

Five Ways to Transform ADHD By Playing Games

By Karen DeBolt, MA

Kids with ADHD often have an amazing creative capacity and high energy, which can interfere with the development of social skills. Poor impulse control and hyperactivity can sabotage school success and family peace, which often leads to low self-confidence.

Ask any kid with ADHD what the worst thing on earth is and you will often hear, “Boredom!” Do you need help teaching your child new ways to cope without getting bored?

The surprising answer is to play games! When I was a kid, we got together every afternoon to play games outside. There was always a range of ages with the older kids teaching the younger kids how to play.

We played games like Hide and Go Seek, Statues, Red Rover, Red Rover, Red Light/Green Light and many others lost to my memory now. These games taught us a lot about life and how to get along in the world. Important skills had to be learned in order to do well in the games.

Take “Hide and Go Seek” for instance. You must learn to be very still and quiet when hiding. You also learn how to think like another person when you are finding. It also helps to have a bit of imagination to find the good hiding places. Usually, you will come across other hidiers and need to communicate with them silently in order to not give away your position. So kids learn to control their impulses, be quiet when it is appropriate, put themselves in another’s shoes, and exercise their creativity. All while playing and having fun!

Other classic games such as Red Rover, Red Rover teach teamwork, strategy, judgment and persistence. Red Light/Green Light teaches attention, focus, and good impulse control.

Here are five ways to encourage your child to go outside and play:

1. Make Space in the schedule – With so many scheduled activities available, many kids have to make an appointment to play with their friends. Consider having at least one day each week that is not scheduled to make room for spontaneous play times.
2. Turn off the electronics – I know it’s harsh (at least your child might think so!) but by turning off TV, videogames, and computers, you will make room for that creative ADHD mind to search for other stimulation. Be prepared to meet that need with some fun game suggestions.
3. Talk to the neighbors – If the kids in your neighborhood don’t get together for games, now might be a good time to talk about getting together. You can play most games with as few as three kids, but more makes it even more fun and more stimulating.

4. Go outside to get things started – Help ease the initial shyness by getting the games started. Teach a game they haven't played before. Often other kids in the neighborhood will magically appear if they see some fun playing happening.
5. Help out with conflict resolution – If there is a disagreement during the games, help your child to learn how to resolve conflicts. Escalating conflict could cause the games to end before they even get started.

Playing outside also provides a great release of stress and energy. So relax and make room in your busy schedule for old-fashioned games. It may be the best thing to help your child learn ways to build confidence, self-mastery, and make friends. Enjoy!

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