

C H A P T E R 3

Social Gross Motor Games

A Kid Sandwich

Guaranteed to bring giggles, this game is especially liked by children with ASD because it stimulates the proprioceptive system and has the delight of a group hug.

GOALS

- Awareness of others
- Pretend play
- Following directions
- Imagination
- Modulation
- Tolerating physical closeness
- Matching pictures

MATERIALS

Optional:

- Pictures of sandwiches

Picture of a boy eating a sandwich
Pictures of sandwich ingredients, such as pickles, cheese, lettuce, and
so on
Masking tape or footprints for the floor

SETUP

Have the children stand in a circle with the adults. Tell the children they are going to make a sandwich. Two children will be the bread. Other children will be the ingredients, and some will be the eaters of the sandwich.

DIRECTIONS

Pick one child to stand in the center of the circle and be the bread. Then ask, “What else shall we put in this sandwich?” If the children at first don’t come up with ideas, suggest some. For example, say, “Let’s add some cheese” and then pick another child to be the cheese. Put that child directly in front of the child who is the piece of bread. Continue naming and choosing children to be the ingredients, such as ham, pickles, tomato, lettuce and so on, each time placing the child in front of the last ingredient. End with another piece of bread. You may also find that some children might call out an ingredient that isn’t usually in a sandwich, such as rice or chocolate. Go ahead and put whatever they say in the sandwich!

After the sandwich is made, gently squeeze all the ingredients together and announce, “It’s time to eat.” Everyone who is not part of the sandwich pretends to eat, smacking their lips and making chewing sounds. Yum! Then, start all over and make a new sandwich!

WHAT IS BEING LEARNED

- ◆ Because the ingredients all get squished together, this game provides the proprioceptive feedback that children with ASD often crave, as well as the friendliness and warmth of connecting with another human in a nonthreatening and silly way. Besides experimenting with a fun way to play with and get next to each other, children are playing pretend, an

important skill. Everyone pretending together reinforces their sense of being part of the group.

- ◆ Because this is such a novel experience for many, it's an opportunity to modify their responses so that their excitement does not make them so wild that they are not able to stand and be part of the sandwich.
- ◆ There is also the culinary lesson being learned about what goes into a good sandwich (not including, of course, the rice and chocolate combo!).

MODIFICATIONS

- ◆ For children who need visual input, show appropriate pictures of sandwiches and ingredients, and place footprints or a line of tape on the floor to show them where to stand when they are sandwich ingredients. You can also place pictures of the sandwich ingredients on the floor so the child who is a pickle will know where to stand and what he is supposed to be.
- ◆ When asking the children, "What else shall we put in this sandwich?" offer several pictures and let them choose the ones they want.
- ◆ For children who are hypersensitive to touch, have them be the bread so that they are only touched on one side. Or, if even that is too much, have them be the person squeezing the others or have them be the "eaters" of the sandwich.
- ◆ For those who are just watching, keep their interest and encourage them to stay with the group by giving them pictures of the food to look at, or have an adult hold the watching child in a firm and comforting embrace while commentating on the action he is watching: "Now Jacob is pretending to be a piece of cheese in the sandwich."
- ◆ For the child who needs more tactile stimulation to stay present, pretend to smear mustard or other condiments on him by rubbing your hand down his back.



Are You My Mummy?

With a simple piece of material, you can turn a child into a fun monster.

GOALS

Playing with others
Proprioceptive stimulation
Vestibular stimulation
Imagination

MATERIALS

Ace bandages, elastic therapy bands, or a long scarf

SETUP

Unroll the bandage to get it ready to wrap child

DIRECTIONS

Have one child stand still while the other children, with an adult directing, wrap the bandage around the child's body. Mime a mummy's stiff-legged walk for the wrapped child to imitate. Demonstrate funny sounds to accompany the walk.

VARIATIONS

1. Wrap a body part instead and make the activity one of a doctor and patient. The doctor is fixing the patient's arm or leg.
2. Wrap an inanimate object instead, such as a teddy bear, and turn it into a mummy that chases after the other kids.

WHAT IS BEING LEARNED

- ◆ The pressure of the bandage can be very comforting to children who are seeking proprioceptive input. Having to walk while wrapped challenges their balancing skills.
- ◆ Wrapping others up can make them aware that other children have similar body parts and that they enjoy the tactile input of touching and being touched.
- ◆ If the variations are played, children also get a chance to use their imagination and pretend to be a doctor, patient, or scared kid running from a pretend mummy.

