



Nutty Ninja Squirrels

This is one of my favourite games for getting into your senses, trust and teamwork as well as being really funny. Playing with the narrative of baby squirrels being blind at birth, this game has a parent squirrel directing a blind squirrel to throw 'nuts' (balled up socks) at others to get them out.

Primer

Here are a few facts about baby squirrels that you can prime the game with

- Although baby squirrels are born furless, blind and helpless, they already have well developed, strong and sharp claws ready for their life amongst the trees!
- After 3-4 weeks their fur has grown and their eyes begin to open
- They tend to leave the dray for their first experience of the outside at about 6 weeks

Ages

9 years +

Duration

20 minutes minimum

Set Up

You'll need to define a circle boundary. For this we usually use backpacks in a circle and also encourage the participants to take off their shoes and socks. Shoes can join the backpacks to help define the boundary and socks can be balled up and thrown into the middle for the supply of nuts or ammunition.

How To

- Get participants to form pairs and explain that for each round one of them will play the role of the blind baby squirrel and one will play the role of the sighted parent squirrel.
- Explain that the aim of the game is to be the last squirrel standing:
 - All baby squirrels will start on the perimeter and when the game starts they will be guided by their parent squirrel to enter the playing area, pick up 'nuts' and throw them at other squirrels.
 - If a 'nut' hits a baby squirrel then both the baby and parent squirrel are out and go to the perimeter to quietly watch the game play out.
 - If a parent squirrel is hit by a 'nut' then they must abandon their blind baby squirrel to fend for themselves.

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- There is no verbal communication in this game, only touch signals from the parent squirrel to the baby squirrel. Avoid parents steering or pushing / pulling the baby squirrel - I usually demonstrate this and say: this is not allowed as there is little skill in this and part of this game is about developing encoded touch communication.
- Hand out a blindfold to each pair and give them five minutes or so to work out and practise their touch communication codes. You can give them ideas or let them work out for themselves what they may want signals for.
- When they have had a good practice, play a round of the game.
- After the first round, harvest some of what they learned worked well or not so well. You can also assess the playing area as you may want to expand this to give a more spacious game or reduce the playing size if it took ages for squirrels to find each other.
- Once you and the group have decided on any tune ups, give them another few minutes in their pairs to tune up their communication signals and perhaps swap roles too.
- Have another round and continue.

Equipment Needed

- Blindfolds - enough for one between two
- Balled up socks or bandanas to act as 'nuts'

Variations

- One variation is to use sound communications instead of touch signals. In this version, parent squirrels stay on the edge and the baby squirrels must really tune into their own parent's sound signals to use their directions. This is exceptionally good at developing acute sense of hearing.
- Another variation is for all participants to start as baby squirrels, silently moving around the space, listening for where others are to throw a 'nut' at, and searching with touch for more ammunition.

Playing Environment

Initially this game is best played on a flat field where there are no hazards. If participants become very skilled and aware in their movements it can be great fun to play in a woodland environment too where there are few if any hazards or obstacles

Teacher Tricks and Tips

- Introduce one layer of this at a time. If you have a group over multiple sessions, you can play the first version several times and then let them know you think they are ready for the next level of challenge and bring in one of the variations.
- It is annoying for baby squirrels to find ammunition that are socks that have unrolled, so it is good to find an effective way to ball up socks or bandanas to help reduce this.
- Any squirrels that get 'out' can be given the job to watch for any 'nuts' that are thrown outside of the playing area and to quietly get them and roll them back into the game.
- It's best that squirrels that are 'out' are quiet, or ideally silent for those still playing to be able to pick up subtle sounds.

Invisible Learning

- Acute listening
- Trust
- Team work
- Sense of touch
- Communication
- Instinct
- Awareness of one's own movement, sounds and concentric rings

Hazards to Highlight

- The main hazard is the potential for collisions of those playing at being the blind baby squirrels, or someone throwing a nut when they are unaware of how close another is
- With bare feet in the summer, depending on the environment, there could be the hazard of bites and stings

Risk Assessment Considerations

These are the risk assessment consideration documents to be referred to for this activity.

- Sensory games
- Site risk assessment (specific to your site)

Links

- Blind, Deaf and Dumb
- Blindfold balancing progressions

Tags

- Game, fun, blindfold, sensory, squirrel, partners, teamwork, communication, co-operation, co-ordination

