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# Chapter 9

## LEARNING THROUGH ABILITIES

- ➔ **Goals and Abilities**
    - ❖ Games
  - ➔ **Goals and Abilities**
    - ❖ Crafts
    - ❖ Music
    - ❖ Storytelling
    - ❖ and Playacting
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## Goals and Abilities - Games

Games are physical and mental contests played for enjoyment. Games have universal appeal and are a great socialising tool for children. From artefacts discovered, we know that even our earliest ancestors played games. Similar games are played in many cultures all over the world, even where contact with others seems unlikely. Many of life's most serious pursuits are represented in forms of play.

In the Games portion of your Colony Programme, Beavers can learn and develop many values and abilities. In order to ensure that all developmental areas are incorporated, Leaders use the SPICES method in their planning:

- Social:** taking turns, appreciating self and others, helping one another, sharing, fair play, tolerance, inclusion
- Physical:** speed, agility, strength, dexterity
- Intellectual:** deduction, memory, sequence, thought provoking
- Creative:** drama, innovation, initiative, creativity, colourful, inventiveness
- Emotional:** learning to deal with joy, frustration, failure, success, delight, anger both for themselves and those around them, learn to have empathy.
- Spiritual:** appreciating rules and the laws of nature, learning about fellowship



### Goals

Many of the goals of the Beaver Programme come together in the games element. When we talk about choices for games, we concentrate on activities that promote and suit the Beavers' stages of development and goals.

Through games, Beavers can learn to:

- Express themselves.
- Develop a sense of belonging.
- Be healthy and have good feelings about themselves.

→ Develop a sense of cooperation through non-competitive activities (teamwork).

## Ability

Most children of Beaver-age move through characteristic stages of development.

Knowing this, one can readily see why some activities are best suited for the whole Colony and others are best carried out in Lodges where one can encourage the older Beavers to take initiative by helping younger Beavers.

Remember, everyone learns differently when learning a new game or skill (tying shoelaces is a good example). Some people learn by listening, some by watching and doing, and some by looking at illustrations. Try to incorporate different styles of presenting an idea or skill to appeal to your whole Colony.

Beavers change physically between the ages of five and seven. Although they are still awkward in some ways, their actions are becoming more precise. They begin to develop strength and endurance. Younger Beavers have energy to burn but tire easily, while older Beavers tend to use less energy. All Beavers show increasing abilities to run, hop and skip.

This age group requires that a leader encourages and supports the children to ensure their experiences in the early years of group play are positive. We can help Beavers by bringing out the highest level of participation, interest and constructive behaviour in games.

If we force vulnerable children into activities that draw attention to their real or imagined inabilities, we could do them a great disservice. If a Beaver is afraid of failure or rejection in play, this may reduce the child's feelings of self-esteem and eagerness to participate. Be encouraging, but also allow those Beavers the opportunity to first watch before taking the big leap into an unknown skill.

## Cooperative Games

Cooperative games are not all that different from competitive games. What differentiates one from the other is the execution.

- The less skilful are not eliminated
- Competition is created on the children's skills.
- Leaders can be creative when keeping scores.

For instance, in cooperative musical chairs, the person left without a chair is not eliminated. Instead, the child simply sits on someone's lap. At the end of the game, it is a real test of ingenuity to figure out how to get the whole group onto that one chair!

Cooperative games seldom raise the issues of failure and rejection. Each player has a

significant role because each Beaver helps the whole group succeed together; there is no reason to eliminate, ignore or exclude players because of ability. In the Scouting Programmes, many opportunities exist where one can exercise his/her individual abilities. **In games for Beavers, the accent is on sheer fun and working together.** Cooperation, acceptance and feelings of success develop strong and positive self-concepts.

Here are some examples of how you can turn traditional win-lose games into cooperative games. The well-known “Three-Legged Race,” for example, need not be a competitive race. Call it “The Bendy Bus” and do it just for fun. You can do the same with the “Wheelbarrow.” Rather than racing, set goals related to skill development. Ask your Beavers: “Can you make it all around the room without falling? Can you climb over this bench together? Can you go backwards?”

Instead of keeping score, aim for maximum participation and enjoyment. Why keep score in something like “Leap Frog”? The aim of the game is to take turns so you can keep moving.

### Choosing Games

Choose games that are challenging but simple enough to avoid confusion. Look for activities where the emphasis is on playing with, rather than against, one another. Develop a variety of games to suit various situations (e.g. quiet, steam-off, gathering, etc.). Adapt games to fit your Programme Theme, and incorporate games suggested by the Beaver Scouts themselves (could be a subject for your next Log Chew session).

When you notice Beavers are getting fidgety, use steam-off games to help them relieve some of the pent-up energy they have. Quiet games allow them to focus on a task or be quiet for a period of time. They are great for winding down the evening.

Try to use a wide variety of formations (e.g. pairs, Lodges, Colony) and keep everyone continuously involved.

