# Smart Play

## 101 Fun, Easy Games That Enhance Intelligence

BARBARA SHER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
RALPH BUTLER

WILEY

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This book is dedicated to all the wonderful children everywhere who have played these games with me, especially to my young playmates on the islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota.

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# Acknowledgments

People often ask me how long it takes to write my books. I answer that each book takes about a year to write, and about thirty years to gather the materials to write about.

If I wanted to be even more accurate, I'd probably say sixty years, because getting the confidence to write a book took the love and unconditional support from my family of birth and the family I made; it took encouragement from my loving friends and the enthusiastic response from the teachers at the schools and the participants at the national and international workshops I have given. Especially, it took the lessons I got from my main teachers: the children who have played all of these games with me. They have had a harsh but honest approach that lets me know which games work and which don't. They either respond with excitement or they just wander away. The games in this book have been well field-tested and only the most successful ones made the grade.

My books are also always inspired by my wonderful daughters. They have been my creative assistants at international workshops, my first readers, my game players, my emotional support, and my friends. I'll never stop appreciating the presence (and present) of Marissa, Roxanne, and Jessica. For my dear friend Jenny Slack who gave me love and clear thoughts during the rewriting phase, and my good pal and colleague Patty Staal who enthusiastically plays these games with me at the schools, I also give thanks.

Of course, it's one thing to write a book and quite another to get it to you. For this, I owe big thanks to my great agent, Judi Schuler, who is quick to answer my e-mail and fulfill my needs. I owe gratitude to my former editor, Carole Hall, who said she thought of me as an "unending diamond mine" of ideas. I owe appreciation to my present editor, Kate Bradford, who has a keen editing eye and plays games with her own children. I am grateful

to my delightful illustrator Ralph Butler, who made the drawings exactly as I want them, and to the people at John Wiley & Sons, especially John Simko, who does the difficult legwork of turning a manuscript into a book.

Most important, I want to acknowledge you, my readers, for taking my ideas and using them with the children you care for. It is this step that takes the love that is behind my words and spreads it out into the world. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

# Introduction

Lessons learned through our bodies stick with us. We don't read a manual to learn how to ride a bike or play a game of Ping-Pong. We learn through our bodies, and once our bodies learn something, we never forget it.

This same kind of body intelligence can be used to help children learn their mental skills. Children will have more of an internal awareness of what *5* means by jumping forward five times in a Mother-May-I game than by looking at a picture of five rabbits.

Children who play the game of making the letter *A* using their fingers are going to remember how to form that letter faster than if they just see it written.

Children who get to mime the words *sweatpants* and *dragonfly* for others to guess are never going to forget what compound words are.

Children who move their bodies as part of the learning process are stimulated and alert. They also increase their body coordination, and learning to move one's body well is important whether one chooses to climb a mountain or dance the latest steps or just walk down the road with style and grace.

To promote using movement and fun as a way to increase cognitive and kinesthetic learning, I have given workshops in such varied places as orphanages in Cambodia, colleges in New Zealand, and schools in Nicaragua and Micronesia. I show caregivers, parents, teachers, and children fun ways to play that enhance their intelligence.

There are two major reasons why I'm serious about fun.

First, research shows that anything learned with tension often gets flushed out along with the unpleasant memories.

Second, the fun factor lifts our spirits and gives us that sense of well-being that opens our minds and hearts. In one of my previous books, *Spirit Games,* I suggest a large variety of fun games to help our children get past negative moments and find that more balanced state of mind from which problems can more easily be solved.

Playing games to learn cognitive and kinesthetic skills works for the same reasons. When we are in a positive frame of mind, we are present to that moment. It is in that state of acceptance that we are most open to new experiences and new knowledge.

We parents are our children's first teachers. We want them to be smart, we want them to enjoy themselves, we want to do what's good for them—and we want them to have fun with us.

Play *Smart Play* games and you can have it all.

## Explanation of Age Categories

Sometimes it is difficult to say at what age a child will do best with which game. There are some children who are delayed in their physical coordination but have exceptional control in their ability to use their hands and/or minds. Others don't want to sit and focus but have incredible large muscle coordination. Each child is unique.

The best way to know which games work best for your child or children is to try them out. Their enthusiasm or lack of it will let you know. You might find, as I often do, that children who I think are "too big" to be interested in that little kids' game are enthusiastic players. I like that, because they can be good models for the younger ones. For the purposes of this book, I've provided some general guidelines to age level, but feel free to make your own decisions.

**Ages 6 and Under** are games that will mostly appeal to the preschool/kindergarten set. There will be some two-year-olds who will be able to play many of the games and some six-year-olds who will be ready to move on to bigger challenges.

**Ages 6 and Up** are games that have slightly more involved directions and require more physical skills and a larger understanding of concepts.

**All Ages** are games with enough variability in them that siblings, friends of differing ages and abilities, and adults can all play them together.

## How to Contact The Author

I have done workshops around the world where participants (teachers, aides, parents, therapists, and children) learned by playing. They had first-hand experience in playing *Self-Esteem Games, Spirit Games, Smart Play* games, and other games that can all be played in the family setting or in the inclusive classroom. They also learned how to make their own games and educational toys out of local and recyclable materials.

If you are interested in my services as a consultant or a workshop leader, simply e-mail me at: momsense@asis.com.