



# Football Spoons

Throwbacks to childhood games and experiences can be effective methods for learning something new (Robinson, Smith, Segal, & Shubin, 2020). The original version of the card game, Spoons, is rife with opportunities for learning about groups and individuals. In my version, the facilitator uses it to discuss issues of equity among students and adults.

## Purpose

Participants aim to build connections to group dynamics and equity.

## Group Size

Generally, groups of three or more are ideal; divide any larger group into groups of three to five.

## Sequence

1. Ask participants to create groups of three to five members sitting in a circle. Give each group a deck of cards. The goal of the game is to collect four cards of a kind. If jokers are used, they can serve as any card.
2. Place spoons in the middle of the table—the number of spoons is the group size minus one (for example, a group of five would use four spoons).
3. Ask the group to mix the cards up and deal four cards face down to each person. The participants can look at their own cards.
4. The dealer places the deck to the right and takes a card off the top of the deck to have five cards, removes one unwanted card, and passes it face down to the left. The next player examines the unwanted card and makes the same decision. This process proceeds, untimed—the dealer doesn't need to wait until a card reaches the last member. Each player discards to the person on the left, not to the middle. The speed is determined by the dealer.
5. The last player places discards into a trash pile beside the dealer. This pile may end up being used if no one in the group can make four of a kind by the time the dealer runs out of cards in the initial pile.
6. When anyone reaches four of a kind, that person selects a spoon. The person who selects the spoon does not need to say anything out loud or announce it. Once someone has selected a spoon, any other members can select a spoon, even if they do not have four of a kind.
7. This will leave one person without a spoon. This person earns a letter S.

## MEETING GOALS

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8. The dealer collects all of the cards and passes the responsibility to the next person, who mixes the cards and deals. The second round continues with the same rules. In each round, someone will earn a letter to add to the creation of the word *spoon*. Spell the whole word, and you're out!
9. After a certain number of rounds, the game becomes more kinesthetic. Players remember their scores in the game, and everyone moves to an open space where the spoons are placed far away from the players. If played outside on a field or inside in a gymnasium or cafeteria, the spoons could be placed twenty yards or more away. The goal, as in Spoons, is to collect four of a kind, and if people see another player (even a player from another small group) go for a spoon, they can grab one as well. In this version, having the players sit along a line and use multiple decks placed every three to four players helps expedite the game.
10. Conduct a whole-group reflection.
  - a. Ask participants, "What did you notice?"
  - b. Observations the facilitator made during the game could inform this reflection. Ask, for instance, "What was the impact when \_\_\_\_\_ happened?"
  - c. Consider the impact of trust. Ask participants, "Were there moments you trusted others in this experience? If so, when? What assumptions might you have been making?"
11. Debrief the process. (Five minutes)

## Notes

- The final whole-group reflection is the key to meaningful learning. During the game, it is helpful for the facilitators to look for these elements.
  - ⇒ How are the spoons set up on the table? Does anyone protest for their own benefit? Does anyone notice that certain spoon placements may be inequitable to someone else?
  - ⇒ As the dealer passes out cards each round, do players share strategies with each other? What might that mean?
  - ⇒ Do players fight for spoons, or if two players touch a spoon at the same time, does one player let go so the other player may have it?
  - ⇒ How do players handle the job of dealer (for example, some avoid it, some self-deprecate while attempting to shuffle and deal, some find it stressful, or some find it empowering)?
  - ⇒ Look for left-handed players—how do they handle the game (which seems to be created for right-handed players)?
- An additional constraint can be added at any point, like removing an additional spoon (for example, a group of four might only have two spoons) or adding a countdown timer. During the whole-group reflection, discuss these variables.

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- If several small groups are playing, consider merging groups a few rounds into the game, sharing one deck of cards. In the debrief, discuss the impact of that move.

### Application Example

- Joi, an instructional coach, is trying to boost social-emotional learning (SEL) among staff members at her elementary school. She holds Adult SEL Fridays after school for thirty minutes. These times are optional for staff members to come to her classroom and play games (for example, Scrabble, Connect Four, Boggle, and so on). The response has been significant, particularly as the state testing window starts to get closer. She theorizes staff members are trying to manage stress. As an option today, she offers an old-fashioned game of Spoons with a modern twist for anyone who wants to go to the gymnasium with her.

### Reference

Robinson, L., Smith, M., Segal, J., & Shubin, J. (2020, October). *The benefits of play for adults*. Accessed at [www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/benefits-of-play-for-adults.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/benefits-of-play-for-adults.htm) on December 28, 2020.