Traditional Street Games
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Introduction

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to calculate the effect of technology on the state of children's health in the twenty-first century. Manual levers have been removed from children's toys and replaced with batteries or a combustion engine. Foot-pedaled cars are now pushbutton cars, and bicycles have become scooters or four-wheeled vehicles. Computers, video games, cell phones, IPods, and other handheld games have replaced the traditional street games. With technological advances comes the elimination of physical education programs and daily recess in order to "leave no child behind." The result is overweight kids across the United States. It appears that contemporary lifestyles are leaving many children on their behinds and few children outside.

A fast-paced lifestyle has families scrambling for carry-out meals, which only compounds the problem of consuming too many high-fat, high-sugar, and high-calorie meals. It's no wonder parents and guardians encounter more health concerns in children. Another tragedy is that many of these children will never learn the traditional street games their ancestors played. Perhaps it is time for parents and guardians to return to tradition and encourage children to play outside.

The Problems

Lack of direct, physical, positive, and emotional connections to nature, including life-long leisurely pursuits, result in sedentary lifestyles, poor health, and nature-deficit disorders for Alabama children, youth, and families. The evidence is obvious. Here are a few statistics:

- The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (2003–2006) reported an increase in obesity for children ages 2–5; a 5 to 17 percent increase in obesity among children 6–11 years of age; and a 5 to 17.6 percent increase in obesity among youth ages 12–19.

- An assessment of children living in rural Black Belt Alabama conducted by the Alabama Cooperative Extension System revealed that obesity is increasing and more children are overweight than previously recognized. In Alabama, 16.7 percent of children ages 10–17 are
obese; the national rate is 14.8 percent. And according to Trust for America's Health (2008), obese children are more likely to become obese adults.

- In 2001, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry reported that children watched an average of 3–4 hours of television daily, and the amount of television children watch directly correlates with an increase in body fat as a result of living a sedentary lifestyle.
- Physicians are three times more likely to prescribe psychotropic drugs to American children than in other countries (Zito et al., 2008).

## Why Street Games?

Physical activity and eating well-balanced meals are the two essential ingredients to improving one’s health. Street games allow young people and adults to add physical activity to their daily routines. There is a rich heritage of games and play in all cultures, and structured and unstructured outdoor play is a vital component to healthy childhood development.

Author Mick Green (2002) writes, "during most of the twentieth century, urban youth spent their daylight after-school hours in their neighborhoods, playing outdoors with their friends in unsupervised activities." He continues, "Streets and sidewalks, the urban equivalent of open spaces were adaptable to the full range of ball games and the widest variety of play."

The Extension team project Saving Towns thru Asset Revitalization provides practical tools for intervention on how traditional street games and outdoor play can impact physical inactivity in Alabama youth. While the focus of this work is fitness and outdoor play, anyone can launch a campaign to introduce traditional games and play. Why not start today?

**Marilyn Simpson-Johnson,**
Extension Forestry, Wildlife and Natural Resources Specialist

**Jerry Chenault,**
Urban Regional Extension Agent
Helpful Hints for Game Leaders

- Encourage fair play, honesty, teamwork, and good sportsmanship. As leader, you set the pace and can frame the activities so that games begin as smoothly as possible, and in the proper context of fun and fair play.
- Allow participants to take leadership roles in the games. For example, allow them to set boundaries, explain rules, and officiate under your guidance and supervision. It will help them to develop leadership skills.
- Stop the game before the fun stops. End on a happy note and not when tired players become argumentative or aggressive.
- Participate in the game, but don't dominate or make the game dangerous. Remember, games are about having fun and not just winning.
- Change the rules as needed. Don't be afraid to be creative. Make an old game different or fresh to accommodate group members or conditions, such as available space or weather conditions.
- Encourage only positive comments between players and equal play for all skill levels. Sitting on the bench is no fun for anyone.
- Keep kids active! Many individuals in our society live sedentary lifestyles, but we want active, healthy, and smiling kids.

Other Outdoor Games

- Frisbee
- Kickball
- Dodge ball
- Water gun battles
- Volleyball
- Duck, duck, goose
- Limbo
- Hot potato
- Freeze tag
- Hide-and-seek
- Wheelbarrow or other races
- Hula-hoop or jump rope contests
- Tug-of-war
- Leap frog
- Races
Street Games

Egg or Balloon Toss

Ages
8 and up

Materials
• 50-gallon plastic bags (with three holes cut in them to allow access of arms and head)
• Eggs or water balloons
• Tarps or other coverings (to cover ground)
• Whistle
• Wet wipes (to clean hands after egg or balloon breaks)
• Prizes

Note: A local commercial hatchery may donate unusable double yolk eggs. If desired, cover ground with tarps. However, the preferred method is to simply let the turf absorb the broken eggs. Broken egg shells are picked up at the end of the competition. Team members are also furnished with wet wipes or moist towels to clean their hands after their egg breaks or the competition ends. This can be a messy, but fun competition.

