



# **BASIC SKILLS MANUAL FOR TUG OF WAR IN SCHOOLS AND YOUTH ORGANISATIONS**



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### **Introduction**

This tug of war basic skills guide has been designed for use by school teachers and youth group leaders in organising tug of war within schools, youth clubs, cadet forces, scouts, etc; either as part of physical education lessons, or for running an inter-house/inter-form competition/sports day or inter school/club events.

This guide covers all the basic principles around the sport that should be understood before, during and after a tug of war exercise.

This guide is not exhaustive, however should you need any further guidance, then this can be gained by contacting the Tug of War Association.

### **Why Tug of War?**

Tug of war is a healthy team sport where the team ethic is more important than any one individual. It has often been said that a tug of war team is similar to a chain. It is only as strong as its weakest link. This results in co-operation and team discipline.



Tug of war is a non contact sport which encourages traditional values of honesty, integrity and sportsmanship. It allows young people to channel competitive instincts in a non confrontational manner.

Tug of war is not an expensive sport. It requires no costly equipment other than a rope which will probably last for many years. It may take place either outdoors on a grassy area or indoors in a sports hall.



Many students miss out on sporting involvement or achievement because they don't have the basic skills required for more popular sports such as football, rugby, tennis etc. There are many examples of such students finding that tug of war suits their particular aptitudes with a resulting increase in their self esteem.

For those wishing to take tug of war further, physical fitness is encouraged as well as a positive attitude to competition. At school level the fun factor is most important for students, especially the younger groups. In that way a positive interest in the sport is developed as well as the possibility of future participation by the young person.

### **Is Tug of War Safe?**

This is one frequently asked question about the sport. In summary, we believe that YES, tug of war is a safe sport as long as everyone is supervised and all necessary steps are followed to create a safe competition environment. The risk of injury in tug of war is no greater than the



risk of injury as a result of participating in any other sport as - long as the rules are followed. Tug of war is a non contact sport and unlike rugby and football, there is limited risk in participants obtaining contact injuries. A health and safety risk assessment proforma is attached at Appendix 1 which can be used to help ensure that participants will be competing in a safe environment.

## Basic Rules of Tug of War for Beginners

- Tug of war teams consist of an equal number of “pullers”. The Tug of War Association standard is 8-a-side.
- Male and female teams do not compete against each other; however it is possible to have mixed teams, each with an equal number of male and female pullers (i.e. four males and four females). Teams can also be divided by age/year group, so that pupils of the same age compete against each other.
- The objective of tug of war is to pull the opposing team a distance of four metres from a fixed centre point.
- Pullers should all wear sturdy footwear. Experienced teams use specially made boots for outdoor tug of war and flat rubber sole trainers for indoor tug of war. For beginners, a good pair of sturdy training shoes should be worn.
- Teams should compete in shorts and strong shirts (rugby jerseys are ideal).
- Pullers grip the rope with their bare hands. No knots or loops should be tied in the rope, and the rope should not be wrapped around any limbs.
- Teams are not allowed to suddenly let go of the rope and deliberately cause the opposing team to fall over.
- Each team is allowed a “coach” at the side of the rope. The job of the coach is to encourage and direct the team, and coach people into position. The coach is not allowed to touch the rope when a pull is in progress. The role of a coach in tug of war is similar, for example, to the cox of a rowing team.
- Each match is a best of three end pull. The team that wins two ends is the winner.
- Teams are not allowed to sit on the floor.
- Each pull is officiated by a judge who stops and starts the pull.

### **Suggested Age Groups**

It is suggested that tug of war activities are organised in the following age groups, although such age groups could be varied should the instructor see fit:

- Under 8 years old (year 1-3)
- 8-9 years old (year 4)
- 9-10 years old (year 5)
- 10 – 11 years old (year 6)
- 11-12 years old (year 7)
- 12-13 years old (year 8)
- 13-15 years old (year 9-10)
- 16-18 years old (year 11-13)

The above age groups are not prescriptive, and competitions could still be held in year groups for the older age groups.

