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Games Keep Brains Sharp During the Holidays

Looking for board games to play over the holidays that won't strain your pocket book? "What Did You See?" is a fun game that uses everyday objects from around the house. This game is a lot like Memory, but doesn't use purchased cards with childish images, so it's great for all ages. And, you can select objects in the house that match the ages of the players.

As an added bonus, this game develops memory and concentration skills, and it's fun to boot!

You'll need:

- A timer
- Paper and pencil for each person playing
- 7-10 small items from around the house that will fit under a tea towel (or other sized towel), such as a pen, a battery, lip balm, a hairbrush, a tree ornament, etc.

How to Play:

- Place all items randomly on a table top
- Cover with a tea towel
- Set timer for one minute and reveal items
- Have a participants study the items intensely
- Cover the items with the towel and have players write down everything that they saw
- When the round is done, discuss what strategies you used to help remember the items
- Take turns choosing the items to reveal
- Whoever remembers the most items wins

Un-Puzzling Puzzles

Puzzles are great activity to undertake over the holidays. Not only are they fun, but they also give a sense of accomplishment when complete. Puzzles help children and parents alike hone their mental abilities.

Here's why: a puzzle is but a jumble of mixed-up pieces, until a plan of action is developed. Sort the pieces by color groupings, or work on the outside frame first. Whichever way the puzzle is sorted, the puzzler uses organization: moving through chaos to order.

When working on puzzles as a family, discuss the strategies used to sort the pieces—this is the key to developing a solid game strategy. Known as Cognitive Awareness, it's a learning technique that helps you to become aware of the process that you use to reach a solution, and un-puzzle the puzzle. And, it's what makes game playing a fun way to keep the brain sharp.