



Tag

for Physical Literacy

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Tag, you're "it"!

Playing tag is universal, and versions of this popular game have been played around the world for centuries or longer.

There is something very elemental to the game of chasing and evading. It can be played by those of various ages and abilities—even toddlers will naturally chase after each other during play.

Why play tag?

There are many great benefits to including tag in your physical and health education (PHE) programming! Playing tag:

- **Develops fundamental movement skills.**

While playing, students are constantly moving, and working on their agility and balance. They sprint, slow down, come to a stop, pivot, speed up, react, weave, reach, and dodge.

- **Builds an understanding of strategies.**

Playing tag makes students more aware of space. They learn strategies that can be applied to other games, sports, or activities.

- **Allows everyone an opportunity to play.**

In most variations of tag, everyone is participating at the same time, and no one is waiting for their turn.

- **Is easy!**

Instructions are most often simple, equipment requirements are minimal, and set-up time is short. That means that limited time is spent listening to the teacher or getting ready for the game to start.

- **Is fun.**

While some will find tag competitive, it is not a high pressure game with scores, or winners and losers. Tag is fun and social! You can see it in the smiles on students' faces.

When Did Tag Start?

Children of the Blackfoot Nation ran across what is now southern Alberta playing a variation of tag for likely centuries before European settlers arrived.

Activity Key

- All All grades
- K-3 Grades K–3
- 4-7 Grades 4–7



When to Use Tag Games

Tag games are fast, easy, and fun. They can be used in many different ways in your physical activity and physical education lessons.

Warm-Up Games

Providing your students with a chance to warm up at the start of the physical education class will get their hearts pumping and reduce the chance of muscle injuries. A good warm-up can also settle down the class, and put them in the right mindset for learning. Tag games can also give the teacher the time they need to set up the equipment needed for the remainder of the lesson.

Reinforcing a Skill

Tag games can be used to help students practice or develop a skill. Since there is a lot of activity happening during the game, teachers can coach a student on their form without singling them out in front of the class. The use of cue words and simple instructions can help students with their skills as they play.

Movement Breaks

Are your students a bit restless? Maybe a short game of tag will help them release energy and let them refocus for more academic learning. A quick game or two on the playground might be all they need.

Cool Down Activities

Once the main activity is completed, it's time for a short cool down. Tag is a perfect go-to. A three to five minute game can productively use up that extra time in your lesson, and help your students get ready to head back to class.



Using Tag to Develop Locomotor Skills

All versions of tag help develop locomotor skills as students chase and evade each other. Some students may need some coaching in how to accelerate, decelerate, and pivot to change direction. Others might need some instruction on running form. Tag helps develop competency in these skills, and gives students the confidence and motivation to use these skills in other games and activities.

Tag can be used to develop different types of locomotor skills including hopping, jumping, galloping, and running. Be creative and build off of these ideas by using different types of movement. Change from one movement to another to add variety or challenge for students that are more advanced in their skills.

Adapting Tag for Diverse Abilities

As with all adaptations aimed at including students with diverse abilities, build from what the student can do. Adapt the rules of the game to help the student participate, and remember that not all students in the game have to have the same rules. Consider pairing up students, using different lengths of taggers, requiring a double-tag for some students to be tagged, and adapting the games to include accessibility equipment.



Running

Most tag games are based on running and provide a great opportunity to develop speed, agility, balance and running skills.

All Ultimate Tag

Set Up: None.

Instructions: This is a great warm-up game. Everyone is a tagger, and if they are tagged they must sit down. When the person who tagged them is tagged, then they can rejoin the game. The teacher can yell “jail break,” and free everyone sitting on the ground.



4-7 Line Tag

Set Up: Separate the class into groups of six to 10 students and tell them to hold hands in a line.

Instructions:

The student at the start of the line chases the student at the end of the line without the line breaking.

Line Tag is a traditional game of the Blackfoot People. It develops grip strength, balance, coordination, and speed.

4-7 Rock, Paper, Scissors Tag

Set Up: Divide the class in two. Mark out the playing area with two end zones and a centre line. Each team positions itself on one side of the centre line with an end zone (safe zone) behind them. The teams should be facing each other.

Instructions: Students from each team go to the centre line and pair up with another student from the opposite team. They play rock, paper, scissors and the person who wins the game chases the person who lost, trying to tag them before they reach their safe zone. If tagged, they join the other team. If there are more students on one side, then the rock, paper, scissors game can involve three students.

