

SPORTS &amp; GAMES · GRADES K-4

# Playground Games

12 classics, with rules

## Why these still matter

Children sometimes need help getting started with playground games. These twelve are tried-and-tested across generations and continents — they need no equipment, work for almost any group size, and teach social skills like turn-taking, fairness and cooperation. Print, laminate, give to lunch supervisors.

## Tag-based games

<p><b>Stuck in the Mud</b></p> <p>One or two children are 'on'. They tag others, who must freeze with arms and legs out (stuck). Free children can crawl through their legs to UNFREEZE them. When everyone's stuck, taggers win.</p>	<p><b>Tail Tag</b></p> <p>Each child tucks a strip of cloth into their waistband as a 'tail'. Run around trying to grab others' tails while protecting yours. Last with a tail wins.</p>
<p><b>Octopus</b></p> <p>Two lines marked across the playground. One 'octopus' in the middle. Players must run from line to line. If tagged, they freeze and become tentacles — they can't move feet but can tag others. Last runner wins.</p>	

## Calling games



<p><b>What's the Time Mr Wolf?</b></p> <p>One child is the wolf, facing away. Others stand at the start line and chant 'What's the time, Mr Wolf?' Wolf calls out a time (e.g. '3 o'clock') — children take that many steps forward. When wolf shouts 'DINNER TIME!', they turn and chase. Anyone caught is out.</p>	<p><b>Red Light, Green Light</b></p> <p>Caller stands at one end, others at the other. 'Green light' = they walk towards caller. 'Red light' = they freeze. Anyone caller sees still moving goes back. First to reach caller wins and becomes new caller.</p>
<p><b>Mother May I?</b></p> <p>Caller stands at one end. Others ask: 'Mother, may I take 3 giant steps?' (Or any number/type of step.) Mother says yes or no. First to reach caller wins.</p>	

## Circle games

<p><b>Duck Duck Goose</b></p> <p>Players sit in a circle. One walks round tapping each head saying 'duck'. They eventually say 'goose' — that child jumps up and chases the tapper around the circle. If tapper gets back to the empty spot first, the goose is now 'on'.</p>	<p><b>The Farmer's in His Den</b></p> <p>Children form a circle around a 'farmer' in the middle. Sing the verses, with farmer choosing a 'wife', wife choosing a 'child', etc. Final verse 'we all pat the dog' is gentle pats on the last person picked.</p>
<p><b>Cat and Mouse</b></p> <p>Two children — one cat, one mouse. Mouse runs in and out of a circle of children. Cat chases. Circle children can RAISE arms to let mouse through, LOWER them to block cat.</p>	

## Skipping & string

<p><b>French skipping</b></p> <p>Two children stand inside a long elastic loop, holding it round their ankles. A third child jumps in and out in patterns. Raise to knees, then thighs as game progresses. Songs help — 'Inside, outside, on, on, off!'</p>	<p><b>Long-rope skipping</b></p> <p>Two children turn a long rope. Others run in, skip a few jumps, run out. With practice — multiple skippers at once. Chants like 'Bluebells, cockle shells, eevy ivy over' help time the rhythm.</p>
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**Cat's Cradle**

A loop of string — two players take turns making patterns with their fingers. Quiet, mathematical, hypnotic. Takes 5 minutes to learn the basics. Lasts forever.

**Make a playground games box**

Get a sturdy box. Inside, keep: skipping ropes, lengths of elastic for French skipping, lengths of string for cat's cradle, beanbags, hoops, chalk for hopscotch. Take it out at break. Children rotate borrowing. The simplest equipment unlocks hours of play.