### **Pulling distances**

For standard tug of war competitions, the objective is to pull the opposing team 4 metres from a fixed centre point. Whilst this distance is appropriate for most age groups, such distances could be reduced to cater for younger age groups. Suggested distances are as follows and could be varied should the instructor see fit:

- Under 8 (year 1-3) – 2 metres
- 8-9 (year 4) – distance– 2 metres
- 9-10 (year 5) – distance– 3 metres
- 10 – 11 (year 6) – distance– 3 metres
- 11-12 (year 7) – distance– 3 metres
- 12-13 (year 8) – distance – 3 metres
- 13-15 (year 9-10) – distance – 4 metres
- 16-18 (year 11-13) – distance – 4 metres

### **Preparing an area for a tug of war**

Tug of war competitions can take place either indoor or outdoor, so tug of war is an ideal sporting activity to take part in whatever the weather.

### Outdoor

For outdoor tug of war, a flat grass area should be used. The area to be used should be approximately 50 metres in length and 5 metres in width. Such an area could easily be accommodated in a gap between different sports pitches. The area should be clear of any litter, debris, loose stones, etc and free from any other obstruction. Once you can be satisfied that the area is clear, then a centre mark should be placed in the centre of the pulling lane. This could be a painted line or a removable cone/bollard.

### Indoor

For indoor tug of war, a large sports hall is ideal. Because space tends to be more restrictive indoors, teams will start closer together on the rope. This will be explained further later. Within the sports hall, again, the floor should be clear of any obstructions, and in addition, any water/spillages should be wiped away and dried before tug of war takes place to prevent slippages. Once you are satisfied that an area is clear, then a centre mark can be placed in the middle of the hall. This should be a removable cone/bollard or a line marked on the floor with chalk/coloured tape. If room is limited, then you could pull diagonally across the hall.

Indoor tug of war can take place on the sports hall floor, however tug of war matting could be borrowed for the day from the Tug of War Association, subject to availability.

If there will be spectators (if the event is a sports day) or if there are a number of teams taking turns to pull in a PE lesson, then they should remain in an area out of the way of the pulling area.

### **Ropes and Rope Markings**

A tug of war rope that is approximately 35 metres in length should be used, which can easily accommodate two teams of 8 a side. If you do not have a tug of war rope, a suitable rope can be borrowed from the Tug of War Association.

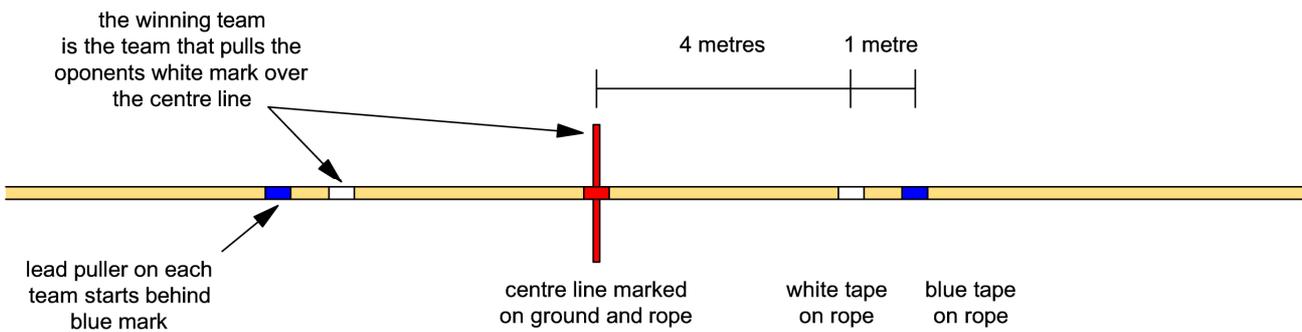
### Outdoor

The rope should be marked as follows (as shown on the diagram on page 6):

- A red mark in the centre of the rope
- 2 white marks, each 4 metres to the left and right of the centre mark

- 2 blue marks, each 1 metre from the white marks (i.e. 5 metres from the centre mark – this is where the first puller of each team will start)

The winning team will be the one who pulls the white mark of the opposing team over the centre line. The above distances could be altered to suit different age groups as stated earlier.



