

## Family Game Night Tips

By Judy Arnall

It's that time of the week that everyone looks forward to – Family Game Night! Here are some tips to make it go smoother and fun for everyone – including Mom!

**Have a simple dinner.** Order in pizza so that there are not many dishes to clean up and cooking is not necessary. If pizza is too expensive, plan to have a “snack” tray instead. Get a set of muffin tins or any compartmentalized tray and serve cheese cubes, fruit cubes, vegetable sticks, a few dips, meat roll-ups, raisins, nuts (not for under four year olds though), crackers, pita pieces, hummus, and various finger foods. This takes hardly any dishes, and Mom is not always getting up between game turns to cook, serve and clean-up dinner.

**Maintain a missing pieces bucket.** Have a catch-all bucket for wayward game pieces, puzzle pieces, dice, and cards that get stuck under the sofa, behind tables and dropped into the carpet. That way, when a certain game is pulled out, the bucket can be checked for “lost” pieces before play begins.

**Use plastic bags for pieces.** When game boxes get wrecked from overuse, use clear locking plastic bags to contain cards and all pieces. Hole-punch the bag if you have young children present so it is not a suffocation hazard. Bags are also handy for travelling because they keep out dirt and are less bulky.

**Roll dice in containers.** Save those big plastic clear pill or dip containers for dice containers. Clean them out really well, and put two dice in them and then snap on the lid. It's great for little hands to shake the dice and not spill them all over the table and floor. The clear sides allow everyone to see the dice roll.

**Paint backs of puzzles.** Put a dab of paint or nail polish on the back of every puzzle piece and clean up will be easy.

**Make a shield.** Prop big hard cover thin books up in front of small children, so little ones can spread out their cards on the table in front of them. One problem with family game night is that little hands have trouble holding the cards. You could also buy a child's card holder.

**Play cooperative games.** The ages of 6-8 years are the hardest times for children to accept losing. After eight years of age, it becomes easier for children to deal with the disappointment of not winning. Have a rule that the winner cleans up the game pieces and it might make losing a bit more palatable.

**Partner up.** Assign a non-reading child to an adult partner to help him read his game pieces and or write his answers, and they will play as a team.

With summer coming, consider games that go beyond the kitchen table. Head to the park and play tag, red rover, duck-duck-goose, Fox and rabbit, and various skipping games. Google the individual games to find instructions and rules of play, on the internet. Buy a big bucket of sidewalk chalk and use your driveway as a huge game board. You could play X's and O's on the driveway as well as hopscotch, Snakes and Ladders and other simple games.

Remember that it's not about the type of game, but the sheer joy of spending time together that really matters to your children on family game night. Have fun!

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