggling the shoe back to the starting line is an image of how authorities can be tricked – and the children love this! At this age children are also fascinated with magic – and when the slipper is revealed behind the starting line, there is a definite moment of surprise for Grandma: it is as if it has happened by magic!



## 76. Mother May I?

The children stand in a large circle around one person who is the mother (or father). By asking questions, and taking different kinds of steps (see overleaf), the children in the circle approach the mother. When one child is close enough to touch her, the mother chases the children back to the line of the original circle. If she catches one, this child then becomes the mother or father. For instance:

Sarah: Mother may we take 3 giant steps forwards?

Mother: No. But you can take 2 baby steps forwards.  
*(the whole circle advances by 2 baby steps)*

Mother: You.  
*(choosing another child to ask the question)*

Tom: Mother, may we take 10 scissor steps forwards?

Mother: No, but ...

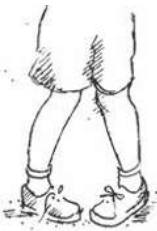
Pigeon-toed children and those whose feet face outwards (duck-footed) need help in aligning themselves as well as their feet! For example, the children whose feet turn outwards will tend to throw themselves into things, and have little sense of backspace. The pigeon-toed child may be more enclosed, and in extreme cases will have difficulty in relating to the world or the people around her.

This game can help children when they go on holiday and need to bargain the price of that souvenir they want to buy! Seriously, bargaining is part of our social milieu and this game gives children a chance to explore and exercise their bargaining skills.

It is also a very old game; it uses the archetypal picture of the mother or father as a creative authority.

For children at this age, the parents are still ‘wise and all-knowing’ – and this changes soon (usually at age 9 or 10). If you observe children playing this game, you will see how they learn through imitation – the mannerisms and language of their parents are often depicted very accurately!

## OTHER TYPES



Pigeon steps



Duck steps



Baby crawls



Star jumps



Giant steps



Froggy jumps



Baby steps



Spin jumps



One-legged hops



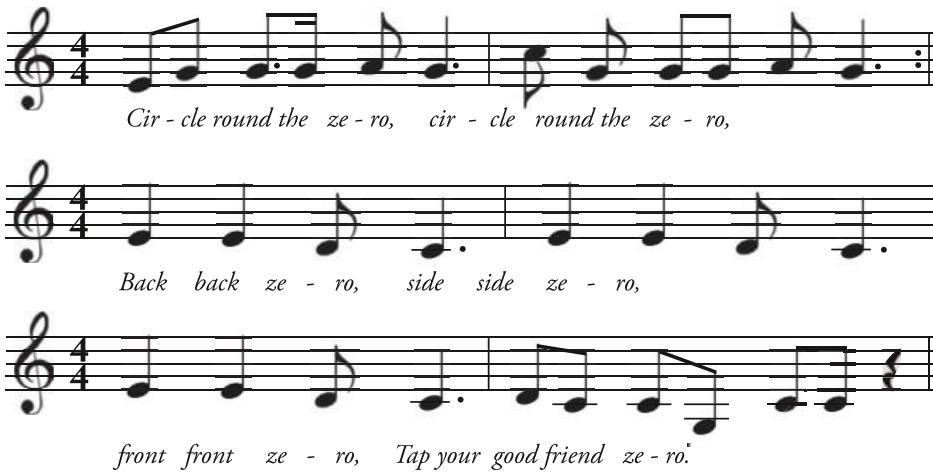
Double scissors



Two-legged hops  
(bunny/kangaroo)



## 78. Circle Round the Zero



The group forms a circle. The game leader chooses one child to begin. That child skips around the outside of the circle while the group sings the song. When they get to the words that correspond to the moves in the song, they follow those motions: standing back to back,

then next to, then in front of, then tapping that player on the shoulder, signalling that the person tapped is the next player to skip. The player who just tapped another's shoulder then takes their place, and the new player proceeds to skips around the circle.

### VARIATIONS

- For more challenge, the game leader can add weaving in and out of the circle as the player is skipping around.
- For more challenge, the game leader may add a rule that no one may go twice before all have gone once. This means the skipper has to measure their speed so that they time it just right to get to the particular player who has not yet gone.

### HINTS TO THE LEADER

- Encourage the players to stop at the person they come to when the first command begins, so they are not tempted to keep skipping past the cue in order to get to a specific player.
- Make sure to leave enough time so that everyone gets a chance to circle around. If the game leader is the first player to go, then the last player can choose the game leader to partner with, thereby coming full circle.

### For children who may struggle to play this game

- This game is good for simple spatial orientation. The game leader may choose to have a child go with them if they are not able to navigate this on their own – the buddy system.

## CHAPTER 4

### Mixed-Age Games

#### SKIPPING GAMES

Many children enjoy skipping when they are younger than seven. This is not surprising, since the 'classic' threshold ages of seven, nine, twelve, fourteen and so on, are becoming less clear. In the past, outer signs of change – such as the change of teeth – would almost exclusively occur around the age of seven. Now it can occur at any time between four and ten – or even twelve in some instances. Likewise, puberty can begin at any time between the ages of nine and sixteen. In the past, emotional and physical maturation was more closely linked; nowadays, early physical and late emotional development is becoming increasingly common. The stress, insecurity and behavioural changes that are often associated with these thresholds is thereby prolonged.

