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Community Cooldown

Share these interactive wind-down “games” with active agers.

Life isn't predictable, so why should our movements be? Add fun games to your cooldowns to help active agers learn to react to on-the-spot activities in a functional way. The following games include a social neuroscience component that builds camaraderie, upgrades reaction time and improves balance. Try them toward the end of class to get seniors on the same page.

Storks and Gazelles

Purpose: to train gait efficiency and reaction time.

- Ask participants to walk around the room, randomly (not in a circle), to bring down heart rates.
- Call out “Stork,” their cue to freeze. They can have both feet flat on the floor, one heel lifted as if taking a step forward, or one foot completely off the floor like a stork.
- After a few seconds, call out “Gazelle,” their cue to resume walking.
- Alternative: Call out “Stork” when they're already in the stork position. Half will start walking and then laugh, realizing that they were anticipating the cue “Gazelle.”

Building Camaraderie

Purpose: to create unpredictable partner pairings while training body awareness, reaction time and balance.

- As participants continue to walk around the room, call out a body part, a number and a direction (left or right). In response, participants form groupings to enact your

cue, then raise their hands when they're finished.

- For example, call out “Five left hips together.” Participants form circles with five partners, left hips touching, and raise their hands. Other examples: “Four right shoulders together,” “Three right ankles touching” or “Two right hands together.” Pause while people respond.
- Over time, increase the challenge. For example, cue “Five suspended right ankles,” “Four lifted left feet” or “Three suspended right knees.”

Mirror Mirror

Purpose: to improve body awareness, strength, balance and coordination while addressing social skills and short-term memory.

- Ask participants to partner up. In each pair, give the taller person the nickname “A” and the less-tall person the nickname “1,” so that everyone is a leader.
- Play a fun 3- to 4-minute song, and cue “A” partners to move in silence in any direction while staying in place. Suggest they emphasize stretching movements (which can be hands-only) but also do leg and arm combinations and even ground-to-floor moves, as they are able.
- Invite “1” partners to follow in a mirror-image technique.
- Halfway through the song, cue partners to change roles.
- Option: Encourage partners to create original movements not done by

the other. For example, the “A” in a pair might dance in place while the “1” punches the air. This helps build short-term memory bridges.

Getting Social (Media)

Purpose: to encourage older adults to become active on social media and interact with each other (and you) beyond the classroom.

- Pose a challenging riddle and tell participants you will solve it on your social media platform.
- Invite participants to interact with your Facebook wall to create a playlist for the next class. For example, say, “Our next class will feature the themes of happiness, love or show tunes. Post your absolute favorite song on my wall in line with one of these themes, and we'll create our next playlist together.”
- Announce that, in the next class, you're going to use only one piece of equipment from the room (e.g., chairs, bands, balls, etc.). Everyone must vote on your social media site—the piece with most votes wins!
- Take a class picture and tell participants to tag themselves and post one thing they enjoyed or learned about in class that day. Tell people you will quiz them on names the next time you meet. ■

Lawrence Biscontini, MA, is a multiple IDEA award recipient; a content specialist, author and continuing education provider; and an active ager himself. Find him at findlawrence.com