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Helpful Strategies for Teaching Children How to Play Board Games

by Julie A. Daymut, M.A., CCC-SLP



Children enjoy playing board games—they *have fun*! In addition to the fun factor, board games can be a great, interactive learning tool. When children play

board games, they learn valuable skills such as turn taking and being a good sport, and they gain knowledge of basic concepts as they practice good listening, following directions, and responding appropriately. Specifically, many educational board games target answering

Board games range from simple to more complex. Some board games have only a few pieces, a few spaces, and a few prompts. Other board games are more complex and have many pieces, many spaces, and many prompts. You can choose a board game that matches the child's abilities. You can also modify a board game to meet the needs of the child. Modifications include using the prompts or cards without the actual game board, using fewer prompts/cards, having fewer players in the game, taking breaks during the game, and using dice with written numbers (1, 2, etc.) versus dots.

Learning to Play a Board Game Step-by-Step

Some children, including those with autism spectrum disorders, may find board games to be overwhelming. There are many game pieces, bright colors, special spaces, and all those questions to answer! Here are some step-by-step tips for teaching children how to play board games. Once a child is familiar with how to play the game or the game's setup, he/she can then focus on the prompts/cards or the *content* of the game.



- 1. Introduce the game board.** Explain what you see on the board. This includes any graphics or writing on the board. Identify the start and end points on the game board. Note any special spaces such as "Move Ahead 2." Have



"WH" questions, categorization, color identification, providing information, sentence repetition, counting skills, describing skills, grammar/syntax, increasing sentence length, and letter recognition. Children also get to work on fine-motor control as they manipulate and move game board pieces.

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the child trace the path from start to finish with his/her finger.

2. **Introduce the game pieces.** These include items such as a spinner, a die (or dice), pawns, and tokens. You may have to explain what each game piece is by describing its function. For example, when explaining dice, you could say: *These are dice. They have six sides each. Each side has dots on it. There will be one, two, three, four, five, or six dots on a side. You put the dice in your hand. You can shake your hand to make the dice turn over. Then you open your hand and gently drop the dice onto the game board. You look at the sides that face up. Count the number of dots you see on each die and add those numbers together. This is the number of spaces you move on the game board.*

3. **Practice moving the game pieces around the game board.** You can use hand-over-hand assistance (putting your hand over the child's hand and moving together) if necessary.

4. **Practice playing the game without the prompts/cards from the game.** Instead, play the game but ask the child questions he/she knows to help learn the game format. You can ask questions like "What is your name?" "Do you have brothers or sisters?" "What is your favorite color?"

5. **Read the game directions.** Have the child repeat the directions back to you to make sure he/she understands how to play.

6. **Play Away!**



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