

Understood

8 Fun Games That Can Improve Your Child's Executive Functioning Skills

By Lexi Walters Wright

Board games require players to follow directions, take turns and plan strategies—three skills that may be tough kids with executive functioning issues. But the following games are easy to learn and understand. Better still, when you point out how the skills your child uses in each game connect to everyday situations, you'll actually be helping her improve her key executive functioning skills.



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Max

Ages: 4–7

Executive functioning skills: Emotional control; planning and prioritizing; flexible thinking

Max is a “cooperative game.” Players work together to safely get a bird, a chipmunk and a mouse back home before hungry Max the cat pounces on them. Kids roll the dice to determine how the critters move on the board. So they have to adjust to the unexpected. But as a team, the players

can divide the number of moves among the different critters. Next time your child gets upset over a change in weekend plans, try reminding her how flexible she is when she plays Max—and how it pays off.



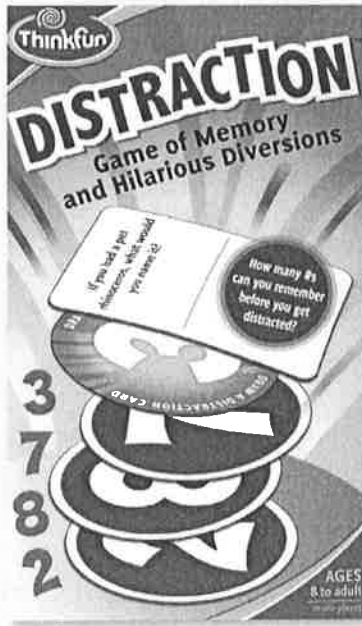
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Jenga

Ages: 8 and up

Executive functioning skills: Self-monitoring; flexible thinking; impulse control

There are lots of new versions of this classic build-and-topple game. But all of them require players to ask the same challenging questions. "What will happen if I remove this block from this tower? Will this whole structure wobble if I take away this one? How will pulling it out quickly affect the stack?" Jenga requires players to be aware and in control of their actions, and those are great skills for kids to hone. But it may be frustrating for kids who have motor skills issues, so choose accordingly.



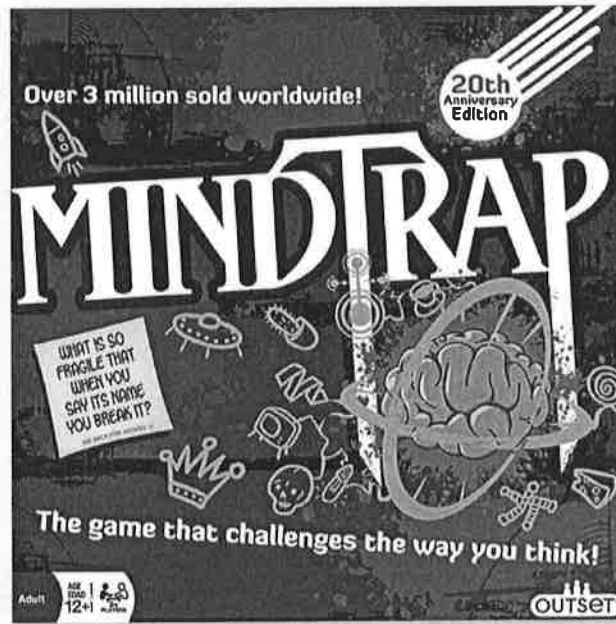
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Distraction

Ages: 8 and up

Executive functioning skills: Working memory; flexible thinking

This tricky game tries to trip players up in wacky ways. The players go around one at a time, taking cards from a pile. The cards all have numbers on them. Each time a player draws a new card, she has to recite all the previous numbers, plus her new one. If she pulls a Distraction Card, she has to answer a question ("Would you rather kiss a jellyfish or step on a crab?") before she repeats the number sequence. Kids won't even realize they're working on their recall skills. But you can remind yours how good she got at this when she's learning her multiplication tables.



