

Tip of the Month May 2024 – People Games



What are People Games?

They are highly motivating, repetitive games that need another person to be fun. This makes them a perfect activity for the early days of AAC implementation with children. Most children find them absolutely irresistible, especially if you choose a game that taps into their sensory preferences. Because people games rely on people rather than toys or daily routines, they avoid some of the pitfalls that can arise when you try to create communication opportunities in an activity that the child prefers to do alone, such as lining up their favourite toys, or during a routine where they are used to helping themselves, such as snack time.

What makes a perfect people game? People games are usually quite short, they have a clear beginning and end, they involve a sensory element such as movement, touch, singing, or vocalising. They are highly predictable and leave the child wanting more. Some well-known and popular people games include songs with actions such as 'row, row your boat' or 'māhunga pakihiwi', or games such as peekaboo, I'm coming to get you (chasing game), and tickling games like 'round and round the garden'. Many games that start with the words 'ready, steady, go!' are a type of people game. People games do not usually need any props, but they can involve toys or items that are hard for the child to operate by themselves, such as balloons, bubbles, swings, and being pulled in a cart (ready steady go!). The important thing is to remember to include a point where you pause the game so the child can request another turn.



Why are sensory preferences important? Most children have obvious sensory preferences, and these can be key to a child's enjoyment of the game. Some children may seek out lots of movement, some like firm pressure and like to crash into things, some like tickles, some like lots of noise, some like it quiet and calm. Some children love listening to singing. If you can work out what a child enjoys, you can find the ideal people game that meets their sensory needs. For example, the child who is always seeking movement may love double bounces on the trampoline, or giant pushes on the swing. A child who seeks out deep pressure will probably love a squeezing game. Some children will need you to add in excited squeals and noises, whilst other children might like you to keep the game quite calm.

Guidelines for successful people games with AAC:

- Introduce the game with a simple name "Are you ready for the *squeazy game*" Make sure there is a symbol on the AAC system that represents this game and point to it / activate it.
- Play the game through a couple of times without expecting any AAC use by the child, until you are sure that they are having heaps of fun.
- In between each game, model what you are hoping the child will use on the AAC system. This might be words such as *MORE* or *AGAIN* or *GO*.
- After two or three turns, get to the end of the game and pause. Make sure the AAC system is in easy reach. Look expectantly. If the child vocalises or gestures in some way to indicate that they want more, model the word on their system – *MORE* – and immediately start the game again.
- Next time, wait expectantly again, and if they show signs that they want another turn, then point to the symbol you are hoping they will use, and wait a bit longer. If the child shows signs of losing interest, take the turn for them and give them another go.
- **It is essential that the amount of fun that the child is having is greater than the amount of work they are expected to do.** Keep their communication turn short and achievable, especially in the early days of AAC use.
- Keep playing until one of you gets bored. The adult usually gets bored sooner than the child!
- If the child makes rapid progress with using their AAC system in the game, you can start to add in more language for them to use. Keep the fun / work balance in check though!

Ideas for People Games

Target words have been put in English; please change these to your home language as appropriate.

Name of Game	How to play	Suggested target words	Sensory Preferences
The Up / Down game	Either sit the child facing you on your knee, or on a Swiss ball in front of you. Hold their hands and lean them back until they're upside down, then pull them back up. Say 'down, and up, and down ...' Pause the game every 5 turns or so.	<i>MORE, AGAIN, UP, DOWN</i>	Movement
Spin around game	Either hold the child in your arms or have them sit or lie over a spinning chair. Say, 'ready, steady, GO' to start the game and then spin them round fast or slow. Pause the game by saying 'aaand STOP'	<i>GO, FAST, SLOW, MORE, AGAIN</i>	Movement
Māhunga pakihiwi	Full song can be viewed here - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUCnOqrnaoA For added sensory input, touch the child's body parts as you sing it, and increase the speed with each repeat of the verse to increase the excitement.	<i>AGAIN, FAST, SLOW</i>	Singing and touch
Pushes on swing	Stand opposite the child in the swing and hold their feet to pull them into a high swing and then let go. Keep them swinging high. Then grab their feet and say 'aaaand STOP!' to stop the swing suddenly. (You need a strong back for this one). If the child can already swing themselves, try a basket swing.	<i>GO, BIG, PUSH, MORE</i>	Movement

