

## Board Games for Preschoolers

Preschoolers learn by doing. While playing board games might seem dull compared to electronic media games, children enjoy them. And, they provide kids with an opportunity to learn and practice skills important for success in school. Children learn about rules, taking turns, honesty, winning and losing graciously and luck. Board games offer your preschooler the opportunity to learn color or image/word recognition, matching, counting, and memory skills. They practice fine motor skills each time they grasp a game piece. Research studies show that board games such as Chutes and Ladders result in children showing significant improvements in aspects of basic number skills such as counting, recognizing numbers, numerical estimation and number comprehension.

### Buying Board Games

- Check the suggested age range on the box. Look for games that are designed at your child's level. If the game is too easy, your child will lose interest; if it is too difficult, your child will become discouraged.
- Pick games that are fun.
- Look for easy-to-follow directions.
- Select games that teach at multiple levels, offering room for advancement. This extends the shelf life of the game, saving you money.
- Read on-line reviews for comments from previous buyers.



### Board Games to Try

*Big Top...* is a travel game. Big Top gets pre-readers to notice what's missing in a stack of circus cards. It develops critical thinking and recognition skills that help with letter recognition and reading. Ages 4+. (*Gamewright.*)

*Chutes and Ladders...* is a game that reinforces counting skills while helping your preschooler understand the rewards of doing good deeds as they climb up the ladders and the consequences of naughty ones as they slide down the chutes. Luck and simplicity this a popular game. Ages 3-6. (*Hasbro.*)

*Feed the Kitty...* is a fast-paced dice game that requires no reading. It's the perfect length for shorter attention spans, yet still helps reinforce the importance of patience. This game is fun for preschoolers and gives practice with light counting, following instructions, and taking turns. They'll love that "whoever has the shortest pinkie gets to go first". Ages 4+. (*Gamewright.*)



*Horton Hears a Who! You to the Rescue!...* is a search game. Players put on the Horton hat and race all over the house to find the hidden clovers. The player who rescues the most Whos is the winner. "Horton" teaches cooperative play,

reinforces memory skills, helps develop fine-motor and gross-motor dexterity, and encourages children to get get moving. Ages 4+. (*I Can Do That! Games.*)

*Hi Ho! Cherry-O...* is a counting game for the preschooler where players race to be the first to have 10 cherries in their basket. A low level of competition and some elements of disappointment (when children have to put cherries back or even start over) make this a good beginning game to learn how to overcome setbacks and not quit. It reinforces counting skills and taking turns. Age 3+. (*Hasbro.*)

*Hiss...* involves building snakes from a stack of severed snake cards (some heads, some tails, and some middles). Kids practice pattern recognition, color matching, thinking ahead... even logic. They'll even get in a little exercise as they stretch out, trying to make a match. Ages 4+. (*Gamewright.*)

*Zingo...* is a fast-paced twist on Bingo in which players try to fill their Zingo cards with matching picture tiles. Tiles feature both pictures and words, making it easy for a preschooler to play. Zingo cards are two-sided, allowing for two different levels of competitive game play. The game teaches letter recognition and matching, key precursors to reading. Ages 4+. (*Think Fun.*)

### Getting the Most Out of Board Games

**Teach basic strategy.** When you're playing with your child, explain why you picked a certain card or moved to the blue square. If your child is playing with a friend, consider joining in the first game or two to make sure everyone understands and agrees on the rules.

**Stick (mostly) to the rules.** It's fine for your preschooler to make up new rules at the start of a game, but gently enforce them once they're set. You might say, "Why don't we look at those cards again?" if she takes too many. If you see your child "bending the rules" when playing with another child, wait until later to set your child straight. Then, ask how they would feel if someone was bending the rules to beat them.

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**Don't always let your child win.** A preschooler should taste victory so as not to get discouraged, but you'll do children a disservice if you let them beat you all of the time. Kids need to learn that games are about having fun and doing your best, not just winning. If your child gets upset when losing, you might say, "It feels bad to lose, but that gives someone else a chance to win, and maybe you'll win next time."

**Use the game as an opportunity to teach.** In studies, the experimenter told the child to say the numbers on the spaces through which the token moved. Children who were on the square with a 3 and spun a 2 would say, "4, 5," as they moved.

Another plus for board games is that they get people of different ages to play together. Children learn important things from interacting with older children and adults, making board games a multi-age activity. Some families even have a weekly "game night" where the whole family plays a board game together. This sort of activity builds strong families.



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December 2010