When introducing skipping (jump-rope), it is good to start with group activities, and then move towards individual tasks. Running through the rope in pairs, for instance, will be easier for a child who is just beginning to skip than doing it alone. The chanting of rhymes helps the skippers to participate in the rhythm of the moving rope: so it is important to speak the verses (or sing the songs) as rhythmically as possible. Also, the verses and words invite the child to cross a threshold, to have the courage to approach the moving rope.

Skipping is beneficial for the six to eight year-olds, for it is now that they really begin to experience the world as separate from themselves. The rope symbolizes an external object that needs coming to terms with, a force that exists outside themselves, that has its own rhythm which must be understood and accepted.



## 126. Come In, Come In

With the children on your right, swing the skipping rope clockwise. The children run through in pairs while saying the verse in this and the following three games:

Come in, come in  
 Come knock at my door  
 Run through, run round  
 And back for more.  
*On each underlined word, the rope touches the ground*

Then ask one child in the pair to close his eyes. The other child leads him through.

I take my love  
 And knock at the door  
 Run through, run round  
 And back for more.

Now they must run in and jump once over the rope, and then run out, while this verse is said:

Come in, come in  
 Come knock at the door  
 One skip and out  
 And back for more.

Once the children have mastered this, keep them on your right but turn the rope anti-clockwise. Now they must jump over the rope and immediately run out.

When the children are a little older and more proficient, you can begin to turn the rope in an anti-clockwise direction (relative to where the children are queuing up for a turn to skip), because this is more challenging: it does not invite them in, as a rope turned clockwise does.

Skipping helps the children become aware of the world around them. The moving rope is a barrier outside themselves that they have to conquer. They have no control over it – and this can be quite threatening to some – especially boys. Many boys will reject skipping because they fear that their failure to succeed will be exposed. It is helpful when introducing skipping to explain to the children that skipping takes courage. Find an image or a picture that they can identify with – for example, the picture of a knight who is brave enough to go near the dragon's jaws.

## 127. The Teeth of the Dragon

The teeth of the dragon  
 They open and shut  
 Run for your life  
 And don't get cut!

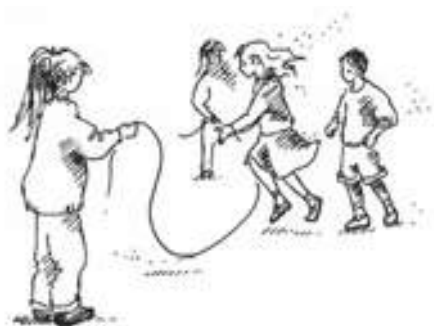
Leading a person through with shut eyes is a good exercise to counteract bullying – I tend to pair the bullies with their victims, so that each child has a turn to lead the other, in a caring and responsible way.



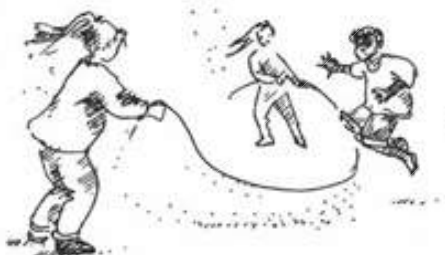
## 128. The Rocking Boat

This game can be done in pairs holding hands. The pairs, once they have made it through, split up and circle back to the line on opposite sides, where they meet again. This particularly helps children who are less confident.

1. We went to sea in a pea green boat  
In a pea green boat, with a big warm coat  
*the rope rocks gently back and forth, while one at a time, the skippers jump over the rope*



2. The first wave rocked and rocked around  
*the rocking of the rope gets bigger*



3. The snakes they slithered without a sound  
*the rope is laid on the floor and moved left and right by the turners*



4. Then two waves rolled and rolled around  
*the rope is pulled tight across the floor by the turners. One turner flicks the rope and sends a wave-like motion down the length of the rope to the other turner. The turner who received the wave now returns it using the same technique. The wave that is created is about 18 inches/45cm high.*



5. And turned the boat upside down  
*now the rope is turned over in traditional skipping style so that they may run through without having to jump.*



6. Upside down, down-side up  
*repeat as above*

And we all dried off in a fisherman's hut.  
*repeat as above until all the children have had a chance to try to run through; and then begin again at the beginning.*

## 129. Highs, Lows

Turn the rope clockwise, with the children on your right. The children run in and jump over the rope to the following verse:

High, lows, stars and peppers  
Scissors, turn around, touch the ground.  
 Faster ...

The rope touches the ground when the underlined words are spoken.

The rope is turned at an increasing pace while the verse is said quicker and quicker.

When the child fails to jump clear or is caught by the rope, he remembers at which part of the verse he stopped. This gives him his own 'task': he has to see how many star jumps, high jumps or whatever, he can do.

If you have a large group of children, a second rope can be used for the 'tasks'.



Scissors



Highs



Stars



Turn around  
*the child turns around while skipping*



Lows



Peppers  
*jumping over the rope as quickly as possible*



Touch the ground