



FAMILY FUN

What Kids Gain From Playing Games

A famous game designer once said that playing a game together builds bonds of trust and cooperation, creating stronger relationships. That has been the case in my family.

In recognition of National Games Day on Dec. 20, this is a good time to reflect on the favorite board and card games my family has played through the generations. Remembering times spent with these games over the years brings back some warm memories.

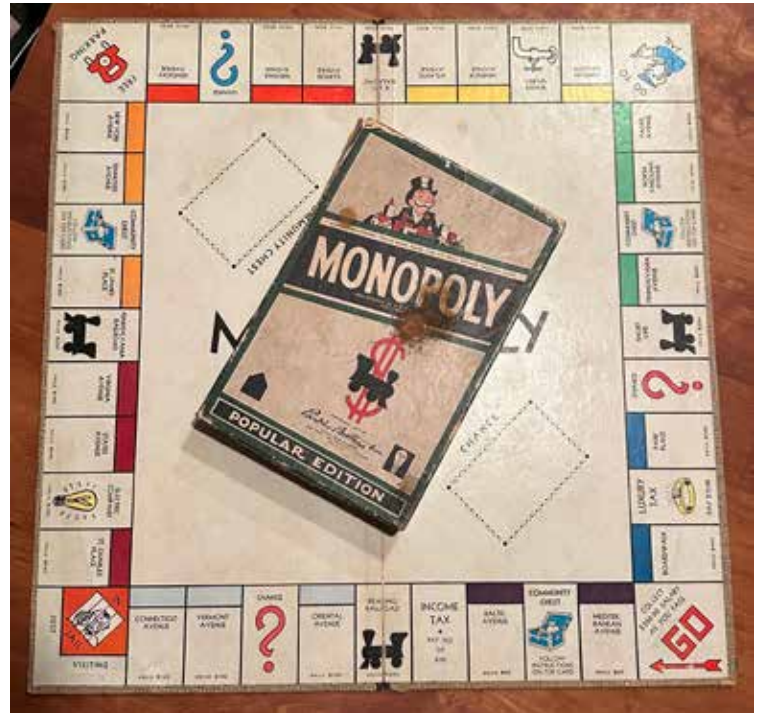
The Ayers family favorite has always been Monopoly. I still have the 1950s version of the board we used year after year at my grandparents' house on the Jersey Shore. On rainy days when we couldn't go to the beach, we would pull out Monopoly, a Scrabble board, or a deck of cards and sit on my grandparents' porch, playing games for hours.

Their porch furniture was made of lightweight PVC pipe and a bright green mesh, which we could move around even as kids. We would pile the furniture into a fort, climb inside, and play cards. My grandparents were happy they could leave us there while they attended to other things. Our favorite games kept us occupied for hours. My brother and I liked to play gin, a two-player game.

Some of our favorite games have been passed down as family traditions. Before my wife and I were married, we enjoyed playing Scrabble together. We never got too competitive. We just enjoyed a few easygoing rounds of play.

Now, our kids are 14, 12, and 9, and we all still enjoy Monopoly. We have a few different Monopoly boards in the house, including my family's original 1950s version, although it's old and beat up now. We also have a New York Yankees version, which is important to me as a lifelong Yankees fan.

One of the first card games we taught our kids to play was Uno. This multiplayer game has a colorful deck with big numbers, and the objective is to be the first player to get rid of all their cards. We played Uno for years and years, and we have accumulated multiple decks, including regular Uno, Uno Flip (a version with two-sided cards), and Uno Harry Potter, featuring images of Harry Potter characters and a special action card.



Games are an excellent way for kids to pass the time productively. We have taught our two boys to play War, a two-player game using the entire deck. The objective is to win all the cards. If the boys have time on their hands, we bring out a 52-card deck and say, "Play War for a while." That will consume at least an hour of their time.

Playing cards and board games also teaches kids to play well with others. In our house, there is a lot of trash-talking during our Uno games — and I mean a lot! If one of us has a "Draw 4" and they're about to play something, that player might look at another one of us and say, "Uh-Ohhhh, you know what's coming now!" And everybody has a little fun before that card gets played. This has taught the kids how to banter in a fun way and to avoid taking that kind of talk personally. We are family members, love each other, and can have a little fun with high-spirited banter. It's just a card game with loved ones.

