

Some Suggestions For Teaching Children How To Play The Board Games

1. Manage expectations and decide on the goal

When starting to play a game the child has not played before, do not expect her to like it. Instead the goal should be for the child to follow the rules of the game and to play the game from beginning to the end. Doing all this while not showing any behavior issues should be the goal.

In reality, a child will not know if they like the game or not until she has played a few times.

2. Use external reinforcers

Playing the game or winning the game might motivate the child to follow the rules of the game and to keep playing it, but we cannot be sure that will happen. Instead of relying on those factors, use a reinforcer you know she will like is a more effective approach.

Before playing the game, ask the child what snack(s) does she want.

3. Decide on a rule how the child can earn the reinforcer.

Tell the child what rules need to be followed during the game. For example, take turns, follow the rules of the game, talk nicely to the other players, etc. Next tell her if she follows these rules she will get small piece of snack during the game.

Then tell her she can receive two big pieces of snacks if she finishes playing the whole game.

4. Use a timer

It is hard to determine how long the child can play the game for especially if she has never played the game. Games can end quickly sometimes and last for longer periods on other occasions.

To motivate her to keep playing, use a timer to break down the time period into shorter times. Show the timer to the child as it lets her know how much time she has to wait before receiving the reinforcer.

When determining how long to set the timer, consider the child's history of playing board games. How long was she able to play for? Were there any behavior issues like not playing correctly or not wanting to finish the game?

If the child loses focus quickly, try setting the timer for two minutes. If after two minutes, the child continues to play without any behavior issues, reinforce the child with a small piece of edibles. Quickly give her the snack then keep playing.

If the child has a longer attention span, try setting the timer for 3 minutes before giving her a snack.

If the child breaks the rule (e.g. tries to leave the table or plays inappropriately, etc.) before the timer rings, tell her something like, "You did not follow the rules. Let's reset the timer and try again. If you want the snack, follow the rules." Then quickly reset the timer.

In summary, the two reinforcers then will be:

a) Small snack – for playing the game nicely and following the rules. This will be given if the timer rings and the child did not do any inappropriate behaviors and followed the rules of the game.

b) Larger snack – (in this scenario, 2 big pieces of snack) if the child finishes the game while following the rules and not demonstrating any behavior issues