



** This news release from K-State Research and Extension is available online at <https://ksre-learn.com/holiday-board-games>

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Holiday Fun: Board games help build important family skills

Sedgwick County extension agent urges families to put their game face on

By Pat Melgares, K-State Research and Extension news

MANHATTAN, Kan. – In the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, a chance to relax, laugh and connect may just be sitting on the family’s shelf or inside a drawer.

“Incorporating board games into holiday celebrations not only enhances the festivities, but also builds a foundation of family values, mental well-being and lasting connections,” said Elizabeth Brunscheen-Cartagena, a family life and resource management agent in K-State Research and Extension’s Sedgwick County office.

For more than a decade, Brunscheen-Cartagena has seen the value of playing board games through a program that she has hosted through her county’s extension office. Bonding Thru Board Games takes place six times a year, plus a day-long Mega Event. Brunscheen-Cartagena also has partnerships with local schools, churches, community events and other organizations in Sedgwick County.

The holidays are an especially beneficial time for families to get together and play around the table.

“With each game played, families create a tradition that enriches their legacy and supports a resilient, connected and joyful family culture,” Brunscheen-Cartagena said.

Here’s are some of the ways families benefit, according to Brunscheen-Cartagena.

Board games strengthen social connections

In particular, board games offer a break from phone and television screens. “Games encourage positive social interaction by creating a shared experience that brings people together,” Brunscheen-Cartagena said.

Cooperative games, in particular, foster teamwork and empathy, teaching family members to value collaboration over competition.

“For family members who don’t see each other often, games offer a bridge to meaningful connection, enhancing social cohesion and creating memories to cherish,” Brunscheen-Cartagena said.

Board games promote mental health and relieve stress

Playing games creates an environment in which everyone can unwind and have fun.

“The joy, laughter and sense of accomplishment that comes with play fosters mental well-being and emotional resilience,” Brunscheen-Cartagena said. “When family members engage in friendly competition or work as a team, they release stress and create memories that help everyone feel refreshed, connected and happier.”

Board games pass on traditions and values

Brunscheen-Cartagena said that when families introduce game traditions during the holidays, older family members can pass on stories about how these games have been enjoyed over the years.

“For example, when grandparents teach a game to grandchildren, they pass on both the joy of playing and a sense of family legacy, allowing cultural values and family traditions to endure, and strength bonds across generations,” she said.

Board games foster intellectual growth and critical thinking for all ages

Games challenge players to think critically, make calculated decisions and anticipate each other’s moves – skills that apply beyond the table.

“Engaging in these cognitive tasks helps family members exercise their minds while having fun together,” Brunscheen-Cartagena said. “This mental stimulation keeps minds elevated, builds intellectual resilience, and models the importance of critical thinking and adaptability for younger players.”

More information on Bonding Thru Board Games is available by contacting Brunscheen-Cartagena by email, lizb@ksu.edu. Find more information about programs and services available through K-State Research and Extension by [contacting your local extension office](#).

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