

How to Play Charades with Children of All Ages

Age Range and Equipment

This classic pantomime game is ideal for family get-togethers during the holidays, a rainy-day activity, or anything in-between. This game can include every generation of the family, and you can simplify the rules when you play with children. With a little guidance, children as young as 3 years old can play.

You will need a device with a timer or stopwatch and will write down the times and tally them up at the end. You may need a paper and pen to do topic selection if you choose that variation of the game.

Game Rules

The premise of the game is for players to act out a word or phrase without uttering a word or sound. Their teammates have to guess what they are acting out in the shortest time as possible. Usually, the game is played by two competing teams, although it can work with several groups, too.

For example, you can act out the word "football" by pointing to your foot and then pretending to throw a ball. For the word "car," you might pretend to sit with your hands on an imaginary steering wheel. Charades can be played with any type of word or phrase.

On each turn, one person acts out a topic for their teammates to guess. You use a stopwatch or app to track the time, giving a maximum of two or three minutes for each turn. At the end of several rounds, the team with the shortest time wins.

When playing with children, you may find that film titles or TV shows work best. Most children are familiar with many simple movie titles such as "Sleeping Beauty" or "The Lion King." And even the youngest can act out "Pinocchio." When playing with very young children, you might want to skip the stopwatch and the competitive element.

Topic Selection

One popular variation of this game involves asking the opposite team to select the film, book, TV show, or phrase that your team has to act out. Before the game begins, each member of the opposite side receives a few blank slips of paper. They write down their selections, fold them up, and pass them to the opposition. On their turn, each player randomly selects one slip, which becomes their task.

Another way to play, you can skip this step entirely by searching online for charades topic lists or charades apps that can randomly generate your topics.

Common Charades Hand Signals

Charades has an understood vocabulary with universal signs that mean certain things. Before your team gets guessing, the first thing you mime is the topic. These signs are the generally accepted hand signals used for items:

- **Movie:** Pretend to crank an old-fashioned film camera.
- **Person:** Stand with hands-on-hips.
- **Song:** Place one hand on your chest and pretend to sing.
- **Place:** Draw an imaginary circle in the air and then point to the middle.
- **Book:** Place your palms facing upward, side-by-side, and pretend to be reading.
- **Phrase:** Make air quotes with your hands.
- **TV show:** Draw a square in the air to represent a television screen.

Gestures for Specifics About the Topic

When getting started with a new topic, other helpful information to give off the bat includes how many words are in the topic. Indicate to players when you are working on a particular word and tell the team how many syllables a given word has.

- The number of words in the title or phrase: Hold up that number of fingers.
- Acting Out a Particular Word: Hold up three fingers for "third word," make sure the team acknowledges that they understand that you are talking about the third word, then act out the third word for the team to guess.
- Indicate the number of syllables in a word: Tap the number of fingers that match the number of syllables in the word against your opposite forearm a couple of times until your team acknowledges that they understand that number of syllables.

Other Common Charades Signals

While playing, your teammates might guess a word or get close. There are some signals to get the players who are nearly there closer to the correct solution.

- Correct word: When someone calls out the right word, point at that person and nod your head. You can also point your finger to your nose, meaning, "You got it, on the nose."
- Rhymes with or a similar word: Either cup your hand around your ear or tug on your ear.
- Little word or prepositions: Bring your thumb and index fingers close together. Your teammates should start calling out every short word that comes to mind (on, in, the, and, and so on) until you touch your nose to indicate that it is the right word.
- Longer version of a word: If your team guesses a short version of a correct word, like "swim" instead of "swimming," pretend to stretch an elastic band between your two hands.
- Shorter version of a word: To shorten a guess from "singing" to "sing" make a chopping motion with your hand.
- Indicate that teammates are close: Make a "come here" motion to keep the guesses coming.
- String the phrase together: Sweep your arms in a big circle.
- Indicate past tense: Wave your hand downwards behind your back.
- Indicate opposite: Make the "thumbs up" sign with each hand and point the thumbs in opposite directions.