How to Play
Each player is teamed with a partner. Team members put on plastic bags. Partners line up across from each other at arm’s length. All players stand in straight lines. The lines begin about 3 feet apart and will back up a step after each successive toss. The objective is for a team member to toss the egg or balloon in the air to his or her partner. The receiver attempts to catch the egg or balloon without breaking it. This becomes more difficult as the lines get farther and farther apart after each successful toss. A team that breaks an egg or balloon is eliminated from the competition. Prizes are awarded to each team that does not break their egg or balloon.

It is a good practice for game coordinators to have volunteers at the end of each line to act as human "markers" of where the proper line should be. This helps to keep lines at the correct place and provides a quick and reliable standard for team members to line up on. Traffic cones may be used to further identify line ends. Each round of competition lasts approximately 15 minutes, depending on number of teams and time spent in lining up after each toss.

Note: Younger participants may have difficulty tossing required distances as spacing increases during the game.

DID YOU KNOW?
Skagway, Alaska is the site of the world’s largest egg toss with 1,422 people.

Hit the Stick

Ages
3 and up

Materials
• Bouncing rubber ball
• Level sidewalk with two (uncracked) squares

How to Play
The players stand at either end of the concrete squares and toss a stick or coin in the center.

The object of the game is to hit the stick or coin with the ball and make it flip over. Each hit yields 1 point, and each flip counts as 2 points. Players take turns throwing the ball. The game is usually played to a score of either 11 or 21.

As the game continues, one player will hit the stick and knock it closer to the other player who has the advantage of dropping the ball directly on the target. A soft touch can keep the stick from jumping away, but this requires skill.

DID YOU KNOW?
To be environmentally conscious, you can recycle Popsicle sticks for use in this game.
Street Games

Hopscotch

Ages
3 and up

Materials
• Playing court (usually drawn with chalk on pavement, or purchase a Hopscotch mat)
• Markers
• Rocks (or bean bags)

Note: Playing court squares should be 2 X 2 feet.

How to Play
The first player tosses his or her marker onto the first square. The marker must land inside the square without touching any lines or bouncing out. If it lands in the wrong square, the player loses his or her turn. If successful, the player hops through the entire grid, beginning with square number 1.

To navigate the grid, side-by-side squares are straddled while single squares are hopped on one foot. Players can utilize either foot on the first square. Some squares may be designated as "safe squares" or, alternatively, "rest" or "home." They can be jumped on in any manner without penalty.

At the end of the grid, the player turns around and hops back through the entire court in reverse order. The player must also stop and pick up the marker on the way out. If successful, the player then tosses the marker into square number 2 and repeats the grid. If a player steps on a line, misses a square, or falls, his or her turn is over! This player's next turn will begin where the last player leaves off.

To win, a player must complete one course for every numbered square on the course.

DID YOU KNOW?
Hopscotch was used as a military exercise with courts more than 100 feet in length.

Human Bowling

**Ages**
3 and up

**Materials**
- 26-inch fitness ball
- Open space

**How to Play**
Mark off boundary areas and tell participants they cannot touch the ball for any reason. If they do touch the ball, or if a ball touches them, they are "out." The game can be played where participants either stay "out" until the game is over, or they can be asked to go to the sidelines and perform certain exercises (twenty jumping jacks, for example).

A player on each end rolls the fitness ball like a bowling ball toward the other players to try and tag them out.

**Alternative Version**
Have participants lie down on their backs and roll out of the way when an incoming bowling (fitness) ball comes toward them.

**DID YOU KNOW?**
Fitness balls, or Swiss balls, were first used in medical treatment programs for newborns and infants.
Jump Rope and Rhymes

Ages
3 and up

Materials
• Jump ropes
• Open space

How to Play

Jump rope is a simple game and exercise that is fun for children and adults. All it requires is body coordination. Have a friend turn the other end of a rope "in sync" and begin a song or rhyme. Invite a friend to jump in and keep the beat. Double Dutch uses two ropes.

Example Rhymes

**Blue Bells**

_This is a warm up rhyme:_

Blue bells, cockle shells, easy, ivy, over

As it is recited, the rope is swung back and forth gently under the jumping feet, but it is not turned over. On the last word, over, the rope starts to turn fully, accompanied by the jump rope rhyme of choice.

**Sweetheart's Name**

Strawberry shortcake, cream on top
Tell me the name of your sweetheart
A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, etc.

Continue until the jumper misses. The letter shouted when the jumper lands is the first letter of the sweetheart's name.