If the weather keeps us indoors over the holidays, we'll probably gather around the dining room table again this year and grab a deck of cards. As you relax with loved ones over the holidays, I hope you have time for some of your own favorite games.

- Andrew M. Ayers

CANINE COUNSELORS

THE ROLE OF COURTHOUSE DOGS



The courtroom can be an intimidating place. The formality, seriousness, and importance of our legal system — paired with potential trauma — can make it a challenging environment for those called to testify. Scared witnesses, victims of crime, and experts who are just having a down day can all have trouble when taking the stand. However, recalling a traumatic event can be easier with the help of a well-trained dog snuggled up against you on the witness stand, providing the mental nourishment to get through it.

Courthouse dogs are used throughout the United States, providing an invaluable service often overlooked or unknown despite their noble purpose. They are professionally trained animals chosen from the most friendly and compassionate pool of dogs to provide reassurance in high-stress situations. Here is what you should know about these unsung heroes.

Accredited Companions

Not just any dog can become a successful courthouse dog. First, it needs to meet the professional standards. Only the friendliest and most adaptable dogs can cut it in an accredited assistance dog school. These hallowed nonprofit institutions are accredited by Assistance Dogs International (ADI), the world's leading authority in the industry. ADI has been an integral part of the process since 1986 and only awards accreditation to organizations that meet its rigorous standards. While the ADI evaluates a dog school's organizational operations, treatment of clients, safety, cleanliness, and compliance with legal regulations,

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they also greatly emphasize how schools treat their puppy pupils. To become accredited, a school must also employ humane training methods, have a valid health care regimen, and employ well-trained and evaluated trainers.

The accreditation process is essential because courthouse dogs are only assigned to a handler after at least two years of training. If you think in dog years, that's the equivalent of a Ph.D. in being a fluffy, adorable companion.

Handling Business

Once a dog has graduated from an accredited dog school, it is ready to be assigned a handler. The handler essentially adopts the dog and is responsible for housing, feeding, and caring for the professional pup. The handler is typically a victim advocate, forensic interviewer, police officer, or attorney, as they most often interact with people needing the dog's expert care. Handlers also can't have other dogs in the home who are overly aggressive, and most handlers provide support to the courthouse dog during off-hours. A secondary handler is typically necessary, as they can accompany the dog when the primary handler is required elsewhere.

The Drawbacks

Issues can arise if court employees or participants are allergic to dogs. Dog dander, a common allergen, can be on handlers' clothing, making them a hazard to those with strong allergies. Care must be taken to avoid contact between handlers, their dogs, and those allergic to the animals. Similarly, some people have intense phobias of dogs; in this case, similar measures should be taken to avoid contact between the dogs and these individuals.

The Benefits

Courthouse dogs can seem alien in the stuffy courtroom environment, but their benefits greatly outweigh any breach in tradition or hindrance allergies or phobias may cause. They can help vulnerable witnesses regain the confidence to share their stories, no matter how difficult, and persevere through a challenging situation.

TAKE A **BREAK**



Picky Eaters

HOW TO HELP KIDS ENJOY MORE FOODS

No matter where you go in the world, most kids are picky eaters. According to a study published in *Frontier*, about 54% of kids are reluctant to try new foods. In the U.S., many kids will scoff at anything but peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. In France, it's probably peanut butter and creme fraiche. And good luck getting Scandinavian kids to eat anything that doesn't taste like black licorice or pickled herring! In all seriousness, parents everywhere have a similar problem. So, what's the solution?

Small Steps

Kids go through many different dietary phases as they grow up. While frustrating, it is common for young kids to go through their "picky eater" phase. Some common tactics parents employ to counter this, however, are *counterproductive*. For instance, making kids eat everything on their plates can be stressful and make them even pickier than before. Instead, serving smaller portions is more helpful, especially when the foods are unfamiliar.

Role Models

When it comes to food, parents should lead by example. Eating together as a family and demonstrating how you enjoy the foods you are trying to introduce to your kids can go a long way to getting them to try new cuisine. While you're at it, describing what you're serving is a good idea so the textures and flavors don't catch them off-guard.