When in doubt, choose games which exercise large muscles rather than fine motor coordination. Encourage a supportive atmosphere between Leaders and Beavers, and among the Beavers themselves.

### Teaching Games

Here are some tips for when you are teaching games to Beavers:

- Gather Beavers close to explain the game.
- Arrange them in the game formation you will be using before you start to explain the game.
- Focus the group’s attention on the game and wait for quiet before you start explaining.
- Show your own enthusiasm about the game.

- Hold interest by introducing the game in a story format.
- Keep your introduction brief and simple.
- Change to another game or activity while interest is high and before the game begins to drag.
- Insist on fair play and enforce all rules.
- Encourage leaders to participate in games and when someone else is leading, participate too.
- Brief all leadership team members about the game.
- Make sure all necessary equipment is available.
- Before you start, think the game through and try to anticipate any changes you might need to make.

To evaluate the suitability of a game you played, get the leadership team together to discuss how much cooperation, participation, creativity, enjoyment and interest the game generated, and whether the Beavers gave it a good rating.

## Goals and Abilities – Crafts, Music, Storytelling, Playacting

Crafts, music, storytelling and playacting provide many opportunities to encourage Beavers to:

- Experience and express love and joy.
- Express themselves.
- Develop a sense of belonging.
- Have good feelings about themselves.

When choosing programme ideas, look for things that reflect these programme goals and keep in mind the developmental stages of the five to seven-year-old age group. Within this age range, senses are developing rapidly and unevenly. Hearing, for example, is not yet fully developed. The ability to coordinate wrist and finger actions varies between the age groups – For example: older Beavers have a more precise grip than younger ones.

You will notice quite a range of ability between younger and older Beavers. When making crafts for example the Colony can be divided into smaller groups: Lodges. The older Beavers within each Lodge, who might be able to finish faster can then be given the opportunity to help teach the skills to the younger ones whilst they are developing their own leadership skills. This way, each age group can be challenged slightly differently but all will have achieved the same goal.

Leaders often notice that children aged seven get distracted less often than younger

children, although they still have a lot of energy to burn. Young Beavers are good at starting crafts but may lose interest before completing the project. It is particularly important to remember that in the Colony trying and experiencing a craft is more important than the outcome!

Imagination begins to blossom throughout the Beaver age range, and one of the primary jobs of Beaver Leaders is to nurture this wonderful element. Puppetry, skits, drama and stories are marvellous ways to tap and stimulate these growing minds.

## Crafts

It is important to use crafts to encourage self-expression rather than imitation. As much as possible, let the Beavers plan and develop a product from an idea. Beavers might be given the choice to construct their own version of a model you have shown them.

- Collect items all year round.
- Have a leader store supplies in the most appropriate manner.
- Visit local craft stores for particular supplies.
- Visit Scoutkeeper's downloads section for ideas.
- Visit libraries.
- Search the internet for more or specific ideas.
- Be familiar with the crafts before you introduce them. Try them first to make sure they are suitable.
- Decide whether to do a craft in Lodges or as a Colony.
- Have an activity ready for Beavers who finish the craft ahead of others.
- If possible, make use of individuals who are proficient in the craft at hand.
- Put protective sheeting on floors or table tops, and have sufficient cleaning supplies available.
- Mark items to identify art work.
- Use Beaver Boxes or bags for taking artwork home.
- Ask Beavers to bring an old shirt or an apron to wear while working on their crafts.
- Exchange your more successful ideas with other leadership teams or other groups.
- Keep an eye on the costs involved. (*Tip: Using recycled items always comes in handy to reduce purchasing*).

## Music

Singing is a wonderful activity that encourages fun, fellowship and a creative release for excess energy whether in a bus, at a campfire, a picnic or hike, or at your Colony meeting.

You do not need lots of talent to become a song leader. It helps if you like to kid around,

because your Beavers will join in the fun more quickly. But all you really need is a big smile and the ability to carry a tune.

Follow these tips when preparing to sing.

- Set the scene by telling interesting facts about the song.
- Explain any unusual words in the song.
- Know the words and music well enough that you do not need to glance at a paper to be able to teach the Beavers.
- Maintain eye contact with your Beavers.
- If it is a new song, teach one verse at a time and ask your Beavers to repeat after you.
- Learn the whole song together first before splitting up into smaller groups.
- Keep the tempo lively and do not let the song drag on.
- Children love action songs.
- Let the Beavers make kazoos, shakers, drums and other rhythm instruments to add to the festivities.

## Storytelling and Playacting

Stories fire up a Beaver's imagination, kindle emotions, bring the past to life, open up the future and sustain interest. If chosen well, stories help children identify and understand the important ideals of honesty, loyalty, friendship, kindness and sharing.

At storytelling time, leaders and Beavers develop a special bond and relationship. Part of the fun of storytelling comes when you involve Beavers in the process. You can do this with action rhymes, finger plays or stories which require Beavers to add sound effects or join in the chorus.