Row, row, row your boat	There are several different versions, but most children enjoy the version with 'if you see a taniwha / crocodile, don't forget to scream'. Hold their hands, pause for a second, then shake their hands vigorously and scream in an exaggerated manner.	<i>MORE, AGAIN</i>	Movement, touch, and singing / noise
Adapted poi games	Great for children who like to watch things moving. The adult is positioned opposite the child and spins the poi whilst singing or chanting, they move the poi in response to directions from the child (up, down, fast, slow)	<i>GO, STOP, UP, DOWN, FAST, SLOW</i>	Visual input, singing
Round and round the garden	Hold the child's hand, tickle in a circle on the palm while saying 'round and round the garden, goes the teddy bear, one step, two step, tickle you under there'. Step your fingers up their arm and then tickle in a place that the child will enjoy, such as around the neck. <i>Some children hate being tickled, so don't do this game if they show any discomfort at all!</i>	<i>MORE, AGAIN</i>	Gentle touch and repeated sound
I'm coming to get you	The adult can pretend to be a monster, making growling sounds, and then says in a pretend scary voice "I'm coming to get you!" and chases after the child. Some children will need this toned down if they find growls scary.	<i>MORE, AGAIN, CHASE</i>	Movement and excitement!
Adapted rākau games	Drumming games with sticks. You can use different surfaces for sound effects, also alternate between fast and slow. Children may enjoy the repetition of particular rhythms, or the use of song. Children who enjoy touch may enjoy the feel of the rākau on their legs or arms. Start the game with 'ready steady GO', and pause it by saying 'aaand STOP!'	<i>GO, FAST, SLOW, STOP</i>	Visual, touch, sound
Balloon Game	Blow the balloon up in bursts, stopping every now and again and asking 'more?' to see if they should put more air in it. Then say "It's big! Let it go" <i>READY, STEADY GO!</i> Let the balloon go so it flies around making noises. Balloons with confetti inside are even more fun.	<i>MORE, BIG, GO</i>	Visual and sound
Bubbles	Either using a wand or a bubble machine, say 'ready, steady go' and then blow lots of bubbles. If the child needs more excitement, they could have a small water pistol and shoot the bubbles with water. TOP TIP: Bubble mix works better when it's cold.	<i>MORE, LOTS</i>	Visual
Pull in cart	The child sits in a cart or on any pull along toy, and the adult pulls them along on a rope. Start the game with 'ready, steady, go!' and finish with 'aaaand STOP!'	<i>GO, FAST, SLOW, STOP, MORE</i>	Movement
Squeezy game	This can be on different body parts depending on the child's preferences. It works well moving up the arms and onto the shoulders, or as a sideways hug. Move your hands up the arms, squeezing and saying 'squeezy, squeezy', then do some big squeezes on the shoulders and say 'BIG squeezy squeezy'.	<i>MORE</i>	Deep pressure
Tickles	<i>Some children DO NOT like tickles, and this is not for them.</i> However, some children love the excitement of a tickling game, especially if combined with a chase or on the trampoline. Because of the nature of this game, it is best kept for parents with their own children.	<i>MORE</i>	Light touch
Bouncing game	Best with smaller children! Sit the child on your knees and bounce them while saying or singing 'bounce bounce bounce'. You can also use a Swiss ball, and push down on the ball with larger children.	<i>MORE</i>	Movement and touch
Old MacDonald	Sing the Old MacDonald song with very exaggerated animal noises and silly faces. Pause each time it's time to change	<i>ANIMAL NAME</i>	Singing

	the animal and wait for the child to choose the animal on their AAC system.		
Trampoline games	All games on the tramp can be started with 'ready, steady, go'. You can do double bounces, or big jumps so the child bounces high, or chase around in circles.	<i>GO, JUMP, BIG</i>	Movement
Adapted pungawerewere waiata	Full song can be viewed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHDMzRBZUVw To maintain the attention of an early communicator, you can make some of the actions include their bodies, such as making the spider climb up their arms.	<i>SING, AGAIN, MORE, SPIDER</i>	Singing, touch
Seesaw	Seesaws need 2 people to be fun, and adults can make them really bouncy. Start the game with 'ready, steady, go!'	<i>GO, MORE, DO AGAIN</i>	Movement
Squashing game	Great for children who seek firm pressure. Use a bean bag or cushion to squash the child against another surface. Introduce it with 1,2,3 ... squash!	<i>MORE, AGAIN</i>	Deep pressure

There will be games that you will remember from your own childhood that you can use or adapt to make successful people games, as well as the ones listed here.

References:

Sussman, F. (1999) *More Than Words*, Hanen Publications

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