Board Games to Strengthen Couples and Families

What, really? Board games?

Maybe it’s been awhile since you last played and enjoyed a board game. Perhaps you gave up on board games after too many drawn-out Monopoly battles filled with bickering and frustration over how long other players took on their turns. Or you got bogged down by complicated rulebooks for games that, in the end, weren’t much fun.

The thing is, board game developers didn’t quit on us. Instead, they adapted, and now board games are much more accessible and engaging. Over the last 10-15 years, an incredible array of new games have become available. They’re easier to learn and more interactive, and with so many options available, there’s probably a very good game out there for you! Plus, in a busy world of screens and electronic devices, board games are a refreshing change of pace, because they are played in the moment, with people who are right in front of you. For these reasons, board games are actually more popular than ever! And because of the enjoyable interaction that board games can facilitate, a good board game might even help strengthen your most important relationships.

Below are some highly regarded board game options for couples, families and larger groups. Included are many newer games and a few classics.

For Couples

A recommended classic: “Scrabble”. Still very fun and simple.

Newer games:

“Code Names: Duet” - a cooperative word game in which your partner gives a clue word, which you use to “unlock” one or more words in the solution grid.

“Patchwork” - a competitive, tetris-like game in which you draft tiles from a pool and try to build the best quilt.

“Carcassone” (2-4 players). Each turn, you get a four-sided tile and place it on a landscape map of fields, roads and villages. Then you can place one of your workers (meeples) on the tile to “claim” a feature and score points. Draw a tile, place a worker, score points. Can that really be fun? Ask the millions of people who own this game!

“Seven Wonders Duel” - a bit more complex, but highly rated. This game features tile drafting to collect resources and build the best collection of wonders of the ancient world. And it has great artwork!

“Bananagrams” (2+ players). Quick, easy, and fun. Deal everyone a bunch of letter tiles; then race to make a crossword of actual words. First one done says “peel” and everyone takes a new letter, and the race continues.

For Families

A recommended classic: “Clue”. Great theme (solving a murder case), easy to play, and a very good teacher of deductive reasoning. (Note: parents with children younger than 10 might like a similar game called “Outfoxed”).

Newer games:

“Forbidden Island” - a very good cooperative game involving treasure gathering on a flooded island. Work together to escape before the seas submerge it completely.

“The Mind” - a cooperative card game. The group has to discard cards from their hands in the cards’ numerical order. Only thing is, there’s no talking...only mind reading!

“Zombie Kidz Evolution” - a cooperative game in which you play as schoolchildren repelling zombies from their school. Easy at first, but as players level up, the challenge increases.

“Ticket to Ride”. Played on a big map. Each turn, you can either take train cards or build travel route segments using the train cards previously collected. It’s pretty much that simple. Somehow, it’s a blast, and there’s great suspense as you try to complete your designated routes before the game ends.

“Timeline”. Competitive history game. Simply place one of your historical event cards among the event cards already played. But it has to be in the correct sequence! Even grandparents will want to try this one!

“Parks” - a “hiker-placement” game where you’re collecting beautiful park cards to score points. This is a very nice looking game that’s also fun to play!

“Catan” or “Settlers of Catan”. A bit more complex, this highly interactive game involves gathering resources to build settlements to score points. The trading system means everyone participates on each player’s turn. Thus, no down time! This game helped ignite the exciting board game revolution we’re now in. It’s still a very good game, though there are newer options that perhaps improve upon Catan’s greatness.

For Larger Groups

A recommended classic: “Cranium”. Not very old, but it borrows from several classics, including “Charades”, “Trivial Pursuit”, and “Pictionary”. A nice mix of hands-on and mental challenges.

New Games:

“Just One” - a super simple, but very fun and engaging cooperative word game for groups. There are 13 cards, each with a word. Players submit one-word clues, but any repeats are cancelled. The guesser only sees the unique clues.

“Wits and Wagers” - trivia game where you don’t have to have the best answer. You just have to bet on the best answer provided by any player in your game. How many m&m’s are in a one-pound bag? Some fun guesswork is involved.

“Sushi Go Party”. Yes, that’s the title. It’s a card-drafting game where you try to collect the highest scoring menu of Japanese foods. Super fun. East to learn.

“Pit” - fast-paced, highly interactive card game. You’re a commodities trader trying to corner the market on one particular resource. Make trades fast enough, and you win! Note: this one gets loud, but in a good way!

