



# Create Your **PLAYLIST**



REDEFINE WHAT IS POSSIBLE.



# GAMES TO THE RESCUE!

It doesn't matter if you're a seasoned pro or a beginner when it comes to outdoor sports, helping others learn and have fun can be challenging! Especially when you're working with a variety of ages, skill levels, and backgrounds.

Good news! Games can help. Having the ability to play a group game effectively creates a fun and welcoming environment. It also gives participants of different abilities a shared experience while simultaneously building their skills.



Great gameplay can feel like magic. But it's also easier said than done. Many of us have found ourselves shaking our heads at a game that flopped. A wrong game can, at best, make people bored, and at worst, make them frustrated and discouraged. The good news is it's easier than you think to have an ideal game on hand when you need it.

## CREATE YOUR "PLAYLIST"

You don't have to be a human encyclopedia of games to start using them more effectively. You simply need to build a good "playlist" – a personal reference guide that will help you figure out when and what games to utilize. We're going to help you build an awesome playlist.

**First, let's go over FOUR tips that will help you choose the right games.**

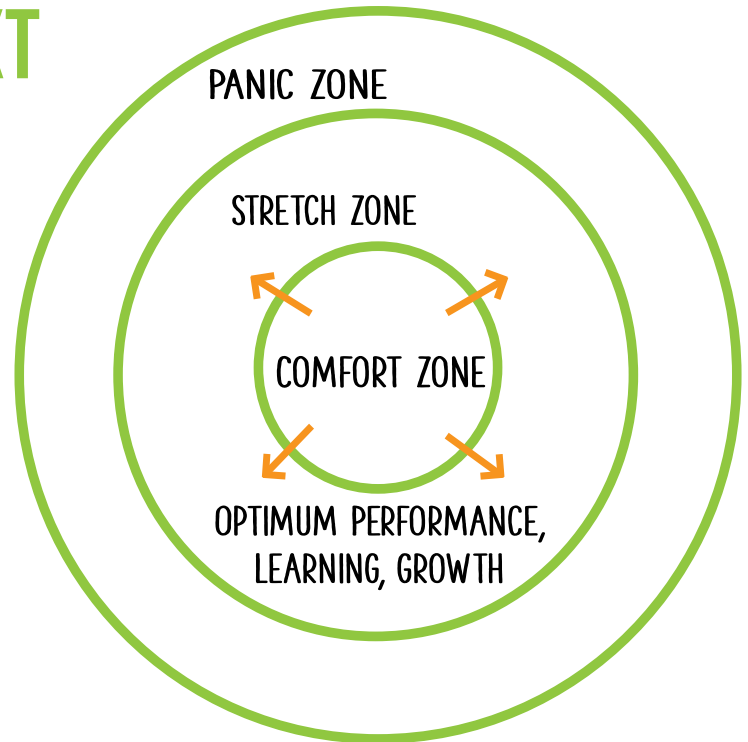




# 1. KNOW YOUR CONTEXT

A standard model for understanding the participant experience is “comfort zone, stretch zone, and panic zone” (see graphic). Common wisdom says that peak fun comes only *after* participants are first securely in their comfort zone.

Some participants may show up squarely in their comfort zone, while others can show up in (or near) the panic zone. Perhaps they don’t know anyone or simply feel intimidated by the activity.



## ASK YOURSELF

**Do people seem like they need to move closer or farther from their comfort zone to be more engaged?** How

can you sequence your games to achieve this? Keep in mind this question is about tuning in to what they need, not what you want them to do.

**What’s the goal?** Are you trying to use the game to help people get to know each other better or work on a skill they just learned? Are you trying to bring the energy of the group up or wind things down?

**How is the group reading and responding to your energy?** Can you adjust your gameplay to meet them where they are?

**Is this culturally relevant and respectful?** Does the game you have in mind unintentionally alienate people because it draws on shared experiences they don’t have? Is it demeaning or exclusionary?

With practice asking yourself these questions, you can quickly assess the context you’re working with and adjust gameplay as needed.



## 2. AIM FOR INCLUSION

In any group, you're going to have participants of differing experience levels, cultural backgrounds, physical capacity, and skill proficiency. Adapt the games you play to the audience you have.

**Use elimination games sparingly.** It's no surprise that people have more fun when they are actively playing.



### LET'S LOOK AT AN EXAMPLE

Musical chairs is a well-known game where players walk in a circle around a group of empty chairs while music plays. When the music stops, each player must race to sit in an empty chair. After each round of play, a chair is removed, making it harder to find an open seat. If a player can't find a seat, they're out of the game.

Imagine you're playing with a group of young kids. If one child is more physically developed than the others, it's not hard to guess who will have the advantage in claiming a seat. What if instead of eliminating players each round, we simply eliminated chairs and told players that when the music stopped as a group, they all needed to be touching a chair somehow. Suddenly the goal isn't elimination, but cooperation and each person can participate equally regardless of size.

**Which version of the game do you think creates more laughs and ultimately more fun?** Greater inclusion also leads to greater engagement, which brings us to tip #3.





## 3. MAXIMIZE ENGAGEMENT

**Make the point of the game to keep the game (fun) going.** Author and scholar James Carse coined this an *infinite game*. “A finite game is played for the purpose of winning, an infinite game for the purpose of continuing the play,” wrote Carse.

Finite and infinite games can play a role in facilitating a positive experience for those learning an outdoor sport. Infinite games, however, tend to foster more engagement.