**Texico**

TEXICO Texico, Texico (cradles)
Over the hills to Mexico (on the word over the rope begins going all the way around and continues until the end of the rhyme)
Where the Spanish dancers do the kicks, the kicks (do kicks)
Where the Spanish dancers to the splits, the splits (jump with legs apart)
Where the Spanish dancers twirl around, around (twirl around)
Where the Spanish dancers jump up and down, up and down (jump high)
Where the Spanish dancers get out of town (jump out of the ropes)

Texico, Mexico all the way to Texico (swinging rope on ground)
Where they do the splits, splits, splits (spread legs as if to do the splits)
And high heel kicks, kicks, kicks (bend knees)
And turn around, round, round (spin)
And touch the ground, ground, ground (bend down and touch ground with fingers)
And they eat red hot chili peppers (spin rope quickly)
Hand Jives
Gramma grams, sick in bed, called the doctor; this is what he said
Let's get the rhythm of the head "ding dong" (shake head left to right)
Let's get the rhythm of the hands (clap hands two times)
Let's get the rhythm of the feet (stamp feet two times)
Let's get the rhythm of the "hot dog" (while saying hot dog, rotate hips with hands on them)
Now put it all together and what have you got? "ding, dong" (clap hands, stamp feet, "hot dog")
Now put it all backwards and what have you got? "hot dog," (stamp feet, clap hands, "ding dong")
Red hot pepper in the pot,
Who's got more than the leader's got? (jump double time) 10, 20, 30, 40, etc.

Go as high as you can go without missing.
The jumper with the highest score wins.

Cinderella
Cinderella, dressed in yellow
Went upstairs to kiss a fella
Made a mistake
And kissed a snake
How many doctors did it take?
Count until someone "makes a mistake."

Fire Alarm
Fire, fire, false alarm
____ fell into ____ arms
Is she/he gonna be the one?
Yes, no, maybe so, yes, no, maybe so, etc.
(double time)

Coffee/Tea
I like coffee, I like tea
I like ____ to jump with me!
A person jumps in, then it repeats and they invite a third person, fourth person, etc.

Dum Dum Dodo
Dum dum dodo, catch me if you can, I can run faster than __________ can.
The verse is sung, and then the person enters the rope and picks someone else.

Down by the River
Down by the river, down by the sea
Johnny broke a bottle and blamed it on me
I told ma, ma told pa
Johnny got a spanking so ha, ha, ha
How many spankings did Johnny get?
1, 2, 3…
Keep counting until the jumper "makes a mistake."
Street Games

Kick the Can

Ages
3 and up

Materials
- An empty or rock-filled can or bucket
- Concrete, asphalt, dirt, or grass surface
- Designated "home base" (with chalk or by digging a 6-foot perimeter with a shoe)

How to Play
You can start the game anywhere. Someone is chosen to be "It" while someone else gets to kick the can. After the can is kicked, all the players scatter and hide. "It" picks up the can and begins to count to some agreed upon number, such as 10, 50, or 100. "It" runs to home base and yells, "Freeze or ready or not here I come!" Then, "It" sets out to find the players.

If "It" sees someone, he or she runs back to home base and calls out something like, "I saw Leonardo behind that dog house." Kick the Can is similar to hide-and-seek and other tag games. When all the players have been found, a new person is chosen to be "It."

Note: A person hiding may not move to a new spot to avoid being called out. Honesty is important to the game.

One additional point: A player that has not been found may run to home base to free the other team members by either tagging them before "It" gets there or by kicking the can before "It" gets there and calls out his or her name. Once the can has been rekicked, "It" runs and picks up, counts, and begins searching for the hiding players.

Much like hide-and-seek, players seek and move around to avoid being caught. A player is caught when spotted and called out.

DID YOU KNOW?
Kick the Can is also called Tip the Can and is similar to the game Capture the Flag.
Punchball

Ages
5 and up

Materials
• Bouncing rubber ball
• Concrete or asphalt surface

How to Play
Punchball requires teams with two to twelve players per team, a ball, and room for bases. It uses many Little League Baseball rules; however, in Punchball, a foul counts as a strike. By the way, the batter's fist is the bat. And there is no pitcher! There are three outs per inning and either 1–3 strikes make an out. The players decide.

To set the game in motion, the "batter" tries to hit the ball with the palm side of his or her fist in a big swinging motion. Then, the batter attempts to round the bases before being "pegged." A runner is pegged when the ball is thrown at the runner for an out. The player can be tagged with the ball for an out, or the ball can be "homed." In "homing," if the ball reaches home plate or if there is no catcher before the runner makes it all the way around, the runner must return to the original base. If a catcher is at home plate, homing is not allowed.

