

The Art of Playing – Tips for Parents

We often think of games as mere amusement, when in fact, games can also be a highly effective educational tool as well. 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”

MindLab is a highly effective after school programme that uses board games to teach children thinking, problem solving and social skills.

In MindLab there is a three step process to teaching children though games:

1. children learn a game
2. Children learn strategies to improve their game playing and thinking ability.
3. The children are encouraged to make connections between the strategies they have just learnt and experienced in the game, and situations in real life.

As a parent, you can help your child develop their thinking abilities at home through the art of playing games. Here are some ideas to help:

1. Teach your child noughts and crosses, or even better, four in a row (readily available at most toy stores)
2. Play the game together, and after round or two ask your child if they want to learn a way to play even better
3. Teach your child the traffic light method:
 - a. Red - means stop and pay attention to your surroundings – really look at the game and study what may be happening, to you and your opponent
 - b. Orange – get ready to go - look at every one of your options and decide which the best move to take is. For example, in the game Connect Four, you can encourage your child to examine what would happen if they dropped their piece in each of the columns. Encourage your child to choose the best move after studying each individual column or option.
 - c. Green – check your plan then go - encourage your child to take one last look to make sure they are making the best move, and then take their move.
4. Now play the game with your child and encourage them try out the traffic light method to see if it helps them play even better.
5. Notice and recognise when your child plays more carefully, slowly and deliberately. Reward them for thinking first before acting.
6. Chat with them about what they think of the traffic light method, do they feel they are playing better using it?

7. Have a discussion about the benefits of thinking first before acting. For example, ask your child how they could use the traffic light method if another child pushed them in the playground.

“What would red light be?” (They could answer, “Red means to stop and study the situation”) “How could you do that?” (They could answer – “look at the other child, are they smiling or frowning, gloating or crying, is there someone behind them who pushed them?)

Is there something on the ground that they could have tripped over?”
“And what is the orange light” (they could answer “ Orange is to look at all my options – I could push them back, I could ask them why they pushed me, I could tell them to not do that again, I could get the teacher, I could run away etc.”)

Encourage your child to understand that with more information they have more options and the choice they take will be a better one (just like in the game). By slowing down and thinking first, they have learnt that they will be smarter, in game playing and in life!

Happy playing!

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Note to Editors:

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.

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