### Indoor

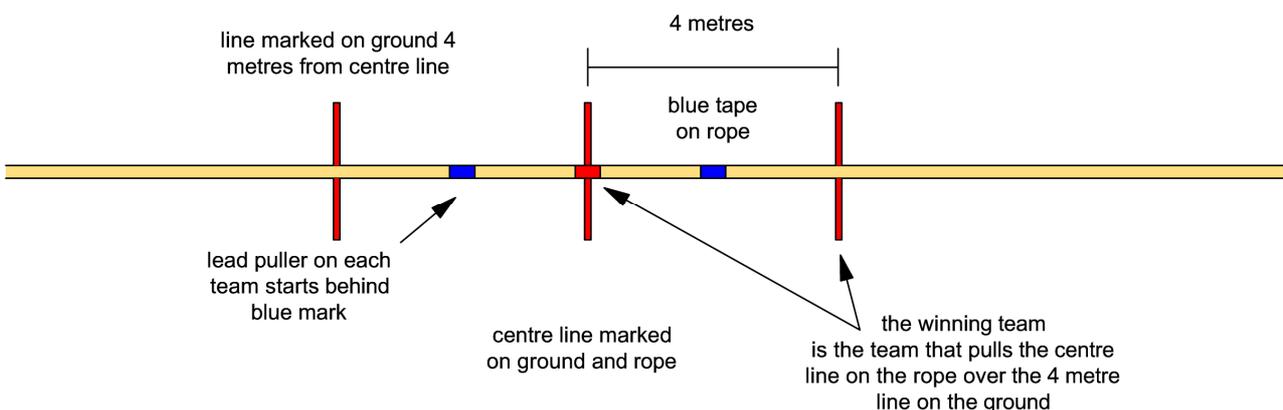
The rope should be marked as follows (as shown on the diagram below):

- A red mark in the centre of the rope
- 2 blue marks, each 2 metres to the left and right of the centre mark (this is where the first puller of each team will start)

The floor should be marked as follows (as shown on the diagram below):

- A red centre mark (either removable cone/bollard, or a line drawn with chalk/coloured tape)
- Two marks 4 metres either side of the centre mark

The winning team will be the one who pulls the red centre mark over the 4 metre mark on their side of the pulling area. Again, this distance could be altered to suit different age groups as stated earlier.



### **Taking Part**

Once pulling area is considered to be suitable for use, you are now ready to start. Students should be supervised by the appropriate number of adults at all times.

Participants should be appropriately dressed in the following attire:

- A jersey made of strong material (i.e. a rugby jersey)
- Shorts
- Sports socks
- Sturdy training shoes

### **Warm Up/Warm Down**

All participants should take part in warm up exercises to include a short jog/run, as well as stretching exercises for the legs, back, arms, shoulders. Once participants have warmed up, they will be ready to pull. Once the competition has finished, participants should warm down, again with a jog and some stretches.

## Rope Pulling - Start Position



The first puller should start behind the blue mark on the rope. The 7 remaining pullers on the team should each line up behind the lead puller, leaving a gap of a little more than arms length from the person in front.

The end puller is known as the “anchor man”. For experienced teams, the anchor usually has the rope pass round their waist (on the right hand side), run diagonally across their back up to their left shoulder. The rope then runs over the left shoulder and under the left arm pit with the remaining rope running free to the side, but not behind the anchor (see photo above for anchor position). For younger age groups, this is not recommended, and the “anchor” of each team should just pull the rope with their hands. For older age groups, the anchor could pass the rope around the back and over the shoulder as described, however additional protection is recommended (e.g. by wearing additional t-shirts/padding underneath the rugby jersey)

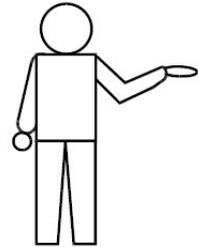


## Starting and Finishing a Pull

Once the two opposing teams are lined up in position on the rope and all checks are made to make sure no-one has wrapped the rope around their hands/arms, and the anchor man is ready, you may start.

