

Kids' Games and Activities: What Are You Waiting For?

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An important part of maintaining your child's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning is to provide a fresh supply of games and activities. Yet, often parents are reluctant to explore new games and activities because of the burden of setting up the activity and learning how to do it. There's nothing worse than trying to figure out how to play a game when you, your child and everybody involved just wants to get started. Things are made worse by the fact that your ability to concentrate is way outmatched by your child who's bored to tears, climbing all over you.

Think about the situation from your child's perspective for a moment. Mom announces that we're going to play a new game.

First Reaction: WOW! Did I hear that right? Mom used the words NEW and GAME together. This is unbelievable. When are we going to play? Right now? After dinner? What am I going to have to do? Is there a catch? Wow! I still can't believe it. Is mom going to play? I bet she is. She has that look. What about dad? I can't believe it. Dad's right here, ready to play. I think we're going to start now. Everybody's going to play the new game right now!

You start opening the package, maybe with an explanation of where you got it, how you heard about it, or the fact that you used to play the same game when you were a little girl (before it was updated 17 times to its latest version, which you have no idea how to play).

2nd Reaction: WOW! Mom's opening the new game. We ARE going to play now. Right now!

You take the game out of the package.

3rd Reaction: Unbelievable! I can't wait to play the new game!

All the pieces are in separate packages. As a small incentive to your child, to give her something to look at while you're glancing over the directions, you attempt to open one of the packages. All the pieces go flying.

4th Reaction: Are we going to have to play the game with wood chips instead of the real pieces since we'll never find all the real pieces?

Everybody goes looking for the pieces. All kinds of things turn up during the search: snack wrappers, the remote control, pocket change. Your husband checks the dates on the coins. Your child asks what he's looking at. Your husband explains that old coins are sometimes worth something. "Some of them are even older than me," he points out.

5th Reaction. When are we going to play the game?

Five or six pieces turn up. You check the directions to see if that's all of them. "They should give you a parts inventory," you inform everyone. A few seconds later, in a slightly whiny voice, your child asks, "What's the matter, mom?" You respond in a matter of fact tone: "Just sit quietly while I read the directions."

6th Reaction. When are we going to play the game?

Half an hour later, somewhere in the middle of a mental fitness training course, your husband is nowhere in sight and your child is wanting to know why horses like apples but dogs don't.

A simple approach to avoid the confusion of learning to play new games is to look over the directions the night before, when your child is sleeping peacefully. It's really that easy.

The only reason you wouldn't want to pursue this sensible approach is that once your child is sleeping, the last

thing you want to do is plan for the next day. You're ready for your free time and that's that. Yet, you know that things go much, much smoother when you're prepared for them. That alone should give you incentive to plan for the next day (even for just 10 minutes). Why go looking all over the house for scissors for an art project, when you could have had that ready the night before? It kind of takes the fun out of it, doesn't it? More importantly, your child has a much better chance of settling comfortably into a game or activity when you've given it some thought in advance, and that's well worth the price of admission.

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