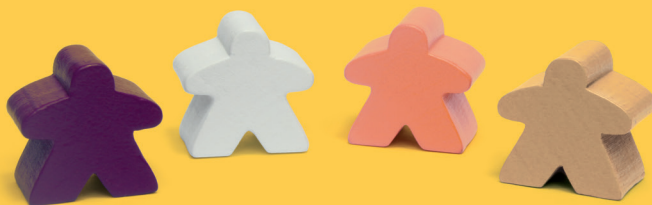


FREE
Sample Extract

THE
BOARD
GAME
FAMILY



**RECLAIM YOUR CHILDREN
FROM THE SCREEN**

ELLIE DIX

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INTRODUCTION

WHY YOU NEED BOARD GAMES AS PART OF YOUR FAMILY LIFE

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

This book is aimed at parents who want to spend more time with their children, and enjoy it. When you have older children in the house, it is not unusual to go through an entire week or more without having a proper conversation with them. Indeed, most conversations with young adults are transactional: arranging lifts, asking for money, negotiating meals ... For many parents, the in-depth debriefs about the school day, the anxious heart-to-hearts about worries and the excited outpourings of triumphs and successes disappeared around the child's tenth birthday (if they ever did happen). Although it may be normal to barely speak to your children, that doesn't mean it is right for us as parents or for them. However, it isn't easy to just strike up a proper conversation with someone who is permanently shielded by headphones and giving off 'leave me alone' signals. For conversation to flow naturally, we need to spend good chunks of time face-to-face with our children. You can't have a proper conversation through a door.

It can be challenging to share time with your children, particularly if they've reached that awkward stage at which they appear to be doing what they can to avoid you. The amount of time I want to spend with my own children can depend on what mood they are in, how many jobs I have to do and whether I'm equipped with a nice cold glass of my favourite tippie. But even when life is busy and tensions are high, I yearn for some quality time with them. I expect you do too; that is why you are here.

THE BOARD GAME FAMILY

This book will help you to reconnect with your children, through introducing board games to the family home. I understand that the idea of your kids willingly skipping downstairs when the 'family bell' sounds on a Sunday afternoon, calling excitedly for their younger siblings and declaring that they'd just *love* to embark on a three-hour epic game with the whole family may have you snorting tea out of your nose. So let me make a few points about the realities of family gaming:

- I do not live in the Little House on the Prairie and I know you don't either.
- You do not have to play long games, ever. Unless you want to. There are loads of brilliant games that fit happily into a 20-minute slot.
- You don't have to play games as a whole family. Nobody should ever be forced into playing.
- You don't need to set a pre-scheduled time for playing.
- Family games are so much more than they used to be, so abandon your preconceptions. The choice and quality available will blow your mind (and your children's).
- If you follow the ideas in this book, game playing will become normalised in your family. At some point your children will bolt downstairs to play and you'll not even raise an eyebrow, let alone splutter out your tea.

Through reading this book, you'll find out how to hook your children into board gaming through clever exposure and stealth tactics. You'll discover your own love of playing games and, in the process, develop your skills as a player and as a teacher of board games. You'll learn how to navigate through the choppy seas of sibling rivalry, minimising the arguments and the tears, and promoting gamesmanship. You'll modify and redesign those games you already own to better suit the family. You'll discover your sweet spots, finding games that work well for you and your children that don't break the bank. And, crucially, you'll become a master of the metagame: the most important game of all.

This is *not* an encyclopaedia of games. Although I will mention lots of different games and point you in the direction of ones that your family might enjoy, this book is not designed as a reference guide to every game you may ever want to play. There are thousands of new games released every year, and I won't even play 1 per cent of them (and I play a *lot* of games). There are already some outstanding resources available for you to conduct your own research, so I'll point you in the right direction and show you where to look.

When I mention a game in the book, it will be to illustrate a point. Don't expect full explanations of rules or detailed reviews because you won't get them here. Any game which is set in ***bold italics*** is listed in the appendix, where each entry includes a brief overview of the game and key information about game length, player count, etc. To find out more about these games, you can search for video and blog reviews online, where you'll find play-throughs, reviews and explanations of the rules. The appendix is designed to be an aid to the discussion in this book, rather than a go-to reference for all things board game related.

WHY BOARD GAMES?



So why board games? There are other ways to engage teenagers in family activities. Other hobbies do exist. You could construct model aircraft, strip and rebuild a car engine, play basketball or do scrapbooking ... But board games are different; they are special. Here's why:

- The bar to entry is very low. You don't need special training or certification. Board games don't rely on any special skills or expertise and you don't need to have played a hundred different games to be able to teach someone how to play one. Most games are designed to be picked up, learned and played quite quickly by those who have never touched them before. While you may come across some real board game geeks, you certainly don't have to be one to join in.

