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Homeschool Fun and Games

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Make the most of the “togetherness” inherent in homeschooling—with some fun and games designed to build family relationships while reinforcing skills. Games promote family bonding while building math, language, and thinking skills. Game play reinforces both character and curriculum by encouraging children to take turns, follow directions, think strategically, and recall information learned or skills developed.

“There are many kinds of success in life worth having. It is exceedingly interesting and attractive to be a successful business man, or railroad man, or farmer, or a President, or a ranchman, or the colonel of a fighting regiment, or to kill grizzly bears and lions. But for unflagging interest and enjoyment, a household of children, if things go reasonably well, certainly makes all other forms of success and achievement lose their importance by comparison.”—Theodore Roosevelt, Autobiography, 1913

Play a Variety of Games

Encourage children to play a variety of types of games, both cooperative and competitive. Cooperative games give the students a common goal, while competitive games are opportunities to learn good sportsmanship. While skills-based games stretch a child academically or logically, chance-based games level the playing field when children of varying ages or ability levels are playing together. Some traditional children’s games are geared to the younger set or may be adapted for play by older siblings with their preschool or primary siblings. While online or computer games can spark interest or review concepts, this month we’ll focus on concrete, “in-house” games.

Make Games Part of the Lesson Plan

Even the most reluctant or distracted learner can usually be motivated by games. Carol Barnier, in *The Big WHAT NOW Book of Learning Styles*, shares this insight: “Time Spent Doing Math: Typical Child—20 minutes; My Child Usually—3 hours; My Child with a Game—30 minutes.” Her book is chock-full of creative, game-style ideas that are helpful for all types of children, but especially the non-traditional learner.

File folder games and other educational games can be integrated into the learning day; if you use workboxes, these activities can go straight into their boxes. Or you can block out time for games in their lesson plan books. You could have math games day one day a week, or incorporate some vocabulary-based games for language arts. Your kids may have so much fun learning, you’ll make games part of their everyday routine!

Don’t Limit Yourself to Only “Educational” Games

Board games such as *Yahtzee*, *True Math*, *Set*, *24*, and *Number Jumbler* are some obvious math choices, but any game that incorporates money or points can reinforce math skills. Language games—including *Scrabble*, *Guggenheim*, *Taboo*, *Balderdash*, *Scattergories*, and *Password*—reinforce vocabulary as well as thinking skills.

Brainteaser games such as *Set* and *Mindtrap* encourage logic and strategy. Puzzle books, hidden pictures, and I Spy

encourage critical thinking and observation.

Jigsaw puzzles aid in visual discrimination for beginning readers; for example, a child who can discern the slight variances in puzzle shapes will be more likely to recognize the differences between a b and a d or a p and a q. Puzzles can also encourage patience, cooperation, problem solving, and art appreciation. My girls spent hours together constructing a 3D puzzle of the U.S. Capitol building.

Trivia games can be useful for reviewing facts such as dates, titles, biographical info, Bible information, and more. When choosing trivia games, be sure to consider the ages and abilities of the players. If they are likely to become a bit too competitive or unevenly matched, team play can be an option.

Scavenger hunts or treasure hunts are fun for the older children to design for their younger siblings. Clues can be riddles to solve or codes to decipher, or simply directions to follow.

Guess Who?, *Battleship*, *Clue*, and *Risk* encourage critical thinking and strategy, while more active games like *Twister*, *Pictionary*, *Cranium*, *Charades*, and *Guesstures* can get the muscles and imaginations going (as well as the laughter!).

Pencil-and-paper games such as hangman, word searches, crossword puzzles, complete-the-square, tic-tac-toe, Guggenheim, and Mad Libs can occupy hands and minds on errand days and holiday trips. Cards for *Uno*, *Old Maid*, *Go Fish*, and *War* also travel well.

Family Fun Night

There are games designed specifically for family interaction: *Imaginiff* and the *Ungame* encourage sharing of opinions, thoughts, and laughter. Jeff Myers developed *The Story Game* from a card deck he wrote for his own family gatherings. Several years ago, Todd Wilson created *To Bethlehem* for his own family, to allow him to interact with his kids, laugh and act goofy, and help them focus on the real meaning of Christmas.

So plan to bake a homemade pizza or other family favorite, maybe pop some popcorn, and gather around the table for a game night that the whole family will anticipate all week.



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