Galloping

Galloping is a locomotor skill often used with younger students as a way to introduce skipping and side shuffle skills. Many students find it fun!

K-3 Hospital Tag

Set Up: Place hula hoops (hospitals) along the outside of the playing area. Spread several items around the playing area; these could be cones, bean bags, or skipping ropes. Put a mat in each corner for students to rest for up to 10 seconds. Give several students a pinnie to designate them as being a tagger.

Instructions: Everyone must gallop around the playing area without touching any of the items or being tagged. If a student touches an object or is tagged, they go to the hula hoop (hospital) and gallop on the spot until someone who is free gives them a high five. Change the taggers every few minutes.



Hopping, Skipping, and Jumping

A regular game of tag can focus on the locomotor skills of hopping, skipping, and jumping, by simply calling out which movement is required. “Everyone’s hopping now.” “Okay, you can only skip now.”

K-3 Hoop Hop Tag/Hoop Skip Tag

Setup: Spread several hula hoops around the playing area. Designate several students as taggers by giving them a pinnie or tagging object.

Instructions: Once tagged, the student goes to three different hoops and perform three hops inside each before re-joining the game.

Change the game to Hoop Skip Tag by telling the tagged student to skip in place three times inside three different hoops in order to re-enter the game.

K-3 Hoop Jump Tag

Setup: Spread several hula hoops around the playing area. Designate several students as taggers by giving them a pinnie or tagging object.

Instructions: Once tagged, the student must jump forward into a hoop, and then jump backwards out of the hoop in order to re-enter the game.

All Pac Man Tag

Set Up: Spread hula hoops across the playing area. Ensure that the distance between the hoops does not exceed one metre. Designate a few students as the taggers.

Instructions: Students hop, skip, and leap between hoops to evade those that are taggers. The tagged student also becomes a tagger, and the number of people who are “it” increases with each tag. The game can also be played so that only one person is “it” at a time and tagging someone changes makes them the tagger.

Hopping and Jumping

Hops are on one foot, and jumps are with two feet.

Proper jumping form starts with a crouch and knees bent. The arms swing back, and then forward when taking off. The student lands softly on the balls of their feet, followed by their heels.



Using Tag to Develop Non-Locomotor Skills

Non-locomotor skills such as balance, coordination, and agility are so important for many physical activities and daily tasks.

Yoga, cycling, skateboarding, skiing, snowboarding, gardening, fishing, and most sports all rely on these non-locomotor skills.

Various versions of tag can help students develop balance and core stability. These games are great for warm-ups, or as standalone activities focused on skill development.

In all of the games below, educators can decide if a tagger will be used to reduce contact (e.g., noodle, rubber ball, etc.).

All Airplane Tag or Bumble Bee Tag

Set Up: Designate someone to be the tagger.

Instructions: When a student is tagged, they must stand on one leg, bend forward with a lifted leg (airplane tail or stinger) straight out behind them, and arms out to the side (wings) for five seconds, before they are free again.

4-7 Cats and Cranes

Set Up: Designate an even number of students to be taggers. Half of them will be cats and the other half will be cranes. Review the cat and the crane stance with the class.

Instructions: When a cat tags a crane, they must say “cat” and the tagged student must stand in the cat stance. Likewise, if a crane tags a cat, the cat must go into the crane stance. Participants are freed when another student faces them in the same pose for five seconds.

Cat stance is:

- standing in a lunge position with the left foot forward, and the right foot back,
- turning the right toes outwards so that the arch of the foot is touching the ground,
- extending the left arm forward with the palm outward,
- raising the right arm upwards and bending it at 45 degrees, and
- holding the palm upwards like a waiter holding a tray.



Crane stance is:

- standing on one foot and raising the other foot,
- bending the raised foot, and
- pointing the raised toes downwards.

K-3 Tunnel Tag

Set Up: Designate a few students to be “it,” and give them pinnies.

Instructions: When tagged, students form a tunnel out of their bodies, either by placing their hands and feet on the ground and bottom in the air, or by standing up and spreading their feet apart. In order to be freed, a student must crawl through their tunnel. Change the taggers every couple of minutes.

All Symmetry Tag

Set Up: Pick several students to be taggers, and provide them with pinnies.