THE BOARD GAME FAMILY

- There is a huge amount of variety within board gaming. The types of experience you have while playing games, the differences in mechanics, themes, artwork, characters and components are truly mind-boggling. Games vary in length and complexity. Different games require different skills and knowledge for success. There are games to suit everyone.
- Board games are portable and easy to store. You don't need to take over the loft, as you might with a miniature railway set. You can grab a game from the cupboard and set it up in minutes.
- There is no major long-term commitment. Adults may have grand plans about huge projects to embark on with their children, but even when initially greeted with enthusiasm, the project may easily outlive a teenage attention span (and possibly an adult one too). One rainy day of trying to build a treehouse might be the beginning and end of a gloriously billed parent-child project. Board games have no such issue; each play is a complete experience in itself.
- Board gaming is an indoor pursuit. In the UK it rains. And for months of the year it gets dark early. You may love mountain biking as a family, but it isn't always weather-appropriate. On those long, dark, wet evenings, board games will not let you down.
- Board games will fit into your day. You can select the game according to the number of players you have and the time you want to spend. You can select a game that you can play in half an hour or that takes a full afternoon. Set-up time is minimal. You can grab a game and be up and running quickly.
- Once you own a game, you can play it over and over again: it's an unlimited resource. You aren't restricted to a certain number of plays before the game becomes useless. So if you launch into a game and you're not feeling it, you can pack it away and pick another, with no wastage and no cost.

WHY YOU NEED BOARD GAMES AS PART OF YOUR FAMILY LIFE

- Board games increase interaction and boost relationships.¹ When you play games, players focus on one another, but within the safety and structure of the game. To be successful, you learn to communicate effectively so that you can accomplish your objectives.
- Playing games can increase your awareness of others. Players learn to truly listen to obtain information about other players. The timbre, pitch, tone and volume of the voice gives indications of how they are feeling about their moves. A player's body language - like switching the order of the cards in their hand, or becoming unnaturally still, or the direction of their gaze - gives micro-clues to their possible next plays and overall strategy.
- Board gaming is inclusive. Anyone can play. All ages can play together. Many disabilities can also be catered for. Children can compete on a level playing field with their parents. With the right games, strength, age, physical ability and prior knowledge will give you no discernible advantage.
- Playing games improves memory formation² and cognitive skills,³ increases processing speed,⁴ develops logic and reasoning skills,⁵ improves critical thinking,⁶ boosts spatial reasoning,⁷ improves

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- 1 Lawrence Robinson, Melinda Smith, Jeanne Segal and Jennifer Shubin, The benefits of play for adults, *Help Guide* [blog] (November 2018). Available at: <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/benefits-of-play-for-adults.htm>.
 - 2 'Nothing lights up the brain like play. Three-dimensional play fires up the cerebellum, puts a lot of impulses into the frontal lobe - the executive portion - helps contextual memory be developed.' 'Stuart Brown: play is more than fun', *TED.com* [video] (12 March 2018). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HHwXlcHcTHc>.
 - 3 Health Fitness Revolution, Top 10 health benefits of board games, *Health Fitness Revolution* [blog] (15 May 2015). Available at: <http://www.healthfitnessrevolution.com/top-10-health-benefits-board-games/>.
 - 4 Allyson P. Mackey et al., Differential effects of reasoning and speed training in children, *Developmental Science*, 14(3) (2011): 582-590.
 - 5 Jennie Pennant and Liz Woodham, Developing logical thinking: the place of strategy games, *NRICH Maths* (November 2013). Available at: <https://nrich.maths.org/10019>.
 - 6 Gwen Dewar, Board games for kids: can they teach critical thinking? *Parenting Science* [blog] (n.d.). Available at: <https://www.parentingscience.com/board-games-for-kids.html>.
 - 7 Shen-Li Lee, How to help children develop spatial reasoning skills, *Figur8* [blog] (8 February 2017). Available at: <https://www.figur8.net/2017/02/08/developing-spatial-reasoning-skills/>.

verbal and communication skills,⁸ increases attention and concentration,⁹ teaches problem solving,¹⁰ develops confidence¹¹ and improves decision-making.

- Playing games teaches competitiveness within a limited domain. The family learns to play to win but they don't *need* to win. Everyone gets used to experiencing defeat; games involve failure on a manageable scale.
- Playing games can increase our consideration of and respect for others. A common parental mantra is, 'You wouldn't like it if your sister did that to you' and with the fast pace of turn-by-turn action in board games, your children can see the implications of this phrase being played out in real-time. 'Treat your brother as you want him to treat you' has a lot more meaning if the tables are going to turn in the next 30 seconds. Through games we learn to consider the impact of our actions on others.
- Board games provide players with challenge. We strive to improve our own performance by experimentation. Mistakes are remembered and learned from. While beginner's luck may occur from time to time, usually players who have had the most experience at playing a game will be the most successful. Players learn that the time taken on refining their strategy and game play will reap benefits in the future.

