

Jordan River's The Art of Mitzvah Games

Bar and Bat Mitzvahs can be among the most rewarding occasions for which a Disc Jockey can perform. Yes, there are so many details to consider while preparing and during the event itself, but the better prepared you are the better the results. I always find myself thinking two steps ahead of the game at every Mitzvah I do. This article focuses on the art of presenting games in a way that are spontaneous and fun for your guests while the hard work you're doing looks like fun too. And, with a little practice on your part...it will be!

Games can be a very important part of the mitzvah agenda. However, they may not be for your client's event. The maturity level of the boy or girl and their friends as well as what part (of what the industry calls) "the circuit" they are in will be the deciding factors. The circuit is the time frame from when the Mitzvahs start in the year till the end of its' season. These are two very important pieces of information to find out when you are interviewing your potential clients. I find that games are best used in situations where the kids have not yet found their "independence" and are still looking for someone to lead them. However, if the boys and girls seem to be more mature, I have a tendency to forgo the games and concentrate on dancing.

I usually use the standard games (Pepsi/Seven Up, Limbo and Hula-Hoop) for the parties that are at the beginning of the circuit. Now if the kids have been to a fair amount of Mitzvahs by the time they attend the party I'm working at, I find it best to use games that are more recent and fresh (Musical Chair Scavenger Hunt, Pass the Hula-Hoop, T-shirt Balloon game). Remember one of the most important tasks you will have that night is connecting with the kids. If you can't connect with them from the get go then chances are you will not get the respect that you need to last through the whole event.

So now that we've gotten the psychological stuff worked out, let's move on to what type of games are available and when they should be played. There are two places in the course of the event that are ideal for games. The first is during the cocktail hour. At this time I use games that are not necessarily structured but available for the kids to play with. The second time is while the adults are finishing their lunch/dinner. Usually the kids are finished with their meal in 15 minutes and the adults haven't even started with the main course so I need some great games to occupy their time until lunch/dinner is done.

This is when I'll use the type of games in which all the kids can participate.

COCKTAIL HOUR GAMES: The cocktail hour is an opportunity for the adults to socialize. So what are the kids doing? Too often they are running around creating havoc. It is during this time that you'll want to break the ice with some simple games that the kids can play on their own. If the parents don't have it in their budget to hire someone to entertain them like a magician, caricaturist, Karaoke or Game Show Mania, it's up to you to entertain. Keep in mind though that all these types of vendors can be a great up-sale for your package so you may want to propose these services first.

The games I use are The Human Puzzle, Gyro Ball and Hula-Hoops. After so many years of being frustrated by the boys running around the dance floor and bunches of girls heading for the restroom or pay phone I said to myself "enough is enough"! I wanted to connect with these kids and keep them occupied all at the same time so these games became my solution. All I do is keep the games by the DJ booth and start hanging out with them. Let's take a look at each game:

The Human Puzzle: The Human Puzzle is a problem solving game. Two people play the actual game but it also attracts attention and you will find all the other kids gathering around to watch. It involves two ropes that the players have wrapped around their wrists in the shape of bracelets. The contestants are connected together by the two ropes and the object of the game is for them to separate from each other. It is a very easy task but the kids tend to make it more difficult than it really is. As a result it takes a long time to figure out. When this is the case, after about 10

minutes of trying to undo themselves, I will start giving them clues. The first couple to get out of the human puzzle will get a prize. I usually bring 4 sets of this game and the kids really love it. You can order The Human Puzzle though one of the vendors in Mobile Beat and they always have them available at all the conventions.

Gyro Ball: Gyro Ball is a test of skill and coordination. You can have anywhere from one to four people play at a time. Gyro ball is a plastic cylinder shaped object that comes with a ball. The object of the game is to place the ball in the cylinder and attempt to get the ball circulating inside it. Once they have achieved this task, the next attempt is to pass it onto the next person while the ball is still circulating. This game is available at toy stores and again at the conventions

Hula-Hoops: Hula-Hoops are pretty straightforward. I usually bring about eight to a party and place them on the dance floor. The girls especially love to play with them and I usually mention over the microphone that this is a great opportunity to practice for the contest that will be coming up later on in the party. You will also find the adults joining in because this is such a nostalgic toy for them.

All three games are going on simultaneously. The best part is that you will break the ice with the kids and get to know them by name. A good 40 minutes passes by with all the kids hanging out in one area. Let me tell you the adults will love you for it!

DINNER GAMES: There are at least 5 games that you can use during dinner. As I mentioned before the most popular ones are Pepsi/Seven Up, Limbo and a Hula-Hoop contest. There are also the more recent games like Pass the Hula-Hoop, Balloon T-shirt Game and Musical Chairs Scavenger Hunt. If you are just starting to get into the mitzvah scene, I suggest you familiarize yourself thoroughly with these games before you walk into any event. Quite simply, if you don't know how to do the games well, it will show in your performance and you might end up with egg on your face. These kids can be very demanding and if you don't know what you are doing, they can really break you down. So before you go to an event, try these games out on your kids or friends at home. Perhaps this sounds a bit odd to you but in the long run you will be grateful that you did. Here is a brief explanation of each of the games:

Pepsi/Seven Up: This is also commonly referred to as Coke & Pepsi. P/S is an elimination game. You will ask the kids to grab a partner. Have each group of two line up across from each other at either end of the dance floor. One side of the dance floor will be named Pepsi and the other will be Seven Up. You then explain the object of the game by telling them you will either be saying Pepsi or Seven Up. If you say Pepsi, the Pepsi side has to run over and sit on Seven Up's lap. If you say Seven Up, the Seven Up side has to run across and sit on Pepsi's lap. There is also one more soft drink involved and that is Dr. Pepper. If you say "Dr. Pepper, all the kids have to run to the center of the dance floor. At that time the DJ will put on a style of music the kids have to dance to. For instance if the song is "Staying Alive", then they will have to dance like John Travolta. If it is a country tune, then of course have them Doe C Doe and if you have a classical song, have them dance like ballerinas. The last one is my personal favorite because the boys really ham it up! The object of this game is to get to your partner's side of the dance floor when your soft drink is mentioned as fast as you can. The last person to get to the other side is out until the last team is left. Let them run back and forth a couple of times before you start eliminating. Use Dr. Pepper about three or four times during the game and have your DJ ready with four different styles of music ahead of time so that when you say Dr. Pepper he is ready to play the song. You can also psyche the kids out by saying the same drink twice and pointing in the other direction. Usually 3 sets of kids will move and you can eliminate them faster. Once you start getting the hang of this game you can start making it your own by creatively adding ideas to the basic game.

Limbo Contest: Limbo is also an elimination game and great because it's for all ages. Little kids can play as well as the adults and believe it or not some adults will come up to play. You will have all the kids line up behind the Mitzvah child and then explain the rules. Ask two kids who are not really participating in the games to hold the Limbo stick. This will help break the ice with them because they will feel like they are part of the party without playing what they think is a child's game (pretty clever huh?). The rules for Limbo are as follows: First, I tell them they must go feet

first head last (no surfing either). In addition I also mention that they may not touch the Limbo stick at any time with any part of their body. Finally, they are not allowed to have their hands, knees or bottom touch the floor and at no time can they jump over the Limbo stick. The last person left will win a prize. I usually have a junior winner for the little ones and the grand prize goes to one of the older kids.

Hula-Hoop: Hula-Hoop is yet another elimination game. I will have all the kids who want to play line up against the wall and have four kids compete at a time. Once the music starts, they can begin. The last person still going in each group of four will then go into the semi finals. The semi finalists will then start competing against each other until there is a winner. If they are skilled at this game, you may want to make it more difficult by having them tap their hand to their head, lift up their left foot up in the air or twirl around in a circle. Most likely you will have to do this as you get towards the end of the game. Again, you may have some adults participate which always makes for a more exciting event.

Pass the Hula hoop: Pass the Hula Hoop is a more recent game and one I play at most every Mitzvah I do. I ask all the kids to get into a big circle and hold hands. I will place two Hula-Hoops in the circle by having two sets of kids put their hands through the Hula-Hoops and hold hands again. The object of the game is to pass the Hula-Hoop through their body and onto the next person as fast as they can with out letting go of hands while the music is playing. Whoever has the hula-hoop wrapped around their body when the music stops will be out until the last person is left. Have your DJ play an up tempo song like The Twist for about 15 seconds at a time so that the game won't go on too long. This game is exciting because the kids gather around to route for their favorite person as they are eliminated.

Balloon T-Shirt Game: This game is really fun and all the kids can participate for the whole game. This is the beauty of the game because you are not eliminating kids and will have their full attention at all times. You must supply five XXXL T-shirts and at least 150 nine-inch balloons. Have the kids get into 5 groups of 6. Have each group pick the smallest person to be the balloon person. At that time the person chosen will put on the oversized T-shirt. The object of the game is to blow up as many balloons as they possibly can and stuff them under the T shirt while the DJ plays the song "I'm Fat" by Weird Al. They will have approximately 4 minutes to complete this task. The group with the most balloons stuffed will be the winners. I usually have everyone gather around as we count the balloons by pulling them out of the T-shirt and popping them with a pin. DO NOT, I REPEAT...DO NOT pop the balloons while they are inside the shirt; the child will get stung. Instead, have one of the kids from each group help you pull them out while you pop them. I will also have one adult help out in each group because some of the kids might not be able to tie the balloons and it's always good to have some adult participation.

Musical Chairs Scavenger Hunt: This game is quickly becoming the most popular game in Southern California; all the kids dig it. If they've been to a lot of Mitzvahs, this game is a must. Musical Chairs Scavenger Hunt is Musical Chairs with a twist. It is played just like regular MCs but when the music stops, you will shout out an object for instance "a tie." The kids then have to go out into the audience, find a tie and get back to a seat before they are all taken. This will continue with other objects that you shout out but before they get a new object, they must return the object they have in their hand back to the person they got it from. They may not take an object from their own body. It must be from another source. A couple of examples of items you can use are ties, shoes, sunglasses, a spoon, lipstick, a comb, etc. The last item I usually call out is always a perfectly square piece of toilet paper from the restroom. This gets quite a laugh and ends the game with a bang.

So there you have it. There are many games to choose from and I've only mentioned a handful in this article. However, these are the easiest and most popular in the Mitzvah scene right now. One last thing to mention, you will want to have prizes available for the winners. I usually have the moms bring at least 15 prizes to give away. The most popular and easy prizes to get are \$2.00 bills, gift certificates to Baskin Robins or gift certificates from your local music store. Let the kids know that they will be competing for "Fabulous Prizes". This will encourage them to participate.

In closing let me say you will find that games will: 1) totally enhance the party; 2) keep the kids occupied; and 3) allow the adults to enjoy the party just as much as the kids since, in essence, you will be watching their kids for them. Remember the adults (especially moms) want a chance to just be people instead of parents while attending a party and this will allow them to do just that. Enjoy!