

HELP SUIT GAME TRIES

By Maritha Pottenger

When you open one of a major, and partner raises you to two of that major, you often have an intermediate hand (a wonderful 15 to bad 18 HCP or extra distributional values). In those cases, you wish to invite partner to bid game if his/her raise was based on good values. By Losing Trick Count, you should have 6 losers. There are a variety of approaches to making a game invitation. One common approach is “Help Suit Game Tries.”

If the opening bidder bids a new suit, it is assumed to be a “Help Suit Game Try.” In choosing a suit to make a game try, you should generally select a suit in which you have at least 3 (or more) cards and the possibility of two or three quick losers. Examples would be: xxx Qxx Kxxx etc. If you have **two** suits in which you could make a game try, bid the **cheapest** one first (for reasons that will become clear later).

In responding to a help suit game try, you should evaluate your overall hand, but particularly look at your holding in the help suit. If you are at the top of your raise (8-10 HCP) and have a reasonable holding (at least one honor) in the help suit, accept the game try by bidding 4 of the major. If you have a “super holding” [AK(x)(x)] in the help suit, you can accept even though you only have 7 HCP. If you have 0 or 1 loser in help suit, bid game. If you have 3 losers in help suit, sign off at 3 of major. If you have 2 losers and a good hand, make a counter “game try” in a higher suit.

If you have shortness in the help suit, it is not that helpful, unless you have extra trumps. However, if you are at the top of your bid (8-10 HCP) and have a singleton in the help suit or a doubleton with an extra trump, you should generally accept the game try. Devalue secondary honors (jacks, queens, kings) in any suit below the help suit game try. For example, with a game try in diamonds, devalue secondary honors in clubs. Tony Forrester suggests the following guidelines: with 4 trumps and a singleton in the “help suit,” accept a game try if your hand also includes any Ace or King. With 3 trumps and a singleton, accept with any two Kings or an Ace plus one trump honor. With 4 trumps and a doubleton, accept with any Ace or the King of trumps. With 3 trumps and a doubleton, accept with any Ace and a King or with a King plus two trump honors.

If you like your hand a lot (a super 8 to 10 HCP), but have an ambiguous holding in the help suit, you can respond by bidding another suit—a suit in which you have a reasonable holding. (This is the reason for asking in the cheapest help suit first. It preserves bidding room.) As an example, if you hold Kxx xxxx AQxx xx and your partner opens 1S, you bid 2S and partner bids 3C as a game try. You’d like to accept, but are unsure your doubleton club (with only 3 trumps) is enough. So, you bid 3D which says: “Partner, I like my hand & I have some good stuff in diamonds. Does that help?” (Tony Forrester would just accept right away.)

If you had a minimum raise and nothing special in the help suit, you should decline the game try, by bidding 3 of the major (which is understood to be a sign-off).

Very, very occasionally, partner will make what appears to be a game try (and you will respond accordingly), but then partner bids yet another suit after you sign off (or bid game). In that case, you know that partner was actually **cue-bidding** with both bids, and you can judge whether to move forward or not. Example: You hold xxxx AKQx xx xxx and partner opens 1S. You bid 2S and partner bids 3C. At this point, you must assume it is a game try. Your club holding is terrible, but you have great hearts, so you bid 3H. Partner now bids 4D. At this point, you know that partner was actually cue-bidding clubs and diamonds, so you now cue-bid 4H (showing Ace of hearts). [Almost always, help suit game tries are made after 1 of major-2 of major and cue bids, seeking slam, are made at higher level, e.g., after 1 of major-3 of major.]

If you open a minor; partner bids a major; you raise that major, partner can now make a Help Suit Game Try with an invitational hand (super 10 to 12 HCP or extra distributional values or known double fit). Example of double fit: You hold AQxxx xx Kxxx xx and partner opens 1D. You bid 1S and partner bids 2S. You should try 3D as you have a 5-4 fits in spades and probably a 4-4 or better fit in diamonds.

Final Note: If you play Help Suit Game Tries, one of a major, two of a major, 2NT should show a balanced 16-18 with 5-card major for opener. Responder can choose between pass, 3NT, 3 of major or 4 of major. One of a major, two of a major, three of a major should ask for good trumps in responder’s hand. In this case, the trump suit is the “help suit.” Extra length will help as well as honors.