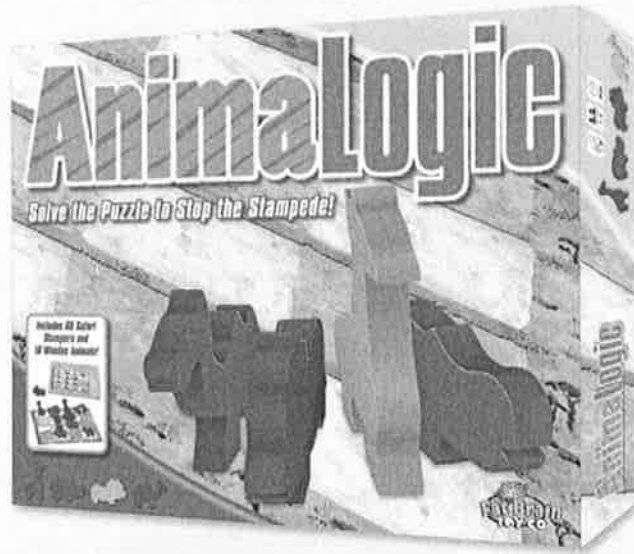
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MindTrap

Ages: 12 and up

Executive functioning skills: Flexible thinking

If your tween or teen likes riddles or word problems, MindTrap may be a great fit. Each card encourages players to think critically about a puzzling question. For instance: "Q: Bob went for a walk without bringing his raincoat or hat or umbrella. How did his hair not get wet?" The answer? "It wasn't raining." No trivia questions here, just tricky riddles. Kids can play individually or in teams, making this a great addition for family game night.



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AnimaLogic

Ages: 5 and up

Executive functioning skills: Planning and prioritizing; flexible thinking; organization

In this animal-theme game, lions, hippos, giraffes and camels need to cross the bridge over the river. The trick is, they can only go in a certain order. Players have to solve the pattern puzzle to help them get to the other side. There are five levels of difficulty in this sequencing challenge. That makes it an activity that will grow with grade-schoolers as they get older and their executive functioning skills improve.



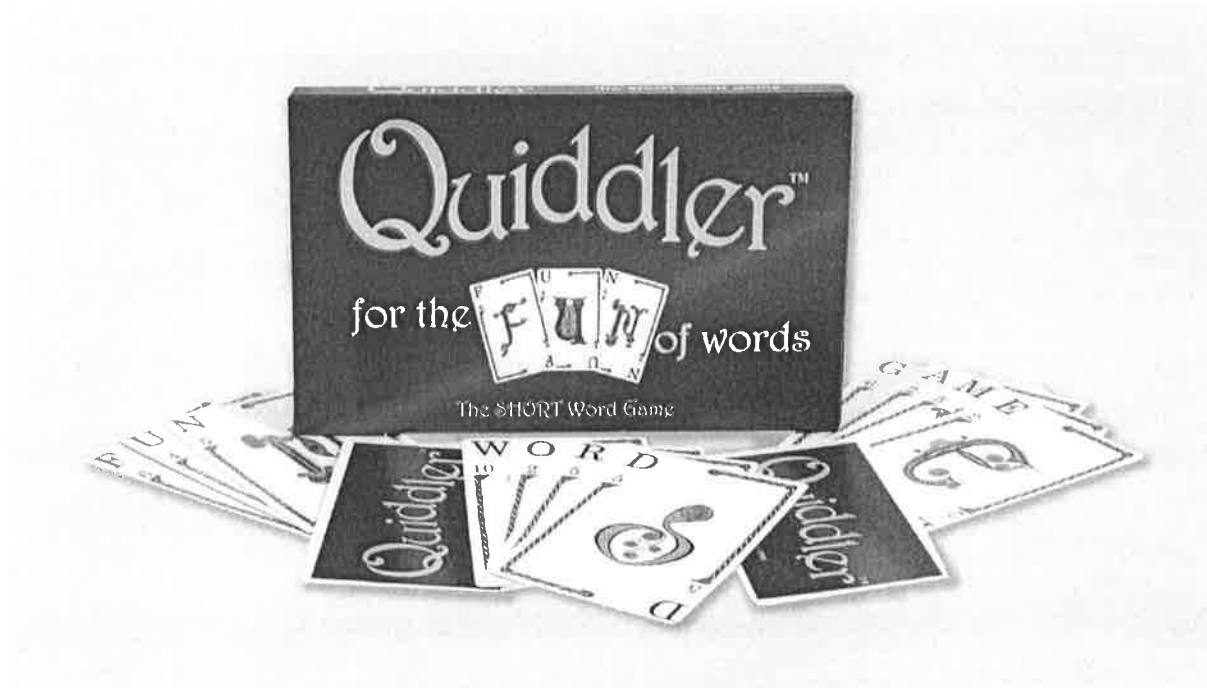
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Snake Oil