8 John Leana, Sam Illingworth and Paul Wake, Unhappy families: using tabletop games as a technology to understand play in education, *Research in Learning Technology*, 26 (2018). Available at: <https://journal.alt.ac.uk/index.php/rlt/article/view/2027>.

9 See: <https://www.scholastic.com/parents/kids-activities-and-printables/activities-for-kids/arts-and-craft-ideas/benefits-board-games.html>.

10 Damian Corless, Teaching life skills using board games? It's child's play ... *Independent.ie* (1 November 2010). Available at: <https://www.independent.ie/life/family/learning/teaching-life-skills-using-board-games-its-childs-play--26790410.html>.

11 Jean Rhodes, 10 reasons mentors should play cards with their mentees, *The Chronicle of Evidence-Based Mentoring* [blog] (12 April 2015). Available at: <https://www.evidencebasedmentoring.org/play-cards/>.

- Playing games has proven health benefits¹² as it increases laughter¹³ and reduces stress, which boosts the immune system and lowers blood pressure.¹⁴

All this potential from a few dusty boxes lurking at the back of a cupboard.

You may come to this book with preconceptions about board gaming. Unless you have played some of the new games that have been published in the last few years, these will likely come from your own experiences of board gaming as a child. But the world of board games is very different now. The rise of crowdfunding has had a huge impact on tabletop games, sparking a surge in innovation and allowing hobby game designers to get their creations out into the world. In the same way that social media has driven a shake-up of traditional journalism, so has crowdfunding forced the big game publishers to get creative. This isn't a renaissance of board gaming; it has *never* been this good.¹⁵ Inventive mechanics, clever interactions, interesting themes and beautiful components will draw you in and get you hungry for more. If you go to a game convention or a specialist game shop, you'll see people from every walk of life. Board gaming is magnetic and indiscriminate in its attraction. It's time to banish your assumptions and get ready for the ride of your life.

12 Alessandro Viggiano et al., Kaledo, a board game for nutrition education of children and adolescents at school: cluster randomized controlled trial of healthy lifestyle promotion, *European Journal of Pediatrics*, 174(2) (2015): 217-228.

13 Lawrence Robinson, Melinda Smith and Jeanne Segal, Laughter is the best medicine, *Help Guide* [blog] (November 2018). Available at: <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/laughter-is-the-best-medicine.htm>.

14 See <http://www.healthfitnessrevolution.com/top-10-health-benefits-board-games/>.

15 Mason Boycott-Owen, After books and vinyl, board games make a comeback, *The Observer* (13 May 2018). Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/may/12/millennials-drive-board-games-revival>.



WHY NOW?

It seems that everyone is spending more time on their smartphones or other devices and less time communicating face to face. Young people are growing up in increasingly digital environments and some are suffering from reduced social skills, difficulty sleeping and, in some cases, technology addiction. As adults, we too turn to screens for our entertainment and relaxation. There are families all over the country in which people are sharing experiences with their smartphones, rather than with each other. Children are growing up in a world in which this is the new normal. But it seems obvious that it shouldn't be normal. For how long should we let this go on before we look back, assess the real damage and understand the cost?

It feels like every week a new study emerges warning about the consequences of our children's reliance on smartphones: from social isolation to concentration problems, bullying, bad language and exposure to pornography. Children as young as 12 are eligible for treatment for gaming addiction on the NHS.¹⁶ The World Health Organization has officially classified 'gaming disorder' as a disease,¹⁷ and we have heard that the more time people spend on social media, the lonelier they are likely to become.

Technology is here to stay. We aren't going to reverse back to a 'simpler time' nor would most of us want to. Development will speed up, not slow down. What needs to change is our relationship with technology: our reliance on it and our life outside of it. We need to find ways to manage digital technologies around our relationships, not the other way around. Dr Richard Graham, clinical futurist and psychiatrist at Nightingale Hospital, runs the UK's first technology addiction service. He says, 'Clearly new technologies are not just blindly positive for all,

16 *The Telegraph*, NHS to treat child gaming addicts as young as 12 isolated from friends (31 July 2018). Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/07/31/nhs-treat-child-gaming-addicts-young-12-isolated-friends/>.

