



Chapter 6: Games

“Play is the finest system of education known to man.” Neville Scarge

Games are at the heart of the BKL program and should be incorporated into every club gathering. Games teach balance, coordination, feel for the snow, and agility. Games provide challenge, stimulation, and an opportunity for everyone to feel successful. Games teach cooperation and are instrumental in transforming a group of individuals into a community. But most importantly, games are FUN!

Having said this, we must find a balance between playing games and other learning activities. One model is to work on a skill, play a game that reinforces the skill, and then return to the skill to reinforce what was taught and provide feedback. The bottom line is:

1. Play games purposefully—not because you have nothing else to do
2. Integrate games into your practice—not the other way around
3. Don't play games for too long. Observe the children. Sometimes ten minutes is adequate. Modify the game by adding more balls, goals, or rules or move on to a new game or something entirely different.

How to Use Games: Use games to involve everyone. Children unwilling or unable to play can be officials or helpers. Games also provide an opportunity to integrate caregivers/parents into club activities. Give newcomers and visitors a chance to watch and, if possible, participate in club games. Unless stated otherwise, all of the games listed in this chapter are played without poles.

The following guidelines will help you to use games successfully:

1. Identify what games you will use before practice. Use this manual to help you figure out the games that will reinforce the skills you want to develop.
2. Have everything you need to play the game and the area where it will be played prepared before practice.
3. Divide kids up BEFORE you go out, if at all possible. Read off the teams you have elected. Letting children pick can result in hurt feelings. You can always count off “1,2,3,4” if you need four groups, with “1's” being a team, “2's” being a team, etc. Make adjustments on the fly if teams prove uneven.
4. Don't let the game go on for too long. Call for a rest or switch to something else when you see signs of fatigue or boredom.



GAMES TO START PRACTICE

There is always a time gap between the first and last child ready for practice. The larger the group, the bigger the gap. Prepare an obstacle course, a slope with a jump, or an area for tag so that those who are ready for practice early can play while they wait for their teammates. You can also have an assistant leader organize a game of “Hokey Pokey” or “Simon Says” while the leader is preparing the rest of the children.

Hit the Deck: When the leader calls “Hit the Deck” everyone must fall and then get up by rolling onto their back to untangle skis (like a dead bug). Then they place their skis on the snow parallel to each other (and perpendicular to the fall line if on a hill). Next they move forward onto their hands and knees before sliding one ski forward at a time and standing up.

The Hokey Pokey: Stand the group in a circle and sing/say: “*Put your left ski in, put your left ski out, you put your left ski in and you shake it all about. Do the hokey pokey and you turn yourself around. That’s what it’s all about.*” Do whatever the lyrics tell you to do. Repeat with various body parts and pieces of equipment.

Hopscotch: This game is the same as the game of squares drawn on pavement with chalk. Use food coloring or simply draw the squares in the snow with a ski pole. Use an extra hat or a pine bough to throw on the hopscotch square.

Red Light/Green Light: Have the children line up and start skiing towards you. Then say, “*Red Light!*” Give children 5 seconds to stop and try to hold the position they were caught in. When you say “*Green Light*” they can begin moving again. First child to reach you gets to be the next caller. This is a good game for practicing stopping.

Simon Says: This game is popular with younger children. “*Simon says step sideways; Simon says hop up and down, etc.*”



GROUP SKIING GAMES

The Blob: “The Blob” is a type of tag. Play in an area with a defined size. Start the game with two children joining hands to become “The Blob.” They ski while holding hands until they tag someone else. “The Blob” now has three people. They ski until they tag a fourth person. Then the Blob splits up into two 2-person Blobs and keep searching for more people. Tip: the size of the field is important— too big and the Blobs won’t be able to tag people. Encourage the Blobs to work together to “sweep” the field.

Capture the Flag: Can be played with flags or any other easily “capturable” object. Full game description [HERE](#).

Duck, Duck, Goose: Arrange the children into a circle facing the center. Choose one child to be “it.” This child skis around the outside of the circle tapping every other child, saying “*Duck, duck, duck, . . .*” then they tap someone and say, “*Goose!*” The “goosed” child jumps up and chases the “it” child, trying to catch them. That child is then “it”, and starts the second round of the game.

Egg Search (with or without poles): No need to wait for Easter! Use small candies and scatter them in a field or open woods while children are not watching. Younger children start two minutes before the older children, if working with different ages.