Ages: 10 and up

Executive functioning skills: Task initiation; flexible thinking; organization

Here's a great game for kids who love role-playing. With each round, a different Snake Oil player draws a "customer" card. It tells them what character they are—rock star, clown, doctor, etc. The other players draw cards with words that they can combine to make up zany products, like a "Rubber Fish" to sell to that character. Kids have to figure out what the product might do, how to pitch it well, and how their characters might respond. It's a fun way to get them thinking on their feet.



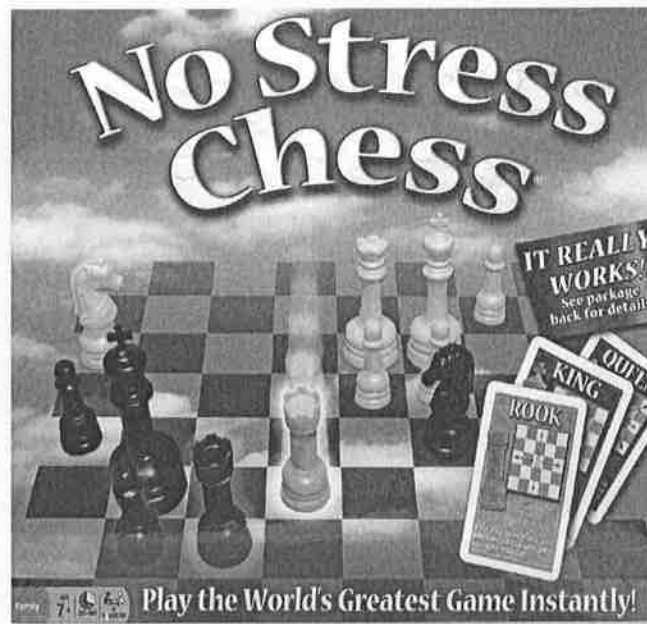
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Quiddler

Ages: 8 and up

Executive functioning skills: Organization; flexible thinking; planning and prioritizing

Imagine a spelling game that doesn't reward players for creating the "hardest" words possible! (Sorry, Scrabble.) In Quiddler, players try to use all their letter cards to spell short words. As the game progresses, players get more cards, so they can create multiple short words or single longer words. For younger kids, Quiddler Junior offers the same spelling challenges but uses shorter words. In both versions, your child gets to flex his flexible-thinking skills while having fun with up to seven other players.



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No Stress Chess

Ages: 7 and up

Executive functioning skills: Planning and prioritizing; organization; task initiation; impulse control; flexible thinking

Classic chess may be *the* best-known strategy game. No Stress Chess teaches kids to play it. A player draws a card that tells her which piece to move. Then it's up to her to choose where the piece should go. Over time, kids develop the logic skills and confidence to execute moves without the cards. Instructions are included for three levels of beginner's play. And kids can flip the board over to play standard chess when they're ready to give it a go.

8 Great Board Games to Help Preschoolers Build Different Skills

Board games can do more than just keep your preschooler occupied. They can help with learning, too. Here are some great board games to help build reading, math and fine motor skills.

7 Board Games to Help Younger Kids Build Math Skills

Practicing math skills *can* be fun—and it doesn't always have to feature numbers or equations. Some board games sneak in counting, sequencing and strategy as your child plays. Beyond classics like Hi Ho! Cherry-O, Connect Four and Yahtzee, these unique board games can help your child practice math skills.

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