Introducing New Foods

Building on the previous tips, introducing new foods, even in very small amounts, can help expand a child's culinary boundaries over time. Even if the child does not eat the food the first time you put it on their plate, or even the fifth time, they will naturally become more familiar and comfortable with it. Studies show that you may need to feature new foods on their plates up to 15 times before kids are willing to try them!



Creamy Thai Carrot and Sweet Potato Soup

Inspired by CookieAndKate.com

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp coconut oil
- 2 cups chopped yellow onion
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp minced fresh ginger
- 2 tbsp red curry paste
- 4 cups vegetable broth, divided
- 1/4 cup almond butter
- 3 cups diced carrots
- 3 cups peeled, diced sweet potatoes
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Cayenne pepper (optional)

Directions

1. Melt coconut oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion, garlic, and ginger and sauté for 5–6 minutes. Stir in curry paste.
2. In a small bowl, whisk 1/3 cup broth with the almond butter until smooth. Add the mixture to the pot, along with the carrots, sweet potatoes, salt and pepper, and remaining vegetable broth. Stir to combine.
3. Bring soup to a low boil over medium-high heat, then reduce heat, cover, and simmer for 15–20 minutes or until the potatoes and carrots are fork-tender.
4. Blend with an immersion blender until the soup is smooth.
5. Season with salt and pepper. Add a pinch of cayenne pepper for more spice if desired.





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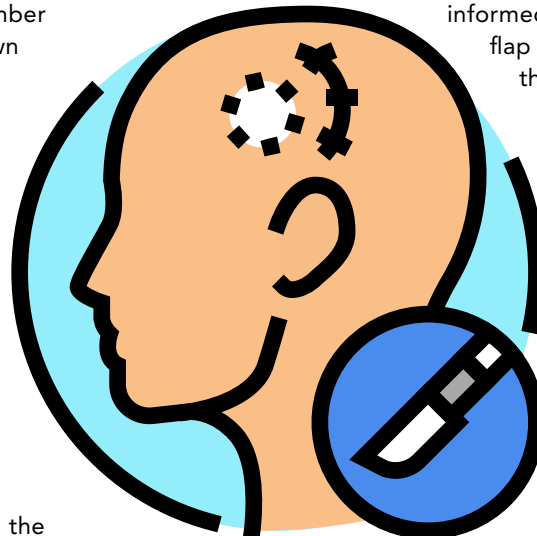
ANYONE SEEN A SKULL? Hospital Misplaces Patient's Body Part

All of us have had to search underneath the couch cushions for a missing wallet or TV remote, or we've had to scour the mall parking lot in search of our somehow misplaced car keys. I would almost certainly lose my head if it were not attached to my body. Which, as it turns out, is why I definitely should *not* work at one particular Atlanta hospital. In September 2022, the Emory University Hospital Midtown staff allegedly misplaced something more important than the contents of a patient's pants pocket. Following his brain surgery, Fernando Cluster was horrified to discover that the hospital had misplaced part of his *skull*.

What a Headache

Fernando underwent emergency brain surgery after suffering a stroke and subsequent cranial bleeding. As part of the surgery, surgeons removed a portion of Fernando's skull, known as a bone flap, with plans to reattach that portion of his skull after he healed from his surgery. While the

hospital scheduled the procedure to repair Fernando's skull for November 2022, issues arose that made it impossible for the hospital to fulfill its end of the bargain. The hospital made errors when identifying the bone flaps and had no idea which skull fragments belonged to Fernando. Eventually, hospital staff informed the patient they could not find his bone flap and, as a result, they would be unable to put the missing pieces back in his skull.



Suing Over a Skull

Consequently, Fernando and Melinda Cluster have filed a civil lawsuit against the hospital. The Clusters claim the hospital's failure to find his bone flap led to an extended hospital stay, increased medical debt, and undue pain and suffering. Not to mention, of course, the alleged negligence in misplacing a *patient's skull*. If nothing else, the Clusters have a remarkable story to tell and, most probably, a large settlement headed their way instead of a fully functional brain cage.