

Dear Readers,

Games were a big part of my childhood. We played games when we were bored, when the grandparents came to visit, on vacation or anytime we could think of an excuse. Card games were a definite favorite but board games, car trip games, and yard sports like badminton made guest appearances as well.

Fall, with school starting and the weather changing, is a great time to introduce new routines into your family life. I encourage all families to include games in their routines because of the many great benefits!

Family Bonding:

Many of my favorite childhood memories took place at our family room card table. We still tell the story of my brother's triumphant "shooting the moon" in hearts. When I think of my grandparents I always imagine them with cards in their hands and a willingness to teach us a new game or strategy. Playing games together was only time my sister and I were at peace with each other. At the game table, I loved to witness my parent's competitive and playful sides.

Learning:

Games are so much fun it is hard to think of them as good for you and your children! Games can teach academic skills such as math and spelling or life skills such as patience, concentration and teamwork.

While games can be a great way to engage your children and give you some free time, the best learning and bonding happens when you play too. It is up to you to instill some game playing values and help your children learn the rules and play fair. Here are some of the lessons you can help teach your children:

- **Patience.** Most games take time and children can learn how to be patient while they wait for their turn or for that "special card" or number. Learning to be patient can take practice so it is important to be encouraging and remind your child that their turn will come soon.
- **Honesty.** By helping your children follow the rules you are teaching them to be honest. If mistakes are made it is important to ask your child to admit their mistake and use it as a learning opportunity.
- **Responsibility.** By asking your children to take care of their games and help put them away when they are done teaches responsibility. And of course there is always the natural consequence of not being able to play if pieces are lost or ruined.
- **Teamwork.** Many games involve teams and are a great way to learn how to support team mates, work together and find out each other's strengths.
- **Accepting both winning and losing.** You can teach your child that we can try to win, but sometimes we will lose, and how important it is to be able to cope with wins or losses tactfully and graciously.

Some Game Ideas:

Children as young as two can start learning the basic concepts of games. Matching games, Candyland, and Hi Ho Cherry-O are good introductory games. Younger children can also participate in more complicated games with older siblings by rolling the dice, picking cards or moving pieces. It is okay to simplify games but I suggest trying to stick to the established rules to provide consistency and encourage honesty. As your children get older they can start playing games where they need to hold cards or that involve more advanced skills such as Old Maid, Go Fish, Bingo, and Sorry. Games such as Yatzee, Scrabble, Jenga and Monopoly are great for

school age children and help with math skills, vocabulary, concentration, money skills and more. Cranium has a selection of children's games that are a lot of fun and can be played in teams.

As you are reading this I am returning from a trip to visit my family where I am sure we engaged in some competitive, yet friendly game playing and good old fashioned family bonding.

Salutations,

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