Ghostbusters: Spread the group out in a field (or gym) in a random formation. Choose one child to be the ghostbuster. All others are ghosts. Anyone tagged by the ghostbuster becomes the haunted house and must stand with arms and legs stretched out to the side. Haunted houses are freed only when a ghost goes under their legs. Haunted houses must remain stationary when tagged. The game starts when you yell “*one, two, three, ghostbusters!*”

Hares and Hounds: The hares get a two minute head start into a wooded area. An overgrown field is ideal terrain. The hounds are released to track down the hares who can hide or run. The hares are given long streamers, ribbons, or scarves to wear as tails. When a hound catches/tags a hare, the tail is collected as a trophy of the hunt. The game continues for +/- 10 minutes when a whistle calls everyone in. The sides switch and hares become hounds and hounds become hares. Who can catch the most hares? Count up the trophies from the hunt. Which side had the best hounds?

Mystery Time Race (with or without poles): This type of race is designed for anyone in the group to be able to win regardless of ability. Pick an approximate window of time for the activity, say 10 to 15 minutes, and select one child to pick a time in your time window. Write down the time they choose and hide it. Start the group out skiing, telling them to be back between 10 and 15



minutes. Score the race by those that come back closest (absolute time) to the *mystery time*. Distance, speed, and style are of no concern.

Obstacle Course: Ski over bumps, under a rope, around poles and bushes, and sidestep up a ramp or hill etc. Turn the course into a relay.

Red Rover: Each team has a turn to defend a square field space from invasion by the other team. When the defending team is ready, it challenges a member of the attacking team to try to ski through the field to the other side. “*Red Rover, Red Rover, send the (team name) right over.*” The team members then try to rush or sneak through to the far side without being tagged. The greater the number of children that reach the other side of the field, the higher that team’s score. Each team takes a turn playing offensive and defensive positions.

Rock, Paper, Scissors: Divide children into two groups. They play on a field that has two well-defined “end zone” lines and side boundaries. The width of the field should be roughly half the length. Each group huddles at its end zone and chooses 2 signs: one to be used as their first signal and the other as a back-up in case of a tie. Teams then ski to the center of the field and face each other spread out along the width of the field. At the command each team presents its signal—the losing team then flees toward its end zone with the winning team in pursuit. Tagged children go over to the winning team. Repeat until a time limit is reached or there is only one team.

Sharks and Minnows: Minnows line up on the “beach” with one shark in the “ocean.” When the shark yells “*minnows, minnows, cross my ocean!*” all the minnows have to ski across the “ocean” to the beach on the other side. The beaches are safety zones. If a minnow is tagged they become a shark. Continue the game until only one minnow is left.

Follow the Leader: Everyone lines up behind the leader and then copies all the movements the leader does such as snowplowing, lying down on the snow and then getting back up, double poling, etc. Rotate who is the “leader.” You can also try this activity through an obstacle course.

Ski Soccer: Children play soccer on skis but use their hands instead of their feet to move the ball. With a large group, try using two balls.

One-Ski Soccer: Children only wear one ski and kick with their free foot (no hands).

Dodgeball: You do not have to divide into teams for this game. Make sure there are plenty of balls available. Children must avoid being hit by other players’ balls while simultaneously trying to throw balls at the other players. If hit, there are a variety of options for getting back into the



game including doing a specific activity like 5 jumping jacks or star jumps. If you play “Revenge Dodgeball”, hit players can resume play when the person whose ball hit them gets hit by a ball.

Flag Tag: Spread children out in a field and give all players a flag or strip of cloth to tuck in their coat pocket (leave part of the flag hanging out). On the start signal children try to steal the other children’s flags. Once you lose your flag, you cannot ski but must keep one foot on the flag on the ground. You can reach out and steal the flag of someone else skiing by you to reenter the game. Last person with a flag wins.

Freeze Tag: Start with a few taggers. When someone gets tagged they are frozen. There are many variations for how they can get unfrozen (the person who tagged them gets tagged or they do an activity – i.e. sing a song, do jumping jacks, push-ups, etc).

Noodle Tag: Every child skis around with pool noodle that they use to tag the other children with rather than their hands.

What’s Around the Corner?: Set two or three stations along the trail. Children must stop and do something at each station like say the first half of the alphabet, count backwards from 25 to 0, spell their name and mailing address, switch poles to opposite hands, do some toe touches, or sing one verse of a favorite song, etc. You can ask younger and older children to do different things at each station.

Ultimate Frisbee/Ball: No stop in play is allowed in this game. When children are tagged, they must give up the frisbee/ball. Children may hold onto the frisbee/ball for five seconds or five strides, whichever comes first. Ultimate Ball game description [HERE](#).

