

Help Grow Your Child's Brain. Play Cards!

Playing cards is a fun way to teach kids basic skills such as counting, taking turns, strategy and being a good sport, of course! Card games are also excellent for working memory and visual processing.

Go Fish

Age: 7+

Number of players: 2+

Cards: Standard deck of 52 cards

How to play: Choose a “dealer” to hand out cards. If there are two or three players, each player is dealt seven cards. If there are more people taking part, each player is dealt five cards. The remaining cards are placed face down in a pile. This is the “fish pond.”

Each player sorts their cards into groups of the same number or suit (i.e. group of threes or group of kings), making sure not to show anyone. The “requester” (person to the left of the dealer) starts the game by asking another player for cards that will match his hand. For example, if the requester has two kings, he will ask the other player for kings. If the other player has these cards, he must hand them over. The requester continues asking the same player for more cards until the player does not have the cards he wants. If the player does not have the right cards, he can tell the requester to “Go fish.” The requester then has to take one card from the “fish pond.” The player who told him to “Go fish” becomes the new requester.

Anyone who collects all four cards of a set (i.e. all four eights or all four Queens) puts them face down in front of him. The winner is the first person to have no single cards left, only complete sets. If two people run out of cards together, the player with the most sets wins the game.

Crazy Eights

Age: 5+

Number of players: 2-4

Cards: Standard deck of 52 cards

How to play: In a two-player game, each player is dealt seven cards. In a game with three or four players, each player is dealt five cards. The rest of the deck goes facedown in a pile, with the top card turned up beside it. This is the discard pile. The player to the left of the dealer discards a card from his hand that matches either the number or suit of the top card in the discard pile. For example, if the card is a five of hearts, he could play any heart or any five. If he does not have a matching card, he continues picking up cards from the deck until he gets one that is playable. Eights are wild and can be put down on any suit. For example, an eight could be played to match a heart. The next player must match their card to the number or suit that the eight was meant to cover. Play continues with players matching the card at the top of the discard pile. The first player to use up all his cards wins. If the deck runs out before the game is over, the discard pile can be used.

Old Maid

Age: 5+

Number of players: 3+

Cards: Standard deck of 52 cards is used, but with one queen removed. This leaves a pair of queens in one colour and a single queen (the old maid) in the other colour.

How to play: All cards are dealt face down to players. Some players may have more cards than others, but this is okay. Each player sorts their cards into matching pairs of the same number or suit, keeping them hidden from other players. Players holding pairs of matching cards lay them down on the table face up. If anyone has three matching cards, he only puts down one pair and keeps the spare card. If anyone has four matching cards, he puts down two pairs.

The player to the left of the dealer offers his cards to the player on his left, who cannot see them. That player selects a random card from his hand. If the new card he picks matches any of the cards he already has, he can put down the pair. If not, he keeps it. He then offers his cards to the player on his left. This continues until all the cards have been put down in pairs, except the Old Maid, which is left alone and cannot be paired. The person left holding this card is the old maid and loses the game.

War

Age: 6+

Number of players: 2

Cards: Standard deck of 52 cards

How to play: All cards are dealt to the two players and kept face down. Neither player must look at their cards. Both players turn over the top card of their piles and put them face up in the centre of the table, beside the other player's card. Whoever has turned over the highest ranking card takes both cards and adds them to the bottom of his pile. This continues until two cards of the same value (i.e. two sevens) are put down together. The game is now in a state of "war." To continue, both players take two new cards and put one face down on top of the card they have already placed in the middle and one face up. Whoever puts down the higher ranking face up card wins all six. The game is won by the player who collects all of the cards.

Concentration/Memory

Age: 3+

Number of players: 2+

Cards: Standard deck of 52 cards

How to play: Older children can use the whole deck of 52 cards, but younger children may want to use fewer cards. Make sure the deck you use is made up of pairs. Shuffle and spread cards face down on a table between the players. Cards can be laid in a random pattern or in a grid. The object of the game is to find matching pairs. Players take turns turning over two cards and letting all the players see them and study them. If they are not a matching pair, try to remember what and where they are, then turn them back over. The next player turns over two cards. If they are a matching pair, that player removes them from the table and keeps them, and then has another turn. When all cards have been removed from the table, each player counts up the number of cards they have collected. The player with the most cards wins.

Snap

Age: 6+

Number of players: 2+

Cards: Standard deck of 52 cards. Two decks can be used for more than three players.

How to play: Choose a card dealer. This player deals all the cards around the group until there are no cards left. Some players may have more cards than others, but this is okay. Players do not look at their cards but keep them face down in individual stacks.