The judge in the centre who will control the pull should issue the following commands:

- “Team are you ready” – this command is issued to the coach of each team who will confirm or signal to the judge that their team is ready.



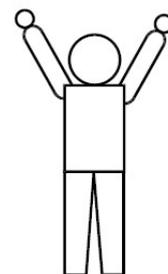
TEAM ARE YOU READY

- Once both teams have confirmed that they are ready, the judge will shout “pick up the rope” – Both teams pick up the rope. The judge here should be pointing both hands to the centre.



PICK UP THE ROPE

- “Take the strain” – Both teams should lean back slightly (but not pull the rope) to make the rope taught. Here the judge should ensure the centre mark of the rope is level with the centre mark on the ground. The judge here should have both hands in the air. If the rope is in the centre, the judge will then say....



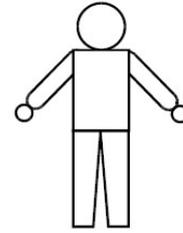
TAKE THE STRAIN

- “Steady” – teams should be ready, and the judge to make a quick final check that the rope is still in the centre. The judge will still have both hands in the air at this point.



STEADY

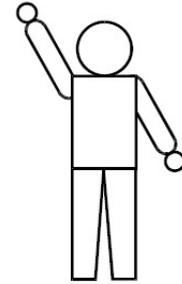
- “Pull!” – The judge shouts pull whilst quickly dropping their hands to the side. Here, both teams should lean back quickly and start to pull.



PULL

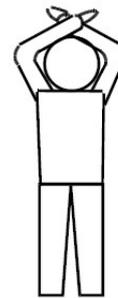
During the pull, the judge should observe both teams to make sure they don't sit on the floor or commit other infringements.

When it appears that one team is taking the other, the judge should also begin to observe the rope markings. For outdoor tug of war, the judge should look out for the white marking next to each team – when this passes the centre line, the judge should blow their whistle and signal their arm in the direction of the winning team.



INDICATING WINNER

A contest between two teams is usually performed as a best of three ends contest. When the first end is completed, teams are usually allowed a short rest (1-2 minutes). Once the teams have been given a short rest, the judge should then instruct the teams to change ends. The procedures outlined above should then be followed again for the next end.



CHANGE ENDS

For indoor tug of war, the judge should follow the centre mark to the 4 metre mark made either side of the centre mark on the ground. When the centre mark passes one of the 4 metre marks on the ground, the judge should blow their whistle and signal their arm in the direction of the winning team.

### Winning a Match

Tug of War matches between two teams are carried out on the basis of the best of three ends. After the first end, teams will change ends for the second pull. If the winning team from the first pull, wins the second end, then they win the match. If the opposing team wins the second end, then a match will go to a third end. In the event of a tie, the coach of each team will go to the judge who will toss a coin for the choice of the third end. The winner of the toss will then get to choose which end to pull on. A third end is then pulled to decide the winner.

At the completion of a match, teams are expected to walk in a line down the rope and shake hands as a gesture of sportsmanship.

### **Pulling Technique**

- Grip - Pullers should grip the rope with their bare hands.
- Pullers should aim to hold the rope around waist level through their centre of gravity.



- Pullers should aim to pull with a 40-45 degree body angle to the ground, pulling with the shoulders back and getting as much leverage as possible through using their body angle (as demonstrated in the photo above).
- Pullers should aim to keep the upper body still whilst forcing short strong steps back using strength in the legs to try and move the opposing team - keeping the body straight and forcing the rope back using strength in the legs (the strongest muscle in the body) will reduce any strain on the lower back.