Advanced "batting" techniques range from simply hitting the ball to letting it first take one bounce to even tossing it up for a tennis-like "serve." Younger children may hold the ball in one hand and swing at it with the other. Enjoy!

DID YOU KNOW?
Punchball is also called speedball and is used to train boxers.
Street Games

Rat Tail Chase

Ages
3 to 12

Materials
• 24-inch cloth strips, flags, or strings to hang as tails

How to Play
Each player gets a flag, cloth strip, or string to hang from the belt area at the back of his or her pants as a "tail." On cue, players try to grab the other players' "rat tail" while keeping their own. They are not allowed to hold their own tail to protect it. A set area or a boundary is given, and players must not tackle, push, or strike other players to pursue their tails.

Players must sit out for the remainder of the game once they lose their tail. The winner is the last player with a tail.

DID YOU KNOW?
Punchball is also called speedball and is used to train boxers.
Red Light, Green Light

Ages
3 to 12

Materials
• No materials are required!

How to Play
One person is the "stop light," and all the other players try to touch the player designated as the stoplight. The players start 15 feet from the stoplight.

The stoplight faces away from the other players and calls out "green light" to begin. At this signal, the players begin to move toward the stoplight. At any point, the stoplight may call out "red light" and turn around to catch any moving players. If any players are caught moving, they are out.

Play resumes with the stoplight again calling out "green light" after turning his or her back to the players. The stoplight wins after catching all moving players moving before they get to him or her. The first player to touch the stoplight wins the game and becomes the next stoplight.

In another version, players are in a large field or yard and line up on one side while "It" stays in the middle of the field facing the players. When "It" calls out, "green light," all the players run to the light. When the players hear, "red light," they stop. Any player that does not stop in 2 seconds is out. "It" continues calling "red light" or "green light" until all players are either out or have made it back to the starting line. The last player back to the starting line is the new "It."

Note: Kneeling, falling, or flopping down are good ways to come to a fast stop at the call of "red light."

DID YOU KNOW?
Variations of this game are played in France, Australia, and Mexico.
Street Games

Ring-a-lievo

Ages
5 and up

Materials
• An object or area designated as the base (tree, playground set, bench, or chair)

How to Play
Choose up to two teams with any number of players. One team is "the hunters" while the other is "the hunted." The goal of the hunters is to catch all members of the opposing team. The hunters need a home base or "jail."

The team being hunted tries to avoid being captured and put into the hunter's jail. They also try to coordinate freedom or release of their teammates from jail, which requires strategy and physical endurance.

Hunters often travel in packs or groups, like wolves. Their strategy is to try and separate one of the prey and capture them by grabbing them and saying, "Ring-a-lievo one, two, three!" That means the victim is captured and must walk to the jail where he or she will remain until the end of the game or until freed by a teammate.

Players often sneak close to the jail in an effort to fake or draw out the jailer so that another player can come in and free the captives. To free them, a player from "the hunted" team must make it to the jail and yell "home free!" This releases all prisoners, and they will then be free to run and scatter to set the game back at full throttle.

The game ends when all "the hunted" players are caught. Hiding is not allowed. Players should be seen frequently and should try to "draw out the enemy."

DID YOU KNOW?
This traditional street game is known by various names such as Ringolario, Ringoleavio, Ringolearyo and rules vary depending on the country of origin. (Source: Streetplay.com, 2009)
Snake Dodging

Ages
3 and up

Materials
- 10-foot rope (or a plastic rope with handles)
- Duct tape
- Tube sock
- Clean rags
- Marker

How to Play
Tape a tube sock to the end of a rope. Stuff the tube sock with rags and draw a face on the sock.

Participants gather in a circle as if to play "Duck, Duck, Goose." Have participants either duck beneath the "snake" as it is swung around by an adult, who is stationed at the center of the circle, or have them jump over it as it comes by their feet. The snake can be swung in either direction around the circle. Once touched by the snake, a participant is "out" of the game.
Street Games

War Balls

Ages
8 and up

Materials
• 6 soft rubber balls
• 6-foot safe (free) zone marked off in the center of a court

How to Play
Participants are divided into two teams. Teams face each other across the court. The center of the court is the safe or "free" zone. Six soft rubber balls are placed in the free zone. On cue, team members try to gather as many balls in the free zone as possible so they can throw them at opposing team members across the free zone. Once a player is hit, he or she is either out of the game or must do a certain number of push-ups to reenter the game. Push-ups are optional and left to the discretion of the game official. However, this game rule must be stated before the game begins.

Each player does his or her best to dodge incoming balls while gathering balls to throw back at the opposing team members.

DID YOU KNOW?
War balls does not have to be played on a solid surface. Have some fun and play the game in a pool!
References


