

# 5 GAMES THAT SUPPORT CHILDREN TO **PLAY THEIR WAY**



**Child-centred games for coaching kids and young people, which encourage them to have a choice in shaping the way they play, develop and learn. And when we play their way, we know that young people are more likely to enjoy it, stick around and grow their passion for sports.**



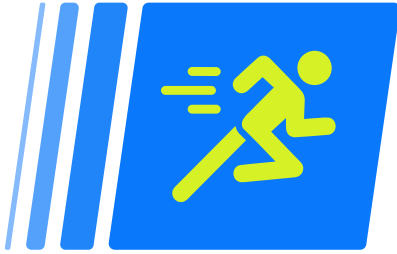
## 1. Pick-up games

Pick-up games are exactly what they sound like... they're games which kids invent, and we pick up on!

Children often spontaneously start games practicing the agile movements and skills. They're known as pick-up games, because they 'pick up' on children's mood and needs

The coach is not involved, you just watch... and learn.

Hockey coach Wendy Russell adds that it helps to then come up with a name for each invented 'pick-up' game as a team. This helps them remember each game they've invented so they can choose to play them again in future.

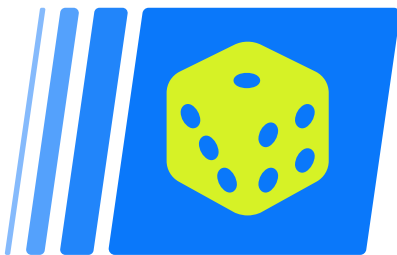


## 2. Variation on Tig

Karate coach Ady Gray shared a simple variation on the traditional game of Tig.

When one player touches another, the person who is 'tigged' – and is now 'it' – has to perform a sequence of karate moves or an exercise like star jumps, before running off to pursue someone else to tig.

Instead of using the whole of the room or pitch, you can limit the playing space. The smaller the area, the faster the footwork has to be to evade being tigged, and the more dexterous the chaser has to be to reach out and touch people as they dodge, jink and weave.



## 3. The Dice Game

Set up cones in a square. Ask the children how they can travel from one side to the other, by moving in different ways.

Write a fundamental movement skill on each side of a blank dice: roll, twist, jump, crawl, dodge, zigzag.

A child rolls the dice and whichever movement the dice lands on is how the group must move across the square, in multiple different directions.

*“The children might jump as though they are catching a high ball and then land safely, which is also practising balance, because you have to be stable to secure the ball,”* says Richard Cheetham MBE, who also shared the Dice Game with us.



Add another dice to the mix and have the children roll both dice. If they land on 'twist' and 'jump', then the children must twist and jump in whichever way they decide to sequence those movements.

*“Their interpretation of the dice is their experience of the game,”* says Richard.

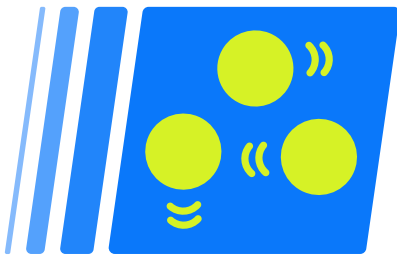
Involve the children in the evolving game design by adding the element

of choice. You might give them blank dice and ask them to decide which movements they want to work on that week, and to write them on each face of the dice.

For younger children, ask them if they are interested in 'a visit to the zoo' – a theme most children will instantly relate to – and write the names of different animals on the dice. Get them to link the movement skills to the animals they select by mimicking how they move: slithering like a snake, twisting like an alligator, jumping like a kangaroo.

*“The important thing here is that you allow them to show you the interpretation of what that could mean by using their imagination. It’s about being able to put the learning in a language they will understand.”*

Let the children have as much fun experimenting with the rules as they do playing the game. There could be lions running amok (“the yellow bibs were the lions, the blue bibs were the lunch, so you’ve got evasion, chasing and footwork”).



#### 4. Me and my ball time

In the first ten minutes of a session, allow the children to just play around with a ball and have fun, make their own rules, and use their imagination.

Older age groups tend to just want to smash the ball into a goal. The younger ones, meanwhile, need some basic direction to begin with to get their creative juices flowing, but they will be entertaining themselves in no time.

*“I will just throw a kit bag on the floor and challenge them to dribble round it,” says Hockey coach Wendy Russell, who shared this child-centred game idea with us. “Before you know it they will be changing direction, lifting the ball over the bag and they might use their imagination further and open the zip and see if they can chip the ball in the bag.”*



#### 5. Follow the leader

This classic game is a great example of how being child-centred in our practice doesn't have to be complicated. Basketball coach Dr Sergio Lara-Bercial shares that he often uses 'Follow the leader' games to practice fundamental skills.

*“The group copies the action of the leader, whether that’s dribbling, catching, or some fancy footwork,” says Sergio. “You as the coach might be the leader to begin with, then one by one, the players can take over and nominate each other to be the leader when they are more confident.”*