To begin, the player to the left of the dealer turns his top card over and places it face up next to his own pile. The next player does the same. (Note: If a player runs out of face down cards, he can shuffle his face up pile and use them.) This continues until a player notices that two cards on top of the face up piles are the same, such as two jacks or two sixes. The first player to notice and shout out “snap!” receives all cards in both of the matched piles and adds them to the bottom of his face down pile. The game continues with a new player turning a card over.

If two players shout “snap!” at the same time, they form a snap pool with the two matched piles of cards placed together in the centre. Play continues until someone turns up a card that matches the top card in the snap pool. Whoever shouts “snap pool!” first takes the whole pool and adds it to the bottom of their face down pile. If a player mistakenly shouts “snap!” he has two options: 1) give every player one card from his face down pile, or 2) his entire face down pile becomes a new snap pool. If a player has no more face up or face down cards he is out of the game. The winner of the game is the player with all of the cards.

Pig

Age: 6+

Number of players: 3-13

Cards: Standard deck of 52 cards for up to 13 players

How to play: For each player, take four of a kind (cards of the same number or suit) out of the deck and put aside the remaining cards. For example, if there are three players, take three groups of four matching cards, such as four queens, four sevens and four aces. Shuffle all these cards and deal them so each player has four. Players can look at their cards privately.

To begin, each person discards one card from their hand and puts it face down on the table in front of them. When everyone has a card on the table, they will simultaneously pass their card to the player on the left and pick up the new card that has been passed to them. When a player collects four of a kind, he puts his finger on his nose. If another player notices this, they must also place their finger on their nose, regardless of whether they have four of a kind or not. The last player to put a finger on their nose gets a letter – first P, then I, then G. The first player to reach “P-I-G” is the loser.

Rummy

Age: 7+

Number of players: 2-6

Cards: Standard deck of 52 cards

How to play: The object of the game is to get rid of your cards as you group them into “melds.” A meld is a set of three or four of a kind, or a “run” (three or more cards in order of the same suit, such as the three, four and five of hearts).

The “dealer” shuffles the deck and deals the cards one at a time to each player as follows: Two players get 10 cards each; three or four players get seven cards each; five or six players get 6 cards each. The remaining cards are placed face down in the middle of the table and serve as the “stock” pile. The top card of the stock pile is turned face up and set next to the stock pile; this card begins the “discard” pile. Each player then groups all matching cards and runs together in their hand, which makes it easier to see the melds in their hand. Do not show the other players.

The player to the left of the dealer plays first by taking the top card from either the stock pile or the discard pile. If the player has a meld, he will lay it down on the table so all cards in the meld are visible. Then he will discard another card from his hand by placing it face up in the discard pile. Players can also place a card down on any existing meld if they have a card that matches the meld or if they draw a card that matches the meld. For example, a player could lay a queen down onto an existing meld of three queens.

The game continues clockwise around the table with players drawing a card from the stock or discard pile, making melds and laying down a card in the discard pile. The first player to get rid of their cards wins the round. Win the entire game by being the first to win five rounds.

Slapjack

Age: 4+

Number of players: 2-5

Cards: Standard deck of 52 cards

How to play: Choose a “dealer” to deal the cards face down to each player. Players cannot look at their cards, but instead put them into piles. Some players may have more cards than others, which is okay. The player to the left of the dealer begins by turning the card on the top of his pile face up in the centre of the table. The game continues with each player adding a card to the face up pile. When a jack is turned, players try to be the first to “slap” their hand over the face up pile. Whoever slaps their hand on the face up pile first gets the entire stack of cards and adds it to the bottom of their pile. The player to their left starts a new face up pile and play continues. If a player has no more cards, they have one more chance to stay in the game by slapping the next jack that appears. If they miss this opportunity, they are out of the game for good. The last person in the game is the winner.

I Doubt It

Age: 6+

Number of players: 6-12

Cards: Standard deck of 52 cards

How to play: Choose a “dealer” to deal all cards, one at a time, to each player. Some players will have more cards than others, which is okay. Players can organize their hand of cards as they please, but do not show any other players. The player to the left of the dealer begins the game starting with aces. He places the card(s) face down in the centre of the table saying “two aces” or whatever the desired number of cards are. Players can lay up to four cards of the card they are required to discard. The game continues clockwise to the next player, who will discard twos. The following player discards threes, and so on. Players announce their cards as they lay them. Start again with aces after kings have been played. Keep in mind that players don’t have to play the cards they announce. They can be lying. Even if you do not have the required card to discard, you must put down and name a card.

After each turn, allow a moment to let anyone challenge the player by saying “I doubt it.” Remember to challenge a player only if you think he might not be discarding the cards he says he is. When a challenge is voiced, the challenger can look at the discarded cards. If they match what the person who played them said, the challenger picks up all cards in the discard pile and adds them to his personal pile. If the cards are not what the person said they were, the player who discarded them must pick up the entire discard pile. The player to lay down his entire hand of cards first will win the game.