

February 2012

Kindred *Spirits*

Life Lessons through Games

Curb Cabin Fever with Fun

Game Tips

Keep these tips in mind when playing games with kids of varying ages:

• **Keep games short.**

With younger children, it's better to play one game three times (or three different games) than to have a game drag on and have the youngest players lose interest.

• **Play in teams when playing more advanced games.**

Pair your preschooler with an older sibling to keep him or her engaged.

• **Make sure everyone is involved in every game.**

Even toddlers can pick letter tiles in Scrabble, roll dice in Monopoly, match colors in Uno and move game pieces in The Game of Life.

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Cold winter nights are perfect for family togetherness. Plan a game night. An evening of playing games can bring your family closer, can help you get to know each other on different levels, and even build character and provide hours of fun.

"Besides curbing cabin fever, game playing is a great way to teach valuable life lessons, from taking turns, planning, memory and hand-eye coordination," according to Lisa Wallace, MU Extension human development specialist.

Different games teach different skills:

- ♦ **Apples to Apples** - public speaking and creative thinking
- ♦ **Bingo** - numbers and letters
- ♦ **Candy Land** - matching, taking turns and counting
- ♦ **Clue** - memory, deductive reasoning and record-keeping
- ♦ **Cranium** - creative thinking and improvisation
- ♦ **Jenga** - hand-eye skills, observation and concentration
- ♦ **Monopoly** - attention span, negotiation, compromise and money skills
- ♦ **Payday** - planning and money management skills

- ♦ **Scrabble** - vocabulary, addition and spelling skills
- ♦ **Sorry!** - counting, colors and strategy
- ♦ **Yahtzee** - multiplication, counting and record keeping

"Learning to lose and learning to win are part of the value of game-playing," says Janine Jones, Ph.D., an assistant professor of educational psychology at the University of Washington. "Children who master these concepts grow up with better skills to navigate not only a game board, but also to navigate life."

But it's up to parents to help teach those life lessons. Parents have to forget about winning and focus on teaching their children how to handle losing, how to win gracefully and how to play by the rules.

Mark the night on the calendar and remind everyone that they're expected to be there - ready for fun. Don't let anything interfere with your game night kickoff. Eat dinner early or order takeout. Make sure homework is done, piano has been practiced and there are no distractions. You might even want to turn off the phones. Then clear away the dishes, put out some snacks and play!

Give Attention for Good Behavior

Be specific with praise

All children will misbehave at times. “Parents often try to teach children by spending a lot of time attending to their misbehavior. But when children behave appropriately, parents sometimes miss the opportunity to acknowledge it,” says Nina Chen, MU Extension human development specialist.

When parents focus on children’s misbehavior, the information that children receive is generally negative, threats, or criticism which may lead children to

misbehave more. Think about this - if you were criticized all the time and were not given credit for things you did right and good, how would you feel? Children have the same feelings and reaction.

According to Dr. Alan Kazdin of Yale University Parenting Center, “attention to bad behavior increases bad behavior (yelling, lecturing, scolding, spanking and punishing are all forms of negative attention), while attention to good behavior increases good behavior.” Clearly, catching your grandchildren being good can

help increase good behavior.

When you really like what your grandchild is doing, tell them. Be specific to praise the action, words, or behavior, not the child. For instance, saying “I like how you clean your room” is more effective than saying “You are a good boy.” Use a smile, give them a hug, a high five, or a touch on the grandchild shoulder. The more immediate your positive attention to your grandchild’s good behavior, the more likely your grandchild will associate the good feelings with the behavior he did and will do more positive behavior.

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Get Your Sweet Tooth Fix from Fruit

Even after a satisfying meal, ‘something sweet’ is often craved. Maybe that’s why we’re eating too much sugar! “Americans are consuming 16 percent of total calories as added sugar”, says Glenda Kinder, nutrition and health education specialist.

However, evidence suggests that your body can tell the difference between nutritionally empty refined sugars and naturally occurring fruit sugars. So a good recommendation to improve your diet might be to replace some of the refined sugar you consume with whole fruits.

The body breaks down sugar, whether in milk, fruit, or a can of soda into glucose, fuel the body can use. But refined sugars are broken down much quicker contributing to a rapid, high rise in blood sugar, compared with whole fruit that produces a gradual rise in blood sugar.

Source: *Environmental Nutrition*