

8 Steps to a Brighter Child and a Happier Home

It may be child's play, but you'd be amazed at what children can learn through games. Watch children playing board games with each other, running a three legged race or playing football – they're not only having fun but also learning cooperation, teamwork, role clarity, strategy and tactics.

Not only is there is a wealth of supporting research, but there are also a growing number of educational advocates who emphasise that the most productive way of learning is through fun and hands-on experience and that game playing provides the perfect tool.

Here is a just a sample of the prestigious support behind the educational benefits of games playing:

According to the head of Ofsted, children who play traditional board games at home do better at school. He said the games help children to think for themselves, to wait their turn and to hold a conversation with adults. And he expressed a concern that computer games and television can discourage children from activities that better stimulate their imagination.

Stephen Twigg, Education minister, said that play is vitally important to education.

The National Union of Teachers conference produced a statement saying that children, in particular, learn through play and they want everyone to spend more time playing, as a "crucial" lifelong learning tool.

The National Foundation for Educational Research concluded that children should have more access to "play-based" learning.

John Dewey, the founder of modern educational theories, wrote in *Democracy and Education* "experience has shown that when children have a chance at physical activities which bring their natural impulses into play, going to school is a joy, management is less of a burden and learning is easier"

Even the venerable Plato said "Not by force shall the youth learn, but through play."

Learning through play is the idea behind MindLab, an after school education programme that teaches children thinking and social skills through playing board games from around the world. The positive impact of MindLab on children's development is supported by prestigious research which shows that children who follow a MindLab curriculum demonstrate a substantial and lasting improvement in strategic reasoning and problem solving skills as well as standardised maths and verbal reasoning tests.

Assuming you are now convinced of the educational benefits of game playing, you may next be asking, what do I do to reap the benefits of game playing with my own children?

Here are 8 steps to help you bring the many benefits of game playing to your own family to produce brighter children and a happier home life.

1. Buy or dust off some games that are old favourites. Games like draughts, dominoes, connect four and card games, are not only terrific fun but they are also stimulating, challenging and involve concentration and strategy.
2. Chose a convenient slot in your weekly family pattern that is an ideal time for your family to sit down together and play a few games, such as a Friday evening or a Sunday afternoon, for example.
3. Add some elements to help "game time" become a family tradition: add favourite foods (bowls of popcorn or hot chocolate perhaps?) a comfy warm setting (in front of a roaring fire?), invite grandparents etc.
4. Start with games that a suited to the youngest age group present, or have a few games going at the same time that fit the various age ranges. Make sure everyone understands the rules and aims of the game being played and give everyone the benefit of examples of good moves and strategies by illustrating them on the game board before beginning the "real" game".
5. Explain that to enjoy playing games we all have to play by the rules, respect our partners and respect the outcome of the game. Regardless if we win or lose, to have fun playing games together we can't gloat when we win, and can't get upset when we lose. If we play lots of games together, there will be lots of chances for each of us to win sometimes, and lose sometimes. Either way we will have had a fun time playing together.
6. Show your own interest and enthusiasm for the game; give it concentration and effort, both for your own enjoyment, and also as a role model for your children. Rather than play ineffectively to ensure your child wins, instead, help your child learn from your game playing skills.

Discuss out loud the moves you are making and why, to help your child understand the strategies you are using. If your child makes a move that is to their disadvantage, encourage them to look again and guide them to see a better move by asking them open questions such as "what are all the different options you have?" "What would happen if you take that move?" "What might be a better move that you can take?" "I can see a way that you can win, can you see it?"

7. Whether your child wins or loses, at the end of the game summarise what you learnt from the game and then ask your child "what did you learn from that game?" "What might you do differently next time we play?"
8. Keep the "game time" fresh by bringing in new games. Surprise everyone by giving the family a new game "present" every few weeks. Games that can be played within an hour and involve

thinking, memory, strategy or calculation are recommended such as: Othello, Guess Who, Mancala, Nine Man Morris, Scrabble, Chinese Chequers or Rush Hour.

We hope you enjoy and learn from "game time" in your family as much as we do in ours!

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Note to Editors:

Over 1,000,000 students in 15 countries internationally have benefited from the MindLab programme. MindLab is a "green field" business opportunity in Indonesia.

The MindLab after school programme gives franchisees the opportunity to make a real difference to children's development, their families and the wider community.

For just the price of a family car, and working part-time, franchisees can expect to make at least RP 400,000,000 to RP 600,000,000 per year.

MindLab also provides a like-minded community to support and guide franchisees as they grow their business, and a proven model to minimise the risk and fear of starting a new business.