“Dixit” - similar to the popular “Apples to Apples” game, but involving vivid art pieces. Simple to teach and play.

Where to Shop

Just Games in Penfield, 1601 Penfield Road, #750, in Panorama Plaza.

Millenium Games in Henrietta, 3047 West Henrietta Road, north of Jefferson Rd

Target Stores; Wegmans

Note that local game shops like Just Games and Millenium Games are also great places to meet other game enthusiasts and try out new games at public board game events.

How to Integrate Games into Daily Life

1. Make it part of the routine. It really helps to play a good board game multiple times before you put it back into storage. The rules and setup stay fresh. You can explore various strategies before you forget them. Some games have variations you can try out. And perhaps everyone will eventually get a chance to win it once.
2. Have a set area to play. A well lit, comfortable game space outside the regular flow of the household will help support regular play experiences.
3. Find a friendly local game store with public game-playing events and get involved! Most of these stores have free game nights, when you can bring your game and/or try someone else’s. Just Games also has a lending library of games available, for free use inside the store and for rental.

Online Resources for more information about board games

1. [www.BoardGameGeek.com](http://www.boardgamegeek.com/) website - superb resource for game recommendations, reviews, how to play videos, game discussion groups, and a place to buy used games. 2. “Watch it Played” videos with Rodney Smith - easy to find online. Learn how to play any of the popular games in 10-15 minutes!

Issues that Arise

As you try out board games with your partner, friends, and family, here are a few things to keep in mind to ensure a positive experience!

Complexity

Some games are very complex, and thus hard to learn and set up. Many of them are great games but they are probably NOT the best ones for you to start out with or to introduce to people who aren’t used to complex games. The [BoardGameGeek.com](http://boardgamegeek.com/) website has a complexity rating system for games. They use the term “weight”. Any game with a weight above 2.00 is going to feel a bit complex to newbies. (Note, most of the games listed above are below 2.00 in weight).

When someone always wins...

Sometimes, one person is just better at a game. They really get it. Or maybe they take the game more seriously and thus concentrate on strategy and details more, and thus win alot. If that becomes a problem, the solution could be to switch it up. Try something new that plays differently. Maybe it’s time to play a cooperative game and work together. That way, you win or lose together! Another option may be to adjust your level of seriousness. If you like playing a game alot AND always win, and you want your playing partner to keep playing it, maybe dial down how intense you play. Don’t consider every possible option before you take your turn, just take your turn in a more streamlined manner. That’ll help in two ways: you’ll keep the game moving along, which is nice, and you’ll probably leave some interesting strategy open for someone else to discover. Who knows, your partner might even win! Remember, when you’re playing with people you love and you lose, someone you love just won a game!

“Take that”

This is when a player totally derails or stifles another player’s strategy.

Competitive games come with varying levels of player interaction, where one person’s game actions directly affect the other player’s standing in the game. Think of “Risk” as an extreme example: you win by conquering your opponents and wiping them off the map! Some gamers like a high degree of “take that” because it adds to the suspense and competition. Others do not like it, either because they dislike when their effort gets nullified by another player or because they don’t enjoy stifling their friends or family members in any manner, even in a game.

Pay attention to this factor. Game developers have been conscious of it for over a decade and they now offer games of many levels of interaction to suit your preferences relating to “take that”. Cooperative games eliminate such conflict, but there are many competitive games too where players can do their own thing, have fun without getting smooshed, and at the end find out if they scored the most points. If you browse the recommendations forum on [www.boardgamegeek.com](http://www.boardgamegeek.com/), you’ll find numerous threads relating to games which minimize (or enhance) these kinds of player interactions.

“Alpha-gamer”

This issue occurs in cooperative games, when one player directs everyone else’s moves. Alpha-gamer syndrome often shows up when veteran gamers teach newbies a new game. The alpha-gamer starts directing everyone. Some games are notorious for bringing out the alpha gamer problem. “Forbidden Island” is an example. Whenever you teach a game or find yourself initiating one, remember to give your playing partner(s) a chance to think for themselves. They’ll enjoy learning the game and its strategies just as you did when you started playing it. Let them make mistakes. Ask them if they want help, but expect that they’ll want advice only enough to learn the rules and (maybe) not get completely crushed on their first try. If it’s competitive and you know you’re certain to win, maybe ask them, “Do you want me to play a bit less competitively, while you’re getting a feel for the game?” They may say no, but at least you gave them the option.

Happy gaming!