17 See: <https://www.who.int/features/qa/gaming-disorder/en/>.

and critically, knowing when not to use devices may be a cornerstone to digital-wellbeing.¹⁸

Today, the majority of parents will have grown up before the internet, the rise of smartphones and the ubiquity of Wi-Fi. When we were growing up, we had to entertain ourselves, make our own fun and experience boredom. But this was a while ago and many of us have forgotten how we used to entertain ourselves, how we discovered information and how we communicated with friends. Today's young adults were born into a time when the internet was mainstream. They've not known a different world. In a very short space of time, all parents will be of the internet generation. Nobody will have even those hazy and rose-tinted memories of life before widespread technology. If we, today's parents, don't make an effort to create rich offline experiences for our families, how will our children be able to do the same for their own children when they are parents? As the bridging generation - who were children pre-internet and parents with internet - we are in a unique position to challenge and define the new world order. We can't stop the march of technology, but we can establish its place within our families. Fear and panic may help us to educate our children about the perils of the online world, but it won't teach them the joys of the offline one.

As parents, we recognise the problem, but many of us don't know how to shift the balance. The advice that is commonly given to parents centres around imposing restrictions: taking away smartphones, reducing screen time, installing blocks and locks, enforcing curfews, banning certain apps, but when you remove these things there is a massive screen-sized hole left in the fabric of family life. There is very little practical guidance for parents regarding how to plug that hole. If you restrict your children's methods of communicating and entertaining themselves, you need a good plan that will fulfil these needs in other ways.

18 Richard Graham, A cure for the fear of missing out? *Huff Post* [blog] (22 May 2016).

Available at: https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-richard-graham/fear-of-missing-out_b_7349230.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAN5VCjNWc6HgrH9-mswKML5Y2rU8d1L3iH3jbh14RbQTFmil0QNm6ZgTaU8MjEeTiQ9850cZS-tTMrB6u136GMgJ_d-ss_t_wxhRp_GO3rDFGyzx9b_z0M_X3vaoQMEy4gkj1Y_LSQ5Zf3jAzFq082gqFAKfCti4kLjhwp4CYHlo

To start with, it is time to be honest with ourselves about our own relationship with technology. It isn't fair to expect our children to withdraw from screens, when we ourselves don't even go to the toilet without our smartphone. There may be a nagging voice in my head that tells me that I shouldn't be on mine, but there is a louder voice that pipes up with all sorts of justifications. If you pine for screen-free time for your family, you should start with yourself. While you read this book and test out the ideas, put yourself through a gentle digital detox. (Have a look at *How to Break Up with Your Phone* by Catherine Price for starters.¹⁹) Gradually change your relationship with your smartphone, so that you are in control of it, rather than the other way around.

You, as a parent, are the best person in the best position to teach your children how to fully live outside their smartphone, tablet or games console. We need to develop our family's offline lives to keep pace with our online ones.



This book will guide you in how to develop a family that plays together. It will open your eyes to the huge impact that play can have on the strength of your family's relationships and the quality of the time you spend together. It won't happen all at once. There'll be times when nothing much seems to be happening. But there will come a day when your kids will come home from school, throw down their bags and beg you to get off your laptop and play a game with them. Patience will pay off. You may need to read this book more than once. Use it as a resource and a guide. When there has been a messy explosion and you are loudly reminded (which you will be) that you are stupid, that this game stuff is stupid and that the whole family is stupid, return to the book. You may find something you missed the first time, something that will be the hook for your child. You'll know it when you find it.

Remember, you're already way ahead of most parents.

Get excited: life is about to change.

¹⁹ Catherine Price, *How to Break Up with Your Phone: The 30-Day Plan to Take Back Your Life* (London: Trapeze, 2018).



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A teacher and educationalist, and previously the co-owner and director of Pivotal Education, Ellie Dix has been obsessed with board games from an early age. Ellie firmly believes that board games have positively influenced her ability to solve problems, manage failure and experiment with multiple paths to success - and she now puts her teaching skills, understanding of behaviour and experience with gamification to use by helping parents to introduce board games to family life.

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THE BOARD GAME FAMILY

A ROADMAP TO INTEGRATING BOARD GAMING INTO FAMILY LIFE, FILLED WITH IRRESISTIBLE WAYS TO ENGAGE EVEN THE TRICKIEST OF TEENAGERS AND MANAGE GAME NIGHTS WITH FLAIR

Many parents feel as if they are competing with screens for their children's attention. As their kids get older, they become more distant - leading parents to worry about the quality of the already limited time they share. They pine for tech-free time in order to reconnect, but don't know how to shift the balance.

In *The Board Game Family*, Ellie Dix aims to help parents by inviting them and their families into the unplugged world of board games. The benefits of board games are far-reaching. Playing games improves memory formation and cognitive abilities, boosts critical thinking, develops interpersonal skills and refines our problem-solving and decision-making.

With these benefits in mind, Ellie explains how parents can unleash the potential of those dusty boxes at the back of the cupboard and become teachers of outstanding gamesmanship - equipped to navigate the unfolding drama of competition, thwart the common causes of arguments and tears, and bind together a happier, more social family unit.



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