Instructions: If tagged, students must make a symmetrical (same on both sides of the body) or asymmetrical (both sides of the body are different) shape out of their body, and freeze. They are freed if another student copies their shape, and holds it for three seconds. Taggers cannot guard frozen players. Change taggers every few minutes.

All Sticky Feet Tag

Set Up: Designate a couple of students to be taggers by giving them pinnies.

Instructions: When a student is tagged, they must sit on their bottom, with their hands on the ground behind them, and their knees bent with their feet in the air. They are freed when another student faces them, gets into the same position, and places their feet against the other students for three seconds.

4-7 Fitness Tag

Set Up: Pick two to three students to be taggers, and provide them with pinnies.

Instructions: If a student is tagged, they must do one of the following: five squats, five jumping jacks, or five pushups/modified pushups. They must try a different one each time they are tagged. Once they complete the activity, they are free to rejoin the game.



K-3 Toilet Tag

Set Up: Determine which students are taggers. Provide them with pinnies.

Instructions: When the participant is tagged, they must squat down like they are sitting on the toilet with their thumb in the air. To be freed, another person must flush their toilet by pressing down on their thumb. Before rejoining the game, they must turn around once. Change taggers every few minutes.

K-3 Alphabet Tag

Set Up: Pick a student to be the tagger.

Instructions: When students are tagged, they must use their body to form the shape of a letter (standing up). In order to be freed, another student must correctly guess what letter they are.

All Dead Ant Tag

Set Up: Decide which student will be the tagger.

Instructions: If a participant is tagged, they become a “dead ant”, and must lie on their back with their arms and legs in the air. To be freed, the “dead ant” must be touched on each of their limbs by four different people. If a student becomes a “dead ant” three times, they rejoin the game as a tagger.

All Plank Tag

Set Up: Give two or three students hula hoops and designate them as the rescuers. Pick another two or three students to be taggers.

Instructions: When a student is tagged, they must hold a plank position until one of the rescuers holds their hula hoop in front of them and they crawl through it. Change rescuers and taggers every few minutes. If students tire holding a plank, they can lower their knees to the ground.

K-3 Police Car Tag

Set Up: This is a gymnasium game. Pick a couple of students to be the taggers (police cars), and give them blue pinnies.

Instructions: Students (cars) can only move along the lines (roads) on the gymnasium floor. Balancing as they go, they are not allowed to touch the floor on either side of the lines. When the police cars tag the cars, they must stop on the line and are now roadblocks. Only the police cars can go around the roadblocks, and all the other cars must take a different road or free the roadblock by touching that student on the head.



Using Tag to Develop Manipulative Skills

Students with manipulative skills feel confident participating in playground games like four square, kick ball, spike ball, softball, or gaga ball. They will also enjoy sports and community activities like racket sports, soccer, cricket, lacrosse, hockey, bowling, baseball, basketball, or volleyball.

Various tag games can be used to help develop these manipulative skills. By including these games in warm-up activities, movement breaks, or as part of a physical education lesson, you can help give your students the skills and confidence to participate in a host of physical activities.

Check out our website for tips on developing throwing, catching, and kicking skills.



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K-3 Toss Tag

Set Up: Spread several hula hoops around the playing area, and place large balls or other tossing implements inside them. Choose several students to be taggers.

Instructions: If a student is tagged, they must run to the nearest hula hoop, pick up the ball or tossing implement, and toss and catch the implement three times before they can rejoin the game. Change taggers every few minutes.

All Dribble Tag

Set Up: Spread hula hoops around the playing area with a ball inside each hoop. Pick two or three students to be taggers.

Instructions: When a student is tagged, they must go to the nearest hoop and dribble the ball on the spot 10 times before they can re-enter the game.

4-7 Jump Stick Tag

Set Up: Give all students a floor hockey stick and a ball/puck. Pick a student to be the tagger. The tagger must keep control of their ball/puck as they try to tag the other participants.

Instructions: Students move around the playing area stick handling their ball or puck. If someone is tagged, collides with any part of another player, or goes out of bounds, they must place their stick safely on the ground and do six side-to-side jumps over their stick before they can re-enter the game. Change taggers every couple of minutes.



4-7 Basketball Pass Tag

Set Up: Give all students a basketball and select up to three people to be the taggers. It is helpful to identify them by giving them a brightly coloured pinnie.