### **Competition Formats**

Competitions can be run either as a league or on a knock-out basis.

#### League

For a league, all teams compete against each other with the team with the most points at the end being the winner. Points are awarded as follows:

3 Points for beating the opposing team by 2 ends to 0  
2 Points for beating the opposing team by 2 ends to 1  
1 point for losing to the opposing team by 2 ends to 1  
0 Points for losing to the opposing team by 2 ends to 0

In the event of a tie, the two teams who are level on points should pull each other again in a best of three ends match (or even a best of 1 end match if running out of time).

### Knock-Out

If you have many teams taking part, and you only have a limited amount of time, a knock out competition might be more suitable. Ideally there should be an even number of teams if possible, however if there is an odd number of teams, then the odd team that is left over would get a “bye” into the next round. Each match would be pulled as a best of three ends pull, with the winning team progressing to the next round until there are only two teams left who would contest a final to decide the winner. The losing semi finalists could play-off for third place. This is a good idea if there are prizes/awards for first, second and third placed teams.

### **Summary**

Tug of war is a great team sport, and is suitable for participants of all sporting ability. Tug of war is a healthy team sport where the team ethic is more important than any one individual.

Tug of war is a non contact sport which encourages traditional values of honesty, integrity and sportsmanship. It allows young people to channel competitive instincts in a non confrontational manner.

Many students miss out on sporting involvement or achievement because they don't have the basic skills required for more popular sports such as football, rugby, tennis etc. Tug of war suits the aptitudes of all students, no matter what their sporting ability may be. Being part of a team and taking part in a healthy team sport would result in an increase in the self esteem of anyone of any ability taking part in a tug of war competition.

The guidance contained in this booklet is intended to give school teachers/youth group leaders a simple introduction to tug of war and how to conduct the sport in a

safe manner. The Tug of War Association believes in the values that the sport has to offer to all youngsters of all abilities. We believe that the sport provides an ideal opportunity for youngsters of any aptitude to compete on a level playing field in a non confrontational and competitive manner.

The Tug of War Association are happy to assist any school further in running tug of war related activities as part of a PE lesson or school sports day. There is also scope to offer in-house training to school teachers/youth group leaders wishing to run a tug of war competition covering all aspects of health and safety, judging and pulling technique.

For further information please contact the Tug of War Association Schools/Youth Liaison Officer as follows:

Mr. Terry Spooore

**Tel:** 02084 228799

**E-mail:** tandaspoore@btinternet.com

**Web site:** [www.tugofwar.co.uk](http://www.tugofwar.co.uk)

**APPENDIX 1 – TUG OF WAR RISK ASSESSMENT PROFORMA**

<b>Site Name &amp; Type</b>		<b>Date of inspection</b>		
<b>Brief Description of Activities</b>				
<b>Description</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Severity</b>	<b>Risk rating</b>	<b>Control Measures</b>
Musculoskeletal Disorders (Back Pain, Joint Injuries, Strain Injuries)				<b>Judges:</b> Ensure that the teams are fully aware of the rules and the procedures involved in taking part in the event. Ensure that the safety Briefing is read out to all stewards and competitors. Judges approved by the Tug of War Association will oversee the event-stewards to work with judges
Slips, Trips & Falls				<b>Judges:</b> A site walk <b>MUST</b> be carried out before the start of the competition. Any objects (stones etc.) <b>MUST</b> be removed. The location of the event must be considered to prevent unnecessary incidents; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Uneven ground</li> <li>• Sloped ground</li> <li>• Areas with large numbers of stones / debris</li> <li>• Excessively wet / slippery ground</li> </ul>
Rope Burns & Abrasions				<b>Judges:</b> Please ensure that First Aid providers on the site are aware that the competition is taking place. A visual check of the rope <b>MUST</b> be carried out to ensure it is suitable for use. <b>Competitors:</b> First Aid will be available on site for all minor injuries
Crushing				<b>Judges:</b> The competition area <b>MUST</b> have suitable fences / barriers to prevent spectators getting too close to the action. Ensure that spectators have adequate room and are not forced into small areas.