Finger-plays introduce Beavers to acting out stories. As they listen and learn to respond to rhyme, they develop language skills and muscle coordination, and learn concepts of over and under, up and down, in and out. Rhymes in stories help Beavers to coordinate speech and body movements and encourage them to listen and follow instructions.

When you use techniques that involve Beavers in the storytelling process, you encourage them to become storytellers themselves.

**BEAVERS**

**HAVE**

**LIMITLESS**

**IMAGINATION !!**

Giving young listeners the opportunity to satisfy their curiosity through stories and books will remain with them throughout their lives.

Follow these basic rules and you cannot go wrong:

- Use stories that are simple
- Tell short stories (10 to 15 minutes maximum)
- Be well prepared
- The use of audio visual can help the children understand more
- A story can be interactive

### Introducing a Story

An excellent way to introduce stories would be to bring objects or pictures related to the story. Allow the children to talk about them and tell their own stories, then continue with your story. If necessary, ask a librarian for assistance as they will know what kind of story is best to develop a particular theme.

Today's children are very sophisticated in their appreciation of storytelling because they are exposed to children's television programmes. Nonetheless, there is nothing more fascinating than a real, live person telling a story. Be flexible and try different themes other than the standard fairy tales and adventure stories that your Beavers may already know.

Learn the story well, know the plot and keep it uncomplicated; follow the correct sequence of events. Improvise and pause for effect. Children thrive on suspense.

Build up to the high points in the story. Centre upon one main character, and always keep this person in view.

If you enjoy telling the story, your Beavers will be interested in hearing it. Beavers can tell when you are bored. If you are not interested in the story they will lose interest themselves.

Speak clearly and slowly. You know the story, but the Beavers may not. Give them time to think about what you are saying and adapt it to their own imaginary settings and their own experiences.

Although you may not be able to get yourself completely into their imaginary world, try to make yourself as much a part of the story as the Beavers do. Become a partner in adventure and discovery, a part of the fantasy you are weaving. Remember, to children the story is not just another fairy tale. It is real. They may dream about it for months, and probably will apply it to their play.



In a large group it is difficult to satisfy the tastes of all the Beavers. Each child is different, with different tastes, temperaments and maturity.

Know the children in your group. Generally, Beavers love thrilling, adventurous stories. However, as a leader you must also be sensitive as some children are shyer than others. Be prepared to tone down the story a little if a child seems upset. Sometimes inviting them to sit close to you helps.

Some of the best stories are those that the leaders make up themselves. Make up different episodes for different occasions and eras, and weave these into fantastic settings which, at the same time, help your Beavers learn. You can lead them through an adventure at the Egyptian pyramids or take them on an African safari or an expedition to the North Pole to meet a polar bear. The sky is the limit!

### **Act it Out**

You do not have to be a gifted actor to do this. Your Beavers are not looking for perfection; they admire and respect you, and think you are the greatest.

Stories may be acted out in many different ways, for example you can give each character a special voice (in some colonies, leaders adopt a different voice for each character to help the Beavers identify them better).

You can also give life to a story by acting it out in pantomime or, if you find that too difficult, through simple facial expressions or body movements. How silly can you make the troll look? If a Beaver misunderstands a word or two because of limited vocabulary, he/she may guess the meaning of the word simply by your actions.

Involve the Beavers by asking them to act out the story with you or encourage them to try their own interpretations. Alternatively, a group of Beavers might like to tell the rest of the Colony a story by acting out the voices for the characters.

You can also act out a story by using a flannel/cork board, pictures, slides, puppets, sounds (pre-recorded or otherwise). This approach gives children a focal point while they listen to the story and provides them with opportunities to use more than one of their senses. Unfortunately, the use of slides tends to limit their imagination. On the other hand, because you can build on it, the flannel/cork board allows your listeners to apply their imaginations in developing the setting even further. Alternatively, if you have artistic talents, you can make simple sketches on a flip chart to bring the story's characters to life.

### **Timing and Setting**

A child's concentration is limited. Keep a storytelling period short. If you want to tell a long story, choose carefully and tell only one chapter at a time so that you leave the Beavers eager for story time at your next meeting.

The setting should be informal with Beavers sitting in a cosy arrangement and lights turned

down low. Describe the story's setting and use your imagination to dramatize the sounds made by trains or wind or other elements in the story. Allow enough time for the Beavers to savour these details. You might be able to enliven the story with a song and all the children can join in.

Allow room for questions but keep it under control to avoid losing the story line or finding that one little Beaver is running the show. Be prepared for problems, interruptions and distractions so that you will not come undone if they happen. If the situation becomes impossible, give up gracefully and suggest a short game or song to release the pent-up energy. When things settle down again, you may be able to continue.

Allow Beavers to tell a story of their own at the end of your story. Perhaps you can make a game out of it to draw out some of the shy Beavers.