Scavenger / Treasure Search: Pass out a list of easy to find items to each team. A 10-15 minute time limit will maintain excitement. Use natural items (leaf, pine needles, stone, and/or sticks), clothing (red hat, green scarf, and/or blue mitten), and special objects that teams can keep (ribbons, flags, and/or badges). State-specific scavenger hunt images for Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont available here: <https://nensa.net/2021/08/25/bill-koch-league-savenger-hunts/>.

Wedge Snake: Three or four children line up as close to one another as possible in the wedge position. Children hold onto the waist of the person ahead of them. You can make this game more difficult by adding children to the snake or by requiring that children turn while going downhill.



RELAY AND RACE GAMES

Relays are one of the most effective and fun ways to involve children in activities where they learn by doing. However, caution needs to be observed to prevent the slowest, most awkward, or least experienced children from standing out.

1. Avoid placing children who are less skilled at and/or newer to skiing in the first or last leg of a relay.
2. Try mixing children who are less skilled and slower at skiing with children who are more skilled and faster at skiing.
3. PAY ATTENTION. Yes, there is always a lot of cheering and backslapping that accompanies relays, but are any children standing back and feeling badly because they “cost” their team the event?
4. Be prepared to make some types of relays optional if you observe that some children don't like them.

Backwards-Forwards Race (with or without poles): This is a two person race where the team members start back-to-back at the start/finish line. At the sound of the start signal they ski around the race course loop in opposite directions and continue skiing in opposite directions until they meet their partner. At that point they turn around and retrace their routes back to the start line. The team finishes only after both members arrive back at the start/finish line. The first team pair back at the start/finish area wins. Pair fast children with slow children to make the race closer.

Beanbag Biathlon Relay: Children ski a lap of a short course and stop at the “firing range” to throw bean bags into a box until they get three “hits” (three beanbags in a box). Then they ski on to tag their partner. If you don't have beanbags you can use snowballs or tennis balls. Leaders and caregivers/parents help return the bean bags to the “firing line” so that there is ammunition for the next child.

Catalog Relay: You need an old catalog, a piece of paper, a clipboard, a pencil, and a stopwatch or watch. Place the catalog about 100 meters from a starting gate. Mark the catalog's location with a pole. The child in the starting gate is given a page number. The object of the game is to ski to the catalog, find the page number, tear it out, and return to the starting gates as soon as possible. The child with the fastest time wins. Appoint some children as official scorers and timers.

Caterpillar Relay: Teams of four line up with children in single file formation. Each child places skis outside the person in front of them. The lead child on every team starts with skis together. Teams then hobble, shuffle or do whatever it takes to get their caterpillar over a marked goal line.



Chariot Race: Divide the group into teams of two. One partner lines up behind the other. An old bicycle tube, rope, or belt is put around the waist of the child in front, and the child in the back holds onto the “reins.” The child in front then pulls the child behind to a designated point and back. When a pair has finished, they tag the next team. The fastest team wins. If there are enough tubes/ropes/belts, all teams can go at once.

Circle Relay/Barrel Racing (with or without poles): Children ski to a pole/barrel, circle it twice, and ski back to tag the next team member. Each team has its own turning pole/barrel.

Cross Country Slalom Relay (with or without poles): Flags can be set on flat terrain, an uphill, or an easy downhill. Leave plenty of room between slalom flags for children to pass each other unless you have enough flags to make a dual slalom. You can set up two courses side-by-side on a short, relatively easy uphill and have children start head-to-head. They can ski up the hill and then back down between the slalom flags.

Double Pole Contest (with poles): Set up two flags or poles ~25 meters apart. Ask each child to count the number of double poles they use between the flags. Then ask each child to ski the route with fewer double poles. See who can do the least.

Double Pole for Distance (with poles): Make a starting line and see who can travel the farthest with ten double poles. Have each child mark their place and try again for their personal best.

Double Pole Drag (with poles): Put an old bicycle tube around the waist of the front child and have the second child hold onto the tube. The front child double poles dragging the second child behind. When they reach the end of the course, the children swap places and repeat the activity.

Double Pole Long Jump (with poles): Draw a “poling line” in the snow. Let each child back up to get good momentum. The child then executes a big double pole on the double poling line and glides to see who goes the farthest. They can try the activity multiple times to see if they can improve against themselves.