**Definitions – Likelihood**

- 1 = Very Unlikely
- 2 = Unlikely
- 3 = Likely
- 4 = Very Likely
- 5 = Almost Certain

**Definitions – Severity**

- 1 = Minor Injury
- 2 = Injury requiring First Aid
- 3 = Serious Injury
- 4 = Major Injury requiring hospital treatment
- 5 = Fatal

**Overall Risk**

- 1 – 5 = Low Risk
- 6 – 10 = Medium Risk
- 12 – 25 = High Risk

**Responsible Persons**

The persons identified below are responsible for ensuring that the Control Measures are in place and that risks identified on this form have been addressed. This form should be on display and everyone involved in the activity must be aware of the form and its content.

Name	Signature	Date

Additional Notes		

## INSTRUCTIONS

### How to complete a Risk Assessment:

There are 5 basic steps to completing a Risk Assessment:

1. Look for Hazards (Description)
2. Decide who might be harmed (Severity & Likelihood)
3. Evaluate the Risks and decide what needs to be done (Control Measures)
4. Record your findings (Risk Assessment Form)
5. Review your assessment as and when needed (you can use the same form for the same activity as long as you check that nothing has changed. Once you have done a Risk Assessment for the room you use you don't need to do another one every time you use that room but just have a quick look and check that nothing has been added, taken away or moved)

### Risk Ratings:

To work out the severity, Likelihood and Risk Rating please use the scale on sheet 2 above. When you have established a risk you need to evaluate how likely it is to cause an accident and how severe the injury is going to be if it occurs. Once you have the two figures, times them together and this will give you the overall risk rating.

### Example

Description	Likelihood	Severity	Risk rating	Control Measures
Crossing the road				Ensure you follow the Green Cross Code and stop at the edge of the pavement before starting to cross.

The likelihood that you will have an accident when crossing the road is unlikely based on how many people cross a road everyday without getting hurt. If you do have an accident there is a strong possibility that you will be severely injured and will need hospital treatment. Therefore the overall risk rating is 4 making it a low risk. The control measure is what people can do to prevent a risk injury to somebody.

Please remember this is just a guide and no one will be able to stop every injury from happening but you just have to ensure you have done all that you can to protect people involved by looking carefully at a situation and planning ahead. You always need to have something recorded on a risk assessment, as this is proof that you have done all you can – just saying “I told them not to do it” is not good enough!

**SAFETY BRIEFING**

**Chief Judge / Nominated Health and Safety Representative to deliver Safety Briefing to:  
Judges & Stewards – Before the Tug of War Competition.**

- A site walk **MUST** be carried out before the start of the competition. Any objects (stones etc) **MUST** be removed.
- A visual check of the rope **MUST** be carried out to ensure it is suitable for use.
- Please ensure that only competing teams are in the marshalling area and spectators are a safe distance from the action.
- The competition area **MUST** have suitable fences / barriers to prevent spectators getting too close to the action. Ensure that spectators have adequate room and are not forced into small areas.
- At the request of the Chief Judge, carry out any relevant actions ensuring the safety of participants.

*Add any relevant points you find in the site specific & vehicle section of this Risk Assessment.*

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**All Competitors – Tug of War Competition**

- All participants must be aware of the rules of the competition
- The decision of the Official Judge is final
- The Official Judges have the right to disqualify any team posing a risk to themselves or others.

*Add any relevant points you find in the site specific & vehicle section of this Risk Assessment.*

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**PLEASE NOTE THAT IF ANY JUDGE / STEWARD / MEMBER ETC REPORTS A SIGNIFICANT RISK, IMMEDIATE CONTROL MEASURES MUST BE PUT INTO PLACE AND EVERYTHING MUST BE REOCRDED ON THIS RISK ASSESSMENT SHEET.**