1. With no clear end-point, they allow participants more time to play with and practice skills.
2. With no winner or loser, those who have less initial success with learning skills are not penalized.
3. Participation is prioritized over “success.” Those that generally self-eliminate from a competitive environment are encouraged to keep engaging.

**Choose games where there is always an option for the action to continue.**



**BUT WAIT!**

### Can We Still Play Finite Games?

Definitely. Games that have clear end-points and clear winners can be tons of fun. If you’re working with a group participating in an outdoor sport competitively, using finite game structures can be an excellent tool to help participants work on the pressure of competition. Try keeping these principles in mind:

- a. Finite games work better when there’s already strong group cohesion.
- b. Cooperation is key. Just because you’re playing a finite game doesn’t mean it has to be everyone for themselves.
- c. Even if your finite game has winners and losers, find a way to keep everyone engaged.



**Have players work together.** The energy, laughs, and playfulness in your games will exponentially increase when you have people communicating and cooperating. We're not just saying this because cooperation is a handy life skill. It turns out when you take a group's energy and give it a common goal amplifies the benefits.



**The best games keep everyone's attention.** If you're creating a new game or adapting an existing game think about what everyone's doing while playing. Even if someone is "out," is there a way to keep their interest and give them a role?





## 4. HAVE A PHYSICAL “BAG OF TRICKS”

**Sometimes all you need is a rubber chicken.** Don't underestimate the power of playful, silly, and goofy props. Not only can these items be helpful additions to the games we play, but they also can serve as non-verbal cues that we aren't taking ourselves too seriously.

Once you've assembled your bag of tricks, it's easy to add, subtract, and change it up over time. Make it mobile, so it's easy to keep with you.



### OUR FAVORITE PROPS INCLUDE

- Rubber chicken (or fish, or animal of choice)
- Foam pool noodles
- Soft toss-able balls
- Soft frisbees
- Different lengths of rope /webbing
- Plastic hoops
- Balloons
- Rubber disks that make easy place markers
- An assortment of animal chew toys
- Small Plastic Cones

## NOW LET'S CREATE YOUR PLAYLIST!

Aim for inclusion, keeping people engaged, and bring a rubber chicken. Easy, right? Even with these tips, we know it can be challenging to come up with a game on the spot. The good news is if you make a playlist, you don't have to.

A playlist is an easy reference guide for when you're leading outdoor sport programs. It can be a small handwritten note card or a typed page. For our example, we'll use an index card.





### STEP 1

On one side of the card, write down four player categories.

SOLO	
PAIRS	
SMALL GROUPS	
TEAMS	

### STEP 2

Then you're going to jot down the names of one or two games in each category that you're comfortable playing. Like this.

SOLO	- SWAT TAG - ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS
PAIRS	- PARTNER TAG - HANDSHAKES
SMALL GROUPS	- SHARK ATTACK - QUICK LINE UP    - CATEGORIES
TEAMS	- GIANTS, WIZARDS, & ELVES

### STEP 3

If you want more detail for easy reference, you can also add other helpful cross-categories.

	HIGH ENERGY	LOW ENERGY
SOLO	- SWAT TAG	- ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS
PAIRS	- PARTNER TAG	- HANDSHAKES
SMALL GROUPS	- SHARK ATTACK - QUICK LINE UP	- CATEGORIES
TEAMS	- GIANTS, WIZARDS, & ELVES	

	NEW TO EACH OTHER	FAMILIAR WITH EACH OTHER
SOLO	- SWAT TAG - ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS	
PAIRS	- HANDSHAKES	- PARTNER TAG
SMALL GROUPS	- QUICK LINE UP - CATEGORIES	- SHARK ATTACK
TEAMS		- GIANTS, WIZARDS, & ELVES







As you discover more games, you can change up your playlist or simply add to it. If you're new to a game, you might need to have the instructions written down. Usually, with a little practice, we tend to remember the games we like. Then all it takes is a glance at the name to recall the details.

The point is that you don't have to remember every game you've ever used. You can pre-load your playlist. The other great news is that over time recalling one game in a category will bring others to mind. But we're not done yet!

## STEP 4

On the other side of your card, you're going to make two different columns labeled "Tweaks" and "Nuggets." Here you can jot down the creative tweaks you find help your games work better. It's also where you can capture helpful concepts that you'd like to remember.

### TWEAKS

HAVE PEOPLE FIND NEW PARTNERS USING THE HANDSHAKES GAME.

### NUGGETS

REMEMBER - CONSIDER THE CONTEXT  
READ HOW THE GROUP IS READING ME

You might find that you want to create alternative playlists for the various outdoor sports you teach because some games work better on bikes or in kayaks, for example, than others. That's okay. It's also totally okay to pull your playlist out and reference it while you're with participants. Playing games and having fun doesn't need to be a magic trick.





## FINALLY, SEEK NEW IDEAS

We get asked all the time, “*where do you get your games?*”

Many of the best games we play in teaching outdoor sports are those that were adapted from another situation (if you can play tag on foot, why not on skis?). There’s no shortage of books, websites, and other resources available to gather ideas. To get started, you can join the OSI Community and access our **free resource library**. We’ve got a bunch of games posted in a variety of outdoor sports.

There’s also a lot to learn from seeking out training in group facilitation, independent of outdoor sports. Doing so will improve your teaching, coaching, group management, and indeed your ability to lead games.



For more ideas, resources, and a network of support **join the OSI Community for free!**

**Lastly, don’t be afraid to ask the participants.** There’s nothing wrong with the question, “anyone got a game they’d like to share?” And if you find yourself stumbling upon a great game with the groups you serve, please share with us!

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