



5 Ways That Playing Games Helps Children Learn Math

1 Games spark big mathematical ideas.

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Games help children develop one-to-one correspondence. With board games, they match each space with a “count word” as they move their game piece on the board.



Moving a piece while counting is a kinesthetic way to show that each number word is one hop bigger than the last (“1, 2, 3, I moved 3 spaces!”) and gives words meaning. Children can see how far they went compared to their friend who rolled 2 and moved 2 spaces.

For a fun twist, draw a number path or board game in chalk outside or mark one with tape inside, and kids can hop themselves around the board.

2 Games cultivate important school readiness skills.

Games help expand children’s vocabulary. With a game like *Crazy 8s*, you can name the color and number when you play a card: “I can match the red 4 card with the blue 4 card because they are both 4.” Use comparison words, such as, “Who has more/fewer cards?” “How many more/fewer?”



Ask questions to help children think strategically and plan ahead, such as, “Is there another way?” “I wonder what would happen if...” “I was thinking about it this way. What do you think?” This kind of support helps children make connections and build vocabulary in a fun and meaningful context.

3 Games promote persistence and problem solving.

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Games help children see what works and why and try again without the pressure of doing it “right.”

When solving a jigsaw puzzle or playing with pattern blocks or tangrams, encourage children to try pieces in different spots, flipping and turning them to see which way fits best. With pattern blocks and tangrams, encourage children to find multiple ways to solve the same puzzle or create the same shape.

4 Games foster social and emotional skills.

Games help children learn important social and emotional skills like being patient, taking turns, and working with others. They also help children learn how to succeed and struggle graciously and respectfully.

All of these ways of interacting with others are important not just in math class and school, but in life. Game play is a fun, relaxed way to help children practice these skills.



5 Games offer many opportunities to practice skills.

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Games help children practice all of the skills they are learning—vocabulary skills, mathematics skills, social and emotional skills—many times, reinforcing long-term retention of the skills.

When children enjoy a game, they will want to play it many times. This repeated exposure has great benefits. Get ready to play that game, and play that game, and play that game again!