Instructions: Students dribble their basketball around the playing area, while avoiding the taggers. The taggers must also dribble their basketball at all times. If a student is tagged, they must stop and place the basketball on the floor between their feet. To be freed, another student passes their ball to the caught participant. They must catch it, and return the pass. Once the pass is complete, they can pick up their ball and re-enter the game. There is no guarding of caught players, and students freeing a caught player cannot be tagged during the passing. If a student loses control of their ball, they must go get it and return to dribbling. Replace the taggers every few minutes and continue playing until the students are losing interest.

K-3 Jail Tag

Set Up: Use cones to set up a rectangle area for the jail. Pick several students to be taggers.

Instructions: If a participant is tagged, they must go to the jail. To rejoin the game, the teacher throws them a ball or object, and they must catch it and overhand throw it back.

All Soccer Ball Tag

Set Up: Select two students to be taggers, and give each a soccer ball.

Instructions: Students are tagged by being hit on their feet by the ball. Once tagged, the student goes and gets a soccer ball of their own, and joins the others who are “it.” Play until everyone is tagged.

K-3 Bean Bag Tag

Set Up: Use pylons to mark out a square at the center of the playing area. Place other pylons 2–3 metres outside of the square. Put 20–40 bean bags in the square. Designate a student to be the tagger.

Instructions: Students play tag outside of the square. If they are tagged, they must go inside the square and throw bean bags at the outside pylons. They can rejoin the game once their bean bag hits a pylon. The teacher should periodically bring the bean bags back to the square. Change the tagger every few minutes.



Other Tag Games

There are other forms of tag that can be used to develop physical literacy, support a multi-ethnic classroom, and re-enforce learning. Here are a few examples.

4-7 Oonch Neech

Oonch Neech is a popular game in India and Pakistan. Oonch means hill and neech means valley and the game is played on a surface with a mix of both. A playground is a perfect location as it has a mix of climbing apparatus (oonch) and ground (neech).

Set Up: Choose a “denner” who is “it.” They decide if the game is played on neech (the ground) or oonch (e.g., a playground, a tree, a platform, or other higher surfaces). The denner’s decision designates where the safe zones are and where the denner can tag them. For instance, if the denner says the game is neech (ground), everyone will rush to the designated safe zone (anything off the ground).

Instructions: The denner tries to tag the students when they are not touching the designated safe zones. Players have to keep moving and can’t be in the designated safe zone for more than 10 seconds at a time. They have to run back and forth through both the oonch and neech areas. As soon as a player is caught by the denner, they are “it” and become the new denner, and get to decide if the game is played oonch or neech.

For more tag games, scan the QR code to register for PLAYbuilder



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All **Math Tag**

Set Up: Pick one or more students to be taggers.

Instructions: When students are tagged, they find the teacher who will give them a math question. If they get it right, they can rejoin the game. If they get it wrong, they are given another question, and can only rejoin the game if they get the correct answer.

K-3 **Sight Word Tag**

Set Up: The teacher will need a deck of sight word cards. Pick one or more students to be taggers.

Instructions: If a student is tagged, they go to the teacher and are shown a sight word card. If they can read it correctly, they can rejoin the game. If they get the sight word wrong, they are shown other cards until they get one right.

K-3 **Crabs and Scorpions Tag**

Set Up: Pick two students to be taggers. Taggers are the scorpions, and move on their hands and feet with their stomachs facing the floor. The other students are crabs and do the crab walk by moving on their hands and feet with their stomachs facing the sky.

Instructions: The scorpions chase the crabs. When the crabs are tagged, they become scorpions. The game continues until all students are tagged.

Tips and Tricks

Here's five helpful tips and tricks for all of your tag games:

1. Remind students to keep their heads up, and to look around. Mid-game collisions can hurt!
2. Try to keep the game at a challenge level that suits most of your students. If they seem to be mastering the game, change the rules to make it a bit more difficult. Add another tagger or change the play area to speed up the game.
3. Don't play the game until the students lose interest, but rather stop the game at the peak of enjoyment. They will remember it as a fun game and want to play it again soon.
4. Use different tagging items to make the game more interesting. It's way more fun to be tagged by a rubber chicken than by someone's hand.
5. Teach students how to tag, and correct them if they are too rough. Slaps, pushes, or hits are not fun ways to be tagged.



*We would like to acknowledge
Bruce Deacon for his
contributions to this resource.*

For more great physical
activity and physical literacy
resources, scan this QR code:



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Updated June 20, 2025

