

Cooperative Games for PE

1. Smaug's Jewels

This game (based on J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*) invites players to steal the "dragon's" jewels and make it back to their base without being captured. First, use cones or other stationary markers to create a circle, and place one player at each marker. Place a Nerf football (or any soft object) in the center of the circle. Choose one player to serve as "Smaug" (the dragon), and assign a number to each remaining player to divide them into teams (1, 2, or 3).

To begin play, call a team's number. This team will have to work together in an attempt to take "Smaug's Jewel" and return safely to their base. If Smaug manages to tag any of the players before they get back to their base, that team's turn ends. When a team manages to steal the jewel, it's time to select a different player to act as Smaug.

2. Iceberg

If you're looking for cooperative games for PE for students in the lower grades (K-2), this is a suitable option. First, split students into teams of 4 (or 6, depending on the size of the class and the number of playing surfaces you have on hand). Give each team a playing surface (old sheets and tablecloths are preferred). Have each team lay out their playing surface on the floor.

When you're ready to begin play, blow a whistle or clap your hands to alert all players to stand on their team's playing surface. The area beyond the boundaries of the sheet are off-limits. Once every player is on the sheet, have them move off and fold the sheet in half, repeating this process until the sheet is too small for the entire team to stand on.

3. Space Race

The objective of this game is to collect enough "fuel sources" (bean bags) and return them to the "tanks" (small hoops or pylon spots) without touching the area outside the "spaceships" (hula hoops). Divide players up into teams of four to six, depending on group size. Scatter a total of five bean bags for each team across the playing surface. Assign each team a "home base" with five fuel tanks apiece.

Players can begin in either the center of the playing surface, or at their team's home base. To move across the playing surface, players must formulate a path using the hula hoops (three per team works well), gathering all team members within these safe spaces. A hoop can be moved only when there are no players currently inside it.

Once the fuel sources have been collected, they must be placed on the tanks. Tossing the bean bags is not allowed—the players must physically return to their home base.

4. Caterpillar

Note that players should be comfortable doing a forward roll before attempting this activity. If you like, divide players into two teams (it's fine to keep them in a single line instead). Line up each team, single file, and have each player pass their right hand through their own legs before reaching out their left hands to take the right hand of the person in front of them. The player in front will still have a free left hand, while the rear player has a free right hand.

Once this is done, have the first player perform a forward roll, without relinquishing the next player's hand. Once this player has completed his or her roll, have them sit cross-legged as the line works together to move forward. Each subsequent player will repeat the forward roll, also sitting cross-legged when finished. The goal is to move through the entire line without breaking the chain.

5. Rope Circle

Divide players into groups of two. Have one partner tie a [jump rope](#) loosely around their own wrists (one end on the right wrist, one on the left). Next, have the second partner tie a second jump rope around their own left wrist, then thread the other end of rope through their partner's "circle." Finally, the free end should be tied to the second player's right wrist. The players should then attempt to separate from one another without untying the ropes or freeing themselves from their own circles. It's up to the supervisor to make sure that the ropes aren't being tied too tightly.

6. Ball Builders

Divide players into groups of two or three. Assign one player on each team to be the holder, and the rest to be the builders. The objective is to see how many tennis balls the holder can hold on to at one time, without using their pockets or any other article of clothing. Additionally, the balls cannot be touching anything aside from each other and the holder, and must be held for at least 10 seconds. Players are welcome to switch roles after a few attempts.

7. Crossing the River

This game can be played with groups of two to five participants, depending on age group. The smaller the group, the more challenging the game becomes. The objective is to move your entire group across the "river," or playing surface (this can be as wide as you like, but 20-30 feet is standard). To do this, players should line up beside each other, their feet touching their closest neighbors'. In order to cross, they must move as a group without breaking this contact. If a player's feet loses contact with any other player's, the entire team has to return to the starting line.

8. Shipwrecked

Divide players into teams of eight to 10 students apiece, and assign a large hoop to each team. This hoop will act as their "spaceship." Blow a whistle to signify the beginning of play, at which time the players will begin racing with their ship toward the finish line. Note that all team members must be touching the ship at all times during this portion of play. When you call out "Shipwrecked," the players all must set their ship down and attempt to get within the circle. The first team to get every player on board earns one point, and the first team to cross the finish line earns two points. The team with the most points is the winner of that particular "voyage."