MODIFICATIONS

- ◆ The temperament of the child determines whether the whole body is wrapped, whether the arms are included in the wrapping, or just one body part is wrapped. Some children seek out deep touch, while others avoid it. Let that awareness help you decide what is wrapped, who is the wrapper, and who is the wrapped one.

Balloon Baseball

Balloons are always one of the best toys because they attract attention and are light and easy to play with. This game uses the balloon as the ball in baseball. The balloon moves so slowly that beginners can more easily hit it.

GOALS

- Eye-hand coordination
- Awareness of roles
- Focusing
- Motor planning
- Modulation
- Spatial awareness
- Vestibular stimulation

MATERIALS

Newspaper sections
Tape
Balloons

SETUP

Make newspaper bats by rolling up sections of newspaper and taping them. The more newspaper sections, the bigger the bat.

DIRECTIONS

An adult throws a balloon toward the child with the bat. Encourage the child to hit the balloon or have an adult stand behind the child and physically prompt him on timing. When the balloon is hit, encourage the other children to try to catch the balloon. Have children take turns being pitcher, batter, catcher, and fielders.

WHAT IS BEING LEARNED

- ◆ Children are learning to coordinate their movements and timing to connect with the balloon. They can see the results of their movements and then modify their actions to get the desired consequence.
- ◆ They are learning that everyone has a different role. Someone throws, another bats, and others catch.
- ◆ Their balance and spatial awareness are being challenged as they run while looking up to catch the balloon, and to the sides to avoid banging into others.

MODIFICATIONS

- ◆ Some children will have difficulty tracking the balloon in order to catch it. They might get distracted or lose interest and need verbal cues to stay on task.
- ◆ Children who have difficulty with timing and eye-hand coordination will need hand-over-hand assistance.

Blanket Ride

Giving and getting rides on a blanket can be a fun way of being with others. In this game all you need is a sturdy piece of cloth and a smooth floor to create a nice give-and-take experience.

GOALS

- Awareness of others
- Purposeful activity with another
- Balance
- Strength
- Proprioceptive input
- Vestibular stimulation
- Awareness of cause and effect

MATERIALS

- Small blanket(s) or sturdy piece of material
- Smooth floor

SETUP

Clear the floor of objects and set one or more blankets or cloths on the floor.

DIRECTIONS

Put one child on the blanket and have another child and an adult, if help is needed, pull it so that the child gets a ride.

Swoosh the blanket this way and that way in unexpected directions to make the ride more exciting, but make sure the ride doesn't get wild enough to throw the child off. Add fun sounds for the kids to imitate.

Have the children switch positions. The one who was sitting is now the puller and vice versa.

Sometimes, make it a group activity. Have two or more children riding together and two or more pulling!

Sometimes, rather than pull the blanket, have the children spin the child by running in a circle.

VARIATIONS

1. A cardboard box works well where one child sits inside and the other pushes or pulls it across the floor or spins it in a circle.
2. A wagon also achieves these goals, but needs more careful monitoring by the adult.
3. An office chair on wheels also can be used and is great for spinning.
4. A boogie board can also be used, using the leash to pull it.
5. Use several blankets so that many rides are being taken at once and the pullers have to watch out for the others and aim for the empty spaces in the room.

WHAT IS BEING LEARNED

- ◆ Children are learning that they can be responsible for another person's pleasure. They can also see, when being pulled by another, that others can be a source of fun for them as well.
- ◆ When children are sitting together and being pulled, they get jostled and lean on each other, becoming more aware of the other children.
- ◆ While sitting on a moving blanket, children are getting experience with balance. In order to stay seated upright while being jiggled and moved in various directions, they have to continually adjust their trunk muscles.
- ◆ Children who are pulling strengthen their muscles, especially in their arms and legs.
- ◆ Spinning is a great source of vestibular input; and if the spinning is stopped and started at intervals, it stimulates feedback from the child's inner ear.

- ◆ If you use several blankets so that many rides are being taken at once, help children avoid running into each other by giving the instruction: “Go into the empty spaces.”

