

Leading Games Effectively

(from *Handbook for Ministries with Older Adolescents in the Episcopal Church*, 1996, available in the *Diocesan Resource Center*, Sunnyvale)

Put safety first. One preventable accident can ruin your whole day (and even the entire event!)

Plan your games well ahead Plan alternatives and be willing to use them. Plan to move from playful, non-threatening towards deeper interactive games. Plan games you enjoy. Try to balance thinking/feeling, doing/being.

Have all equipment and space prepared in advance Mark off any necessary boundaries. Be sure the game leader can be seen and heard. Stand on a wall or chair if necessary. Stand in a circle of players, not inside it, to give instructions. Be willing to model anything you ask the group to do.

Start positively and with energy Trust your plans and your discretion. Do not ask, “Do you want to play a game?” Do say, “We’re going to play a game now!” Identify yourself as the game leader, not the judge. Watch closely, pick up clues.

Put the group into group playing “position” before explaining the instructions. Divide into teams, lines, circles, pairs, etc. first. This reduces confusion and allows the group to start playing sooner.

Make instructions brief and straightforward Give just enough information to start the game. Do not try to anticipate all possible situations. Allow players to do their own “problem solving”. Remember that the game leader may always stop the game and modify the rules if the need arises. Encourage people to ask for clarification, but avoid “what if...”

Demonstrate more; talk less Choose games with simple rules.

Always allow people to choose to observe and identify them as participants too

Encourage players with positive feedback Communicate honest acceptance.

Timing is important End the game before it reaches its peak. Signs that it is time to end: people’s attention wanders, they modify the rules on their own, they break the rules. Sometimes a group will like to play a game over and over – try not to let one become stale or habitual because the element of discovery is central to community formation.

Make the game as fair as possible This is particularly important for active games that require physical coordination. If there is extreme variance in ability or experience, try to adapt the game to compensate. Ice hockey can become broom ball on ice wearing tennis shoes. Water polo can become inner tube water polo... Teaming stronger players with new players, or creating an adjusted scoring system or adapting rules for the players with more experience can work well and build community.

There are times when well-planned, well-executed games do not work Be willing to acknowledge a flop and move on. If it’s not fun or meaningful, stop! Postpone evaluation until the appropriate time. Remember that the games are a vehicle for growth, not a task to be accomplished.

WATCH OUT FOR:

- Hot Seat Games that will produce group enjoyment at the expense of an individual;
- Players feelings if they have to be eliminated or set apart (suggestion: adapt the game to include them in some way)
- Never require blindfolds; ask for volunteers.
- Any game that does not reflect your theology of values;
- Games that are culturally biased and may alienate players.
- Games that require expertise and may divide the group into those who are confident and those who are not.

Above all else, don’t take yourself or your games too seriously.

Have fun! Celebrate life as the enormous gift that it is.