



## Six Skills to Build Through Play

Whether building a tower, playing a board game, or participating in organized sports, children can learn a variety of skills through play. Below are six skills adults can integrate into virtually any play activity.

**1. Following Rules and Directions:** All games whether a basic game of tag or a complex board game offer invaluable opportunities for learning to understand and follow rules and directions. Consequences for not listening to and following the rules, such as disqualification for a false start in swimming or losing at crazy 8's by forgetting numbers and suits can follow other cards, are natural ways children learn the importance of rules and directions.

**2. Patience:** Games involve waiting and turn taking which can be very difficult for children. Be sure to take your turn and include other children in turn taking when playing games. Point out the importance of positions involving patience, such as mid-fielder in soccer or outfielder in baseball. Illustrate through plays and scenarios that even though those positions involve waiting they are critical. Most activities require practice to develop skills which can be frustrating for young children. Teach the importance of persevering and practicing. These skills will not only serve the child in their current situation, but also later in life.

**3. Manners:** Sharing, taking turns, being a gracious winner or loser, and other important social skills can be taught and practiced through games and play. These skills are important both for developing friendships and later in life for working with others. Teach children to shake opponents' hands, compliment others on good plays, and use polite words when someone is collaborating on a play activity.



*From: Using Nice Words*

**4. Academics:** Games are a fun way to encourage children to read, count, sequence, add, or subtract. In games and activities there are a number of opportunities for adults to increase practice of these skills. Have children read the rules aloud or deal to practice counting. When tossing the ball in the backyard, count the number of times it is thrown back and fourth or during a soccer game, have the child stand on the fourth line.

**5. Problem Solving:** Building blocks, board games, and sports all involve a level of problem solving. Give children an opportunity to try things on their own first, then provide assistance as needed. If a child is struggling in an area, problem-solve ways to improve their skills. For example, trying a new stance in baseball or thinking about where the other team is kicking the ball when they score a goal.

**6. Conflict Resolution:** Interpretation of rules, calls on plays, and opportunities for taking turns can all result in conflict. When children disagree during a game, practice skills for managing conflict. Teach children to take a deep breath, explain their understanding of the situation, listen to others, and then determine a way to resolve the conflict. When possible, try to prevent conflict by helping children review the rules in advance, determine who calls the plays, establish the order, etc.

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