

When Everybody Wins

Time for the slow-motion sprint. / The slowest runner wins the race / ... / And we're off /
And it's hard, / So hard / Inching along like worms in a wheat field / Counting breaths and
blades of grass / That in the end / We no longer care who's the winner / And we don't even
care we don't care.

—From *"The Slow-Motion Sprint"* by Marilyn Singer

ACTIVITIES LIKE A SLOW-MOTION RACE create feelings of mutual understanding and harmony. Laughter at trying to go slow can lift our mood like a helium balloon rising delicately above our heads. Giggling is actually the best fallback position when we want to shift a contrary mood. "Let's try hopping up the stairs" or "walking backward to bed."

Wishing, fantasizing, and even brainstorming are also processes that can also help us align with each other. A humorous wish can be fulfilled in spirit. "I wish you could have more candy, a whole mountain of the kinds you like." "I wish you could have all the electronic equipment you want—a whole room full—but it might distract you from other important things." Brainstorming comes in handy when people's ideas are in competition: "Let's brainstorm and pick an activity everyone would like."

Preparing a surprise for someone—a dinner for a neighbor, breakfast in bed for Dad—makes everyone feel in league with each other. Surprises don't have to be huge. When siblings are at odds, an instantaneous surprise like "Let's surprise Daddy with a song" can transform them into a team.

Cooperative games—those that aim at enjoyment, not winning—emphasize fun rather than who's bigger or a better player. For example, older and younger children can be captivated by a game called Dresser-Guesser. First, form partners and decide who will be the dresser and who will be guesser. Then partners turn back to back and the guesser closes her eyes. The dresser changes a few things about her clothing, e.g., takes off a bracelet, rolls up one sleeve, unbuttons a button, unties a shoe. When the dresser is ready, they turn around and the guesser tries to observe what's different. Great for concentration!

Thinking of ways to create satisfying experiences that aren't based on competition prepares children for happiness with partners, friends, and groups. They will discover that working in harmony is so enjoyable, they will want to do it again and again.

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