

# Stalker

**Materials:** Blindfold

**Procedure: (Focus Attention /Direct Experience)** Play this game in any quiet natural setting. Lawns are not great because there are no obstacles and they are very quiet on the feet. Any wooded area or meadow is perfect. This game is legendary at camp. Games played with older children - 12 and up can last 20 to 45mins. However, the success of the game requires the leader to take an active role as moderator and judge. The rules of the game are simple, however, achieving success is complex

- 1) A **“prey”** stands in the middle of the play area blindfolded and will remain stationary in that spot. They are free to turn in any direction but cannot move from that spot. **The “predators” take a designated number of steps from the centre** - usually 20-40 depending on how long you want the game to last, fanning out in all directions.
- 2) Once they have settled, the leader may need to adjust the position of various predators to ensure that everyone is equidistant from the prey. **On GO, the predators start stalking the blindfolded prey. If they make a noise and the prey hears the sound, the prey will point in the direction of the sound.** The leader confirms that the prey has pointed correctly and then signals or, if need be, asks the predator to sit, who is now “out” and must sit quietly for the remainder of the game. Meanwhile, the other predators continue to approach as silently as possible.
- 3) **The prey continues to listen and point - narrowing the field of predators.** However, the prey does not get an unlimited number of “points”. If there are 20 predators, the prey gets 20+1. Any incorrect point will use up one of the 21, while a correct point does not.
- 4) **The game ends one of three ways.** If a predator can sneak up on the prey - they must stand quietly beside the prey for a silent moment and then gently tag the prey - who is now eaten. Or, if the prey uses up all their points - the leader yells “fair game” and all remaining predators are free to pounce on the prey. Whoever reaches and tags the prey first wins. Or if the prey manages to identify all the predators the game also ends.

## Hints, tips and tricks:

- The moderating of this game makes the difference. The moderator, who stands at the centre next to the person playing the prey, must listen just as hard as the prey. If the prey points in the direction of a predator but that player is stationary or silent - I give the benefit of the doubt to the predator, in which case the prey loses one of their “points”.
- If a predator is making lots of noise and the prey’s direction of the point is not aimed exactly at the target - I will still make the predator sit. Also if a predator is moving too fast, especially at the start of the game or near the end, I caution them and if they continue to move too fast - I make them sit. The only acceptable movement is slow.

- Players who are out will make noises from time to time that attract the attention of the prey. If the prey points at them, these do not count as a wrong “point”. Just remind the sitters to be silent. If they need to adjust themselves, pause the game and let them get comfortable before continuing.
- And finally, I let the players know all these nuances before the game and ask them to work on an honour system. Sometimes players will get bunched up, one will make a noise, the prey will point in the group's direction and I just ask the individual responsible to sit down.

There are so many incredible outcomes from this game. Being in nature with a group of children, in total silence is amazing. Predators who are “out” will sit perfectly still, watching the unfolding game with rapt attention, especially if there is an epic stalking battle unfolding between two predators. Build this up. Now and then, stop and provide an update. “We are down to four predators. Amazing work hunters and incredible listening prey.” Doing it in a soft but enthusiastic voice draws the whole group together. We play an extreme version with our bushcraft campers, who are experts, and a single round can last an hour. The most skilled stalkers won’t move for the first five to ten minutes. They will plan their line, seeing the moss-covered log and planning to avoid the dry leaves. They know that movement only happens when the prey is turned away and even then only in tiny increments. It is one of the most powerful tools for teaching children about the challenge of hunting and demonstrates the advantage that prey have if they remain vigilant.

It generally takes at least two rounds for the children to understand the game and start developing strategy. So commit some time. It took me quite a while to get comfortable letting the game unfold at such length but has been so much fun.