Participating in games provides students with the opportunity to learn social interaction, communication, and adaptive behavior skills (Levin & Enselein, 1990). Despite this, many individuals with severe disabilities are excluded from age-appropriate games because of their cognitive and/or physical limitations. Fortunately there are several ways that game materials and/or rules can be easily modified to enable these students to play with their age-appropriate peers.

Games that are battery-operated and have an on/off switch can be adapted for external switch control by placing a battery device adapter/battery cell interrupter between the battery and one of the battery contacts. Many battery operated games such as Bed Bugs, Blast Out, Looping ’ Louie, and Yahoo Buckaroo are age-appropriate for elementary school students. Some of these games also involve pushing a lever or grasping a small handle; operations which can be made easier by extending levers with wooden tongue depressors or building up handles using foam rubber.

Card games can be adapted in a variety of ways. For students who have difficulty holding cards, place the cards in a potato chip clip, a clothespin, a card holder (a piece of wood or weighted shoe box with a groove cut in the middle), or silly putty rolled into a log shape. Blue- Tac (available from AbleNet) can be used on the end of a student’s fingers to help make it easier for them to pick up the cards. Placing the deck of cards in a small basket or box may prevent some students from displacing the deck when discarding cards. Students can also use a battery-operated card shuffler to shuffle cards by pressing the lever or using a switch (and battery device adapter). Card games include: 5 Alive (ages 6 to adult), Go Fish (ages 5 to 8), Rook (ages 6 to adult), Skip-Bo (ages 7 to adult), and Uno (ages 7 to adult).

Many board games such as Blurt (ages 10 to adult), Monopoly (ages 8 to adult), Shakin Sorry (ages 6 to adult), and Yahtzee (ages 8 to adult), require players to throw dice. Strategies for helping a student fulfill this requirement include placing the dice in a cup and having the student tip the cup over, placing the dice in a partner’s hand and having the student knock the dice out, or placing the dice in the ‘bed’ of the Bed Bugs game and having the student use a switch to roll/vibrate the dice.

Other board games such as Don’t Wake Daddy (ages 5 to 8), Dream Phone (ages 9 to 14), Life (ages 9 to adult), Spin Bingo (ages 6 to adult), and Wheel of Fortune (ages 8 to adult) involve the use of a spinner to let players know how many spaces to move. A student can use a switch, a battery device adapter, and a Twirl O’Paint to activate the spinner. In order to use the Twirl O’Paint, remove the arrow from the game’s spinner card, attach it to the edge of the Twirl O’Paint’s splash guard, and secure the spinner card to the Twirl O’Paint’s motorized tray using a removable adhesive such as Blue-Tac or Silly Putty.

Some board games may involve using small game pieces which may be difficult for some students to hold. Small game pieces can be substituted with thread spools, soda bottle tops, or Milton Bradley ’s Sliders (plastic game pieces with a metal bearing at the bottom that allow them to move across a game board with very little pressure).

Even with adaptations to materials, some students will be unable to participate in games unless the rules are changed or modified. The easiest way to modify rules is to have students play in teams instead of as single players. This allows a student without a disability to assist a student with a disability when it is his or her turn. The peer might indicate which game piece to move and where to move it; provide two choices of cards to discard in a card game (i.e., two red cards in Uno); or use hand-over-hand assistance to help the student move the game piece or to shake the dice cup.
Adaptions for Games

In order to select age-appropriate games, look at the age-range on game boxes and ask your students’ nondisabled peers what types of games they enjoy playing. Peers are also an excellent resource for ideas on how to adapt games.

Reference


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