

The Testing Games: Can Teaching Kids to Be Opportunistic Reduce Standardized Test Anxiety?

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As a writer of toy reviews, it's easy to find families who want to test products. However, at this time of the year, I have trouble getting my testers in the upper elementary grades to play with the toys. Why? Simple: It's testing season now. Stress is high among teachers, parents, and students alike.

Toy testing can wait, but I feel sorry for our children. In some ways, I see them being no different from the toys themselves, just sitting there waiting to be "assessed." Since when did standardized testing become so passive? When I was in high school, we bought books with titles like, *Cracking the SAT* and even today, I see titles such as *The Perfect Score: Uncovering the Secrets of the SAT* and *The SAT Prep Black Book: The Most Effective Strategies Ever Published*.

I suppose the one difference is that these kids, as young as nine, aren't really the ones being assessed, so maybe they're not supposed to care so much. As we all know, the goal of these tests is to evaluate teacher and school performance. But guess what? The kids do care. How could they not? I am not concerned about their scores so much. Rather, I worry about what could be the repercussions of their mounting anxiety on top of their playtime already being reduced. Moreover, kids are being told that they can't study for these tests which probably causes them even more anxiety!

Thanks to the great world of toys and games, I think that statement can be proven wrong. Not only can kids prepare themselves to be better test-takers, but if you try out some of these suggestions, they can probably sneak back in some much needed playtime.

Why Be "Assessed" When You Can Score?

We can teach a child to re-imagine her role from one that is about to be tested to one where she is testing herself. The latter role requires a child to hunt, gather, and protect their points as if she were playing a game. Changing their mindset from this passive role to a more opportunistic one can give them a chance to feel a bit more in control and most importantly, help reduce some anxiety. Here is a list of my top ten go-to games that can feed the hunter spirit in every child, playfully and productively:(in reverse alphabetical order)

Top Ten Games to Boost Test-Taking Skills

9. Training Eyes to Pay Attention: CUBU by Funnybone Toys \$14.99

This is a game that works on the skill of visual attention- training your eyes to pay better attention to things. Each card dazzles all the players with beautiful visual illusions as players must work fast and hard to find color sequences among the cards. Working on visual attention might seem like no big deal but think about how we are attentive with our other senses ie. hearing kids sneaking around not sleeping, tasting that oaky Chardonnay. Experts will tell you that there is ample reward for those whose eyes pay close attention. According to Amy Baez, Pediatric Occupational Therapist and Founder of Playapy, visual attention is even important for building good social skills. Baez added, "It's also important with reading because when your eyes are constantly averting off the page, then you're going to lose your place." How many times have you ever lost your place when reading something you were forced to read? Get CUBU. It's amazing.

