Gaming IRL

Building Social and Cognitive Skills Using Common Board/Card Games

Stephanie Pepi, Director
Starfish Social Club
www.starfishsocialclub.org
Playing games strengthens and reinforces:

- Communication Skills
- Delayed Gratification
- Handling Frustration and Disappointment
- Good Sportsmanship
- Reciprocation
- Perspective-Taking
- Attention to Task
- Dealing with Wait Time
- Cooperation

- Dealing with Conflict
- Compromise
- Requesting
- Following Directions
- Strategizing
- Flexible Thinking
- Decision-Making
- Commitment to Task
Strategies:
- Play child’s choice first, adult’s choice second
- Play adult’s choice first, child’s choice second
- Play two games of the child’s choosing
- In a group of more than 2, everyone picks a game and all games are played.
- Consider using a reinforcement system if playing other games is an obstacle for your child.

Struggles:
- Allowing your child to always pick the game.
- Allowing your child to be removed from the expectation of playing things others want to play.

Scaffold:
- Play games that are based on luck, not skill. This is the basis of most games for kids 6 and under. Stick with these.
- Introduce skill-based games only when your child is able to receive feedback since your guidance is an important factor.
Choosing a Gamepiece

Strategies
- This one decision incorporates several important social skills. The day a child can relinquish their favorite piece to another child is a day to celebrate!
- Teach a script to address this situation.
- Consideration: Does that change where you are sitting? Would you rather pick a color that matches the board in front of you, or pick the color you want and move?
- Role play and demonstrate this every time. Talk out loud.

Struggles:
- Allowing your child to pick their piece first every time
- Allowing that choice to go unchallenged
- Allowing your child to always be red on every single game ever made.

Scaffold:
Remove your child’s preferred gamepiece from play. This is sometimes easier to tolerate than someone else playing with it.
Who Goes First?

Strategies:
- This is a great problem-solving opportunity! What fun ways can you come up with to decide who goes first?
- A lot of games have this written in the directions, but I prefer the outcome to be random as it eliminates (most) arguing and disappointment.
- Our most popular strategies for making decisions are rolling dice and rock-paper-scissors.
- Another option is to let the person who chose that game go first.

Struggles:
- Allowing your child to always be first
- Allowing your child to be second if they aren’t first

Scaffold:
Determine during the ‘setting expectations’ phase who will go first. For example, “You can go first when we play Spot It, Dad can go first when we play Sorry, and I can go first when we play Chutes and Ladders.”
Time to Play!

Strategies:
• Help everyone follow the play. This helps reduce frustration caused by not knowing when it’s your turn or not knowing what’s happening.
• Talk out loud about EVERYTHING. This helps kids learn how to strategize and try different options.
• Any time you are with one or more people, you are in a group! We handle conflicts and decisions as a group. This strongly reinforces the concept that it’s not all about you!
• Kids always have the choice to not play, but the only other choice is to watch. They learn just as much by watching as they do by doing!
• Act out different emotions as things happen during the game. Model how to respond to disappointment, frustration, and excitement.

Struggles:
• Allowing do-overs (only for your child)
• Allowing your child to quit playing when they choose

Scaffold:
Play with 4 people so your child has a partner. You can demonstrate reacting to different things that happen to your team and model coping skills in a more genuine way.
Strategies:

• First, demonstrate congratulating the winner. You can create a script for this as well.
• What next? Does that person start over? Do the remaining players keep playing? Does everyone start over? Is the game over?

Struggles:

• Allowing your child to always win
• Allowing your child to be the only one who gets to start over/keep playing
• Allowing your child to exit without saying something thoughtful to the winner

Scaffold:

Allow your child to do something nonverbal, like a high five. This is easier than using words when there are big feelings involved.
Game Over

Strategies:

- Verbally reinforce all the things your child did well. Use specific language.
- Set a goal for next time. This could be to play longer, to play something different, or anything specific you noticed that interfered with your child’s social success.
- Let your child know how much fun you had playing games with them. For kids with social challenges, games may be tied to negative thoughts and feelings.
- Plan the next session at this time.
- Reinforce your child for engaging in game play. It was a lot of work!
- Congratulate yourself for supporting your child on their social journey!