MODIFICATIONS

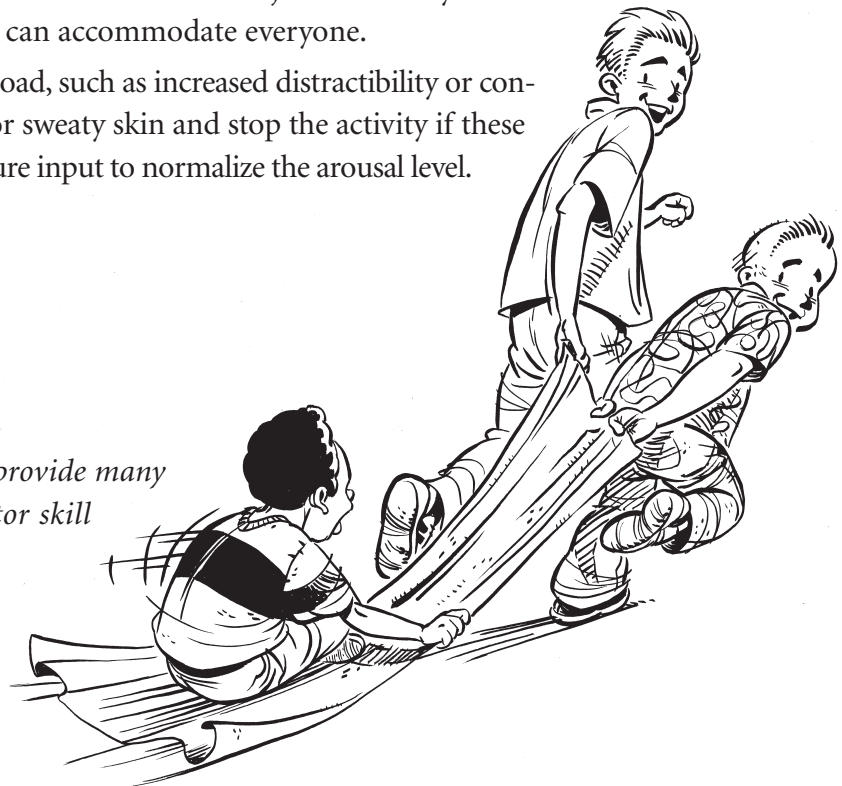
- ◆ For children who are generally not aware of other children, emphasize what is happening with words and touch. Pull the blanket with your learner and walk backward or stop after a few steps and say, “Look! We’re giving Oliver a ride!” It generally helps to accompany the words with a hug or little squeeze to increase alertness.
- ◆ Riding together and bumping into others may be difficult for some kids. Start them off with only one other child and go slowly. At the other extreme are the children who crave a lot of physical touch—riding fast with others falling on them and over them is just what they like and need. This is a game that can accommodate everyone.
- ◆ Monitor for sensory overload, such as increased distractibility or confusion, rapid breathing, or sweaty skin and stop the activity if these occur. Provide deep pressure input to normalize the arousal level.

Boat Ride

Unexpected movements can provide many possibilities for fun and motor skill development.

GOALS

Tolerate the unexpected
Pretend play
Increase language



MODIFICATIONS

- ◆ For some children, just sitting in a box or getting in and out of a box is plenty of activity.
- ◆ Some children might prefer to turn the boxes over and hide under them. You can change the game into hide-and-seek, pretending not to have a clue where they hid and then finding them!

Going Through the Tunnel of Legs

This is a good game to get adults involved in the play. Parents and older siblings are definitely welcomed. All that the big people have to do is stand in a line, feet apart, and form a tunnel. The children crawl through the legs. The big people have the power, if they want, to make the tunnel narrower and narrower. Maybe even take a toll?

GOALS

- Understanding beginning and end
- Adjusting one's body to spaces of different sizes
- Being part of a group
- Experiencing getting in line behind others
- Awareness of and allowing other bodies into their space
- Increasing proprioceptive input

MATERIALS

- Three or more adults

SETUP

The adults stand in a line behind each other with their legs open in a V formation.

DIRECTIONS

The children are encouraged to get on all fours and crawl through the legs of the adults. Keep control of the traffic by having another adult at the end of the tunnel directing children back to the beginning. Otherwise children might try to crawl back the way they came, which makes for an interesting traffic jam but is less comfortable for the bridge parts.

Once the children have the idea of the game, modify it by narrowing the stance of the adults so that the space to crawl through is narrower. In order to get through, children have to modify their position and tilt their bodies sideways.

Sing a song while children are crawling to whatever tune you want:

Crawling through the tunnel

Crawling through the tunnel

Crawling through the tunnel

All the way to the end

VARIATIONS

1. Keep bringing the legs closer and closer together so that the crawlers have to turn sideways to squeeze through.
2. Use a line of chairs for the children to crawl under.
3. Use a series of tables to crawl under.
4. Have bigger children make a tunnel for the smaller ones.

WHAT IS BEING LEARNED

- ◆ Children are learning to adjust their bodies to fit into the space, and if they try to walk upright through the tunnel of legs, they won't fit.
- ◆ If the variation is played in which the tunnel is made smaller, children become aware of a difference in space and learn that they need to make the physical adjustment in their bodies by turning sideways to fit.
- ◆ Children are also learning that when something ends, it is possible to go back to the beginning and do it again.