



Game Playing Tips for Grownups

Start simple. When you play a game for the first time, start with the easiest or simplest version. Once everyone is familiar with the rules, follow kids' eagerness for challenge and adjust the difficulty of the game to suit the child by using lower or higher numbers, playing with fewer or more cards, or modifying the rules. Try to find the "just right" level of challenge—this is the sweet spot where optimal learning can happen. A good game is just easy enough to play, and just hard enough to be fun!

Ask questions. Rather than telling children what to do next, ask questions to help strengthen children's problem-solving skills. When children answer questions and explain their thinking to someone else, they learn more deeply. They have an opportunity to think through their ideas and revise their thinking while talking about it.

Listening to children's answers to questions like "Oh, why do you think that?" "Why did you choose that one?" or "How do you know?" can also help you learn more about what children know, what they are beginning to understand, and what they don't know yet. Rather than telling children what to do next, make observations and ask questions. Say, "You need a card to match. Do you have a card that's similar or the same as this card?"

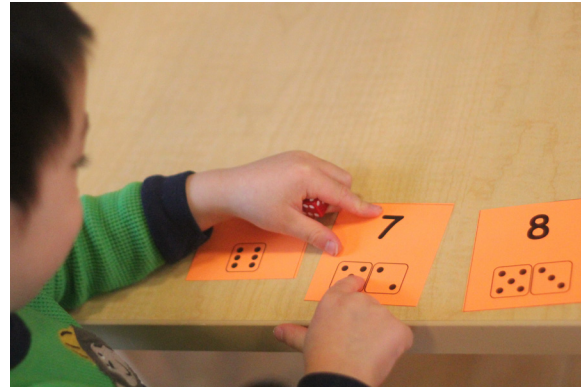
More questions you can ask are:

- › **How do you know?**
- › **What do you think?**
- › **I wonder what would happen if . . . ?**

- › **What do you think I should do next?**
- › **What number would you most like to roll now? Why?**

Be positive. Express good thoughts about math and how fun it can be. This is important because children are likely to take on your beliefs, and when they feel more positive about math, they are more likely to do well in math.

Play! Young children learn best through play and conversation. Keep the games fun and interesting. Don't be concerned about trying to finish or "win" a game, especially the first time playing. It takes time to get familiar with a new game and learn how to play.



Repetition supports learning. If the children enjoy a particular game, play it again and again, just as you might read a children's book repeatedly. Most likely they are in the process of

growing their thinking as they repeat the game. But when a game gets too familiar or too easy, children will probably want to move on to something more challenging.



Make up your own rules. It's okay to bend the rules or make up your own. If kids want to peek during memory games or play a card game face-up, that's okay. As long as everyone agrees on the rules—those are just the rules of the game. If kids want to make up their own game, that's great! It's more important to enjoy playing and doing math together than to play a game exactly as written.

and be patient. They are also learning to understand fair play and to not give up if a game becomes frustrating or challenging. Not all the games involve winning and losing, but when they do, children can practice winning and losing graciously and respectfully. These are important skills for school and in life.

Encourage fair play. Young children are still learning how to take turns

Read, color, and discuss the math minibooks. The math minibooks complement the learning children are doing with the math games. Teachers can introduce the minibook in the classroom and then send the minibook home so families can enjoy them together. Look for math in other books that you read together at school or at home to extend the learning even more.

For suggestions for picture books that complement the Young Mathematicians program, see ym.edc.org/picturebooks.



This work is supported by the Heising-Simons Foundation Grants #2015-023, 2016-13, 2019-1396 and Overdeck Family Foundation Grant #2019-1396; and by the National Science Foundation Grants #DUE1348564, DRL 1907904. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.