Egg Relay: Get some big spoons and decide whether or not you want to use uncooked eggs. If an egg breaks, a leader can leave the starting line with a replacement egg and ski to the site of the catastrophe. Set up a small loop in a field and break children into teams. They must complete the loop with their egg and pass it off to their teammate as the “tag.”

Holding-Hands Relay: This game is popular with younger children. Partners must ski without poles and while holding hands. If one child falls down the other helps them up while still



holding hands. The lead-off pair skis the loop—keep the loop easy—and then tags the second pair.

Interval Relay (with or without poles): Two children alternate laps for three to 10 laps each. This relay provides excellent training and is a good activity for older children in the middle of the season. Choose the technique you wish to work on as the format for the relay: double pole, skating, striding, hill-climbing, downhills, etc.

Medley Relay (with or without poles): Have three or four short loops of different varieties: flat, a hill-climb, downhill, mixed-terrain, etc. Children can start from one exchange zone or have exchange zones along the trail at convenient locations.

Equipment Relay (start with poles): Children race 5 times around a short loop alternating laps with their partner. After tagging their partner, children must take off one pole or ski for their next lap. The relay finishes with a running lap. Can keep the race going by having children put their equipment back on with 5 more short alternating loops.

No Ski Start: Children start with their skis off, run about 10 meters, put their skis on, and then complete the relay.

Peas-on-a-Plate Relay: Using frisbees as plates and tennis balls as peas, relay teams of three or four take turns collecting a pea on their plate and then passing the plate to their teammate until the plate is full. Pre-count to determine how many tennis balls fit on a frisbee. The start line should be about 10 yards from the tennis balls. Scatter the tennis balls to spread the competitors. Spills are common and if the plate empties the team has to start over again one pea at a time. As children get better at this game, add in some varying terrain and a few obstacles.

Push the Piggy to Market (with or without poles): Children use a ski pole to push a ball along a short trail (25-50 meters), turn around a flag, and return to tag their partner. Their partner then goes through the same procedure. Alternatively, children kick a ball with a ski tip as far as possible in two minutes. When the two minutes are up, the next team member takes over for two minutes, and so on.



FOR SLIDING AND GLIDING

Furthest on One Ski: This exercise is designed to work on balance. Pick a tracked hill within the ability level of the group. You can decide whether or not to have the group take off one ski. Line up the children to go down the hill one at a time. Keep track of who can go the longest distance balanced on one ski. Change skis and learn to balance on the other side.

Limbo: Get small to ski under a pole that the leader is holding over the trail.

Juggler: Ski downhill balancing a snowball on your head. Who can ski the farthest before it falls off? Ski beside a partner and play catch with a snowball.

Railway Tracks: Instructor skis first and children follow in the instructor's tracks. Lay a streamer or rope across the track for children to jump over.

Scooter: This activity helps develop strong kicks for diagonal stride. Have children on one ski in a straight track. Tell them to kick off with their non-ski foot like they are on a scooter. A pole can be held crosswise to simulate handlebars. Change skis and repeat the game. Form the exercise into a relay race for a group activity or set up two poles and have children see how few kicks they can make to get between poles. This variation helps develop balance.

Gliding Contest: Have everyone double pole to a specific point at the top of the hill and then ski down and see how far they can glide. They can do this multiple times to compare their own gliding distance.

Ski the Bumps: Ski over bumps like a car on a bumpy road. Use your legs like shock absorbers.

FOR DOWNHILL SKIING

Pie Making Contest: See who can make the widest slice of pie.

Pie Slices: Identify five pieces of pie from narrowest to widest wedge. The leader calls out numbers of the pie for the children to execute. Alternatively children could call out the number of their pie slice as they ski down.

Red Light/Green Light: Play on a downhill. This variation on the game emphasizes control through wedging.



The Squeeze: Set two poles side by side so the children can ski straight between them. Then have them wedge down and close the wedge to squeeze between the poles. They can open up the wedge on the other side to stop.

Leapfrog Downhill: Pick a very gentle hill on a day when the snow is soft. Separate the group into smaller groups of about the same height. Start the first child in each group gliding down the hill and stop them a short distance down. This child must then crouch down so the next child can ski-straddle over them as in leapfrog. Continue the progression until the last child is down the hill.

Dual Slalom: Set up two identical courses side by side and have pairs of evenly matched children race to the bottom. Use poles, flags, cones, or random pieces of extra clothing to mark the courses.

Fly Like a Plane: Hold your arms out like wings and bank turns like an airplane.

