

The Power of Playing Games And Incorporating Games Into Your Home School Routine and Intervention Plan

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“All children can be reached by playing games.”

The Rubik’s Cube was first spotted by Tom Kremer in 1979 at the International Toy Fair. Though the puzzle was invented by Erno Rubik, a fellow Hungarian, it was Tom’s foresight and ingenuity that succeeded in bringing Rubik’s Cube to the international market by 1980. It became the most quickly selling toy ever, grossing over 300 million units in the first three years alone. This, however, was merely one of many accomplishments Tom attained with the power of games.

Tom initially discovered the captivating nature of games in 1960, during his time as a soccer coach. It was this period that inspired him to teach emotionally and behaviorally disturbed children in a “special needs school” in London, England. Within three years, he succeeded in forming a reputable soccer league of the special schools.

While teaching, Tom noticed that some children were not responding to traditional instructional methods and would close their eyes when asked to read. He decided to use another recreational approach to the learning struggle: after placing words upon a soccer ball, he would write one of those words on the board and see who could find it first on the ball. The feedback from his students for this game was overwhelmingly positive. Tom went on to start his own toy company—Seven Towns, Ltd.—and has had a successful career inventing toys and educational games.

I recently had the privilege of talking to Tom in a phone interview. He shared the power of using games to impact children’s emotional, social, and cognitive abilities. He said, “All children can be reached by playing games.” To learn more about Tom’s heart for children who struggle with learning, [visit his website](#).

The Brain Workout

Did you know that working memory and processing speed are two of the most common weaknesses in individuals with learning challenges—and that playing games is an excellent way to strengthen these areas?

The brain training exercises that are a key component of the Equipping Minds Cognitive Enhancement Curriculum have the same impact that Kremer saw with the games he created. As part of this program, students participate in engaging, interactive games and activities. These games are used to find the specific places in which the brain struggles with working memory, processing speed, perceptual reasoning, or verbal comprehension. From there, the parent can hone in on areas of difficulty and “give the brain a workout.” Much like an athlete trains at the gym, the therapist uses the games and activities in this curriculum to stretch and strengthen the brain and to “make the brain sweat!”

Can You “Spot” the Possibilities?

If you have been to Wal-Mart, or Target, or even visited a Chick-fil-A and purchased a kid’s meal, you may have received one of my favorite games: *Spot It*. This matching/memory game is part of the [Blue Orange Games](#), which encourage having fun together as a family.)

I want to take you beyond the “typical” ways to play *Spot It* and show you some ways to use it to build processing, visual memory, auditory memory, working memory, and long-term memory. These are just a few of the endless possibilities for this fun game!

Visual Memory, Working Memory, and Processing

- Show one *constant* card.
- Say the objects on the *constant* card: “a green snake, a blue dolphin, a pink pig”
- Have each player draw a card, find the match on the *constant* card, and say “I see [number + color + animal/object].” They should always use a full sentence like, “I see two blue dolphins.”
- After the players have matched each card to the *constant* card, turn the constant card over and recall the animals on the constant card.
- Players can take turns or play competitively. I recommend taking turns initially.

Auditory Memory, Working Memory, and Processing

- Do **not** show the one *constant* card to the players.
- Choose someone to say what is on the card: “I see two green turtles.” Keep the constant card hidden.
- Have each player draw a card, find the match on the *constant* card, and say “;I see [number + color + animal/object].” They should always use a full sentence like, “I see two blue dolphins.”
- After the players have matched each card to the *constant* card, turn the *constant* card over and recall the animals on the *constant* card.
- Players can take turns or play competitively. I recommend taking turns initially.

Long Term Memory Recall

- Recall all of the objects on the cards in one minute or longer. Keep a record of the objects mentioned.

Comparison

- When you find the items that match, compare the sizes. The animals are small, medium, or large.
- Compare the different objects by color and size. Are the animals dangerous or friendly?

Categorization/Classification: Foundational to Higher Order Thinking and Strong Long-term Memory

- Place nine cards on the table.
- Do a systematic search by starting at the top left card and move left to right. Classify or group the objects into categories. Discuss what is similar and what is different on the cards.
- *Spot It* “Animal” categories could be 1) water animals, 2) land animals, 3) animals that fly, or 1) mammal, 2) reptile, 3) bird, 4) amphibian, 5) fish, 6) arthropod.
- *Spot It* “Party” and “Camping” categories could be 1) inanimate (nonliving), 2) animate (living), 3) vegetation, or 1) things you would wear, 2) things you would use or classify according to color.

Reading, Writing, and Grammar

- Have students tell you what they see. The parent and/or teacher can write it on a dry erase board. The student can then read it.
- Have the students write what they see: “I see two red balloons.”

Do you play *Spot It*? Have you invented any creative ways to play the game? I want to hear your ideas!