9. Knots

To play this game, divide players into teams of six, and have each team form a circle. Instruct players to hold hands with two others (they can't hold both hands of the same player), making sure that no one's hands are joined with their closest neighbors'. Once this is done, blow a whistle to signal that it's time for the "knot" to begin unraveling. All hands must remain joined until the team is standing in a circle, or in two intertwined circles.

10. Frenzy

This is a fun way for students to let out pent-up energy on a rainy day. Invite players to scatter across the playing area (the gymnasium is the preferred venue). Next, toss out as many balls (or balloons) as there are players. The participants will then attempt to keep the balls (known here as “rabid nuggets”) in constant movement.

Instructors should stand at either end of the gym to keep an eye out for “hectics,” or balls that stop moving. Once you’ve spotted one, yell out “HECTIC!” and point to the offending object. Players are then given a set period of time (say, five seconds) to get the hectic moving again.

Once five hectics have been spotted, the “frenzy” is over. Time each frenzy to see how long the players are able to make one last. To keep things more interesting, toss another rabid nugget into the fray every 10 seconds or so.

11. Group Juggle

Even students who aren’t skilled at juggling on their own can be successful at this cooperative activity. To begin, split the class into teams of at least 5 (try to stick with odd-numbered teams). Have all players form a circle, facing one another. One player should then be given a ball, which he will throw to any team member who isn’t standing directly to his right or left. The next player repeats this step, and so on and so forth, until the ball returns to the starting player. Once this happens, have the players attempt to pass the ball in the same sequence as before. Once a rhythm has been established, continue by adding more balls to the circle.

12. Birds of a Feather

In advance, make up a series of index cards printed with the names of various animals (two for each animal you choose). Be sure that each creature has a distinctive sound that children will likely be familiar with. To play, have each student draw a card from the pile. Turn them loose in a safe playing field, encouraging them to keep their eyes closed during play. Have them imitate their designated animal, repeating the sounds until they locate the student who shares the same animal. Once this happens, the pair is welcome to open their eyes. The game is over when all of the pairs have been matched up.

13. Amoeba Advance

This game requires splitting the class up into two equal teams. Once you’ve done that, invite half the team to form a circle by joining their elbows, and have the rest of the team wedge themselves inside the circle. When both teams have formed their makeshift amoebas, blow a whistle to signify the start of play. The teams will then attempt to make it to the finish line without breaking up the group. If the amoeba should dissolve during the attempt, the team must repair itself before it can move forward.

14. Magnificent Marbles

In advance, designate a large circle to serve as the giant marble ring. Place three or four partially deflated beach balls and an equal number of smaller targets (like multicolored poly spots) within the playing circle. To begin play, have ready a supply of bean bags. Invite participants to stand outside the circle and use the bean bags to nudge the balls as close to the smaller target areas as possible.

Players are not permitted inside the playing circle; if a bean bag gets stuck inside, they may attempt to retrieve it only by throwing another bean bag in to try and knock it out.

15. Dry Marco Polo

This activity is a good one to [use as an icebreaker](#) on the first day of gym class. It bears a resemblance to Birds of a Feather, only students are given a larger role in the setup. Divide students into pairs. Each group must then choose either a compound word or a group of words that work together in some way (i.e., “suit” and “case” or “cheese” and “whiz”). The relationship between the two words doesn’t really matter, as long as both partners agree on which ones to use. One player should be assigned one word, with their partner taking on the other.

Invite each team to share their chosen words with the rest of the class. Not only does this provide the group with a fun sharing activity, it will help to ensure that each word pairing is unique.

Next, have the students scatter to various areas within a safe playing field. Ask them to close their eyes (or use blindfolds if necessary). Blow a whistle to signify the start of play, at which time the players should begin calling out their assigned words. Once the partners have found one another, they’re invited to open their eyes (or remove their blindfolds) and watch the rest of the group.