Human Slalom: Have children line up on the fall line. The top child turns around each of the children and stops at the bottom. The next child “peels off” from the top and weaves through the human poles to the end of the line.

Race Cars: Kneel on skis and race downhill steering with hands on ski tips. Give children different ways of coming back up the hill.

Round the Peg: This exercise is designed to teach quick downhill turning ability and quick transitions to uphill skiing. Pick a downhill within the ability level of the group. Place a peg or ski pole on a challenging portion of the downhill slope. Have the children ski down, go around the peg, and quickly return to the top of the hill. Depending on the group, you can time them.

Slalom Course: Start with good spacing between the poles for easy turns, then move the poles closer together for quicker turns.

Ski Jumping : Make sure you create a jump with a safe outrun.

Group Icebreaker Games

These games are helpful to get children feeling comfortable in the group, and will help break down social barriers. It is worthwhile to spend time creating a positive team culture early in the season and these games can be done either on snow or on foot.



Name Game: Form a circle. The first time around each child and instructor says their name and a fact about themselves (like where they live, their favorite food, or their favorite thing about winter etc). The next time around each person says their name and fact, along with someone else's. You can also go around and each person has to introduce the person next to them in the circle to the group.

Eye Contact: Children form a circle and must introduce themselves to and switch places with the first person they make eye contact with.

Form a Line: There are countless ways to play this game. The idea is to give children a variable to organize themselves by. The simplest is to have players alphabetize themselves by first name. You can make it harder by using children's last names. Try it again without talking for an extra challenge. You can also have players organize themselves by height, hat color, etc. The possibilities are endless!

Tarp Game: The ground is a lava (or freezing water or a shark filled river etc.) and the only raft your group has is a tarp that everyone stands on. The object of the game is to flip the tarp over without anyone touching the ground. This can be done on skis if your tarp is big enough. Try with no talking for an extra challenge.

How Slow Can You Go: Children line up at one end of the game area (field, room, stadium, etc). When the leader says "Go!" everyone must move towards the opposite end of the game area as slow as they possibly can. Everyone must remain in forward motion. Stopping is not allowed! The last one to cross to the other side wins.

Squish Race: The group breaks up into teams of two and each team is given a balloon or ball. The team must hold the balloon or ball between their bodies with no hands. Teams race to a finish line and if a ball is dropped along the way, the team must start over.

Face Pass: Form a circle. The first person makes a funny or unusual face and "passes" it to the next person who must imitate the face, and add another face of their own. The third person in the circle must imitate both previous faces, before adding their own and "passing" it to the next person. Keep going until everyone has a turn.

Lava River: Each child is given a raft (square of cardboard, small mat, etc). The players can only step on these to cross the lava river (a designated area of the field), and each raft must always have someone touching it or it will float away. Players must use teamwork to figure out how to get across without losing a raft or touching the lava.



Fib Pass: Form a circle. One person acts out an action (i.e. brushing your teeth). The next person asks them what they're doing and the first person must fib and respond with another action that they were not doing (i.e. "I'm reading a book"). The second person then acts out the action from the first person's response, and the next person asks them what they're doing. The second person responds with yet another action (i.e. "I'm riding a bicycle). Keep going around until everyone has a turn.

Dryland-specific Games

Slow Soccer: Children earn one kick at a time by doing certain exercises (i.e. jumping jacks, sit-ups, etc). Can play with multiple balls to make the game more exciting.

Card Strength: Set a deck of cards on the ground and create a start/finish line a little ways from the deck. Assign an exercise to each card suit (i.e. hearts=push-ups, spades=lunges etc). Create teams and have the first member run out to the deck of cards, grab a card, run back to the start/finish line and do the exercise associated with the suit on their card. The rep count will equal the number on the card (face cards=10, aces=1). Once they finish their exercise, they tag the next team member.

Camouflage: This game is best played in the woods. The game starts with one person, the game leader, shouting "*camouflage*" at which point everyone else scatters and hides. The game leader then counts to ten out loud with their eyes closed after which they begin looking around. If the leader recognizes anyone not completely hidden, they call out their name and location. If they are correct, that person is out. If not, that person does not have to reveal their identity, and is still in play. Once the leader can no longer identify anyone, they call out "*green light*" and counts out loud to five with eyes closed. The hiders have these five seconds to try and reach the leader, or at least get closer while still being out of sight. The first person to touch the leader without being seen is the winner and the next game leader.

Nordic Ski Lab Games Video Library:

<https://nordicskilab.com/cross-country-ski-games-for-kids/>