Build & Take

There's power in positive numbers, but negative numbers are equally important! Practice adding positive and negative numbers using a card game and you'll master this tricky concept in no time. Work together with your child, or play competitively, as you gauge his level of understanding. You'll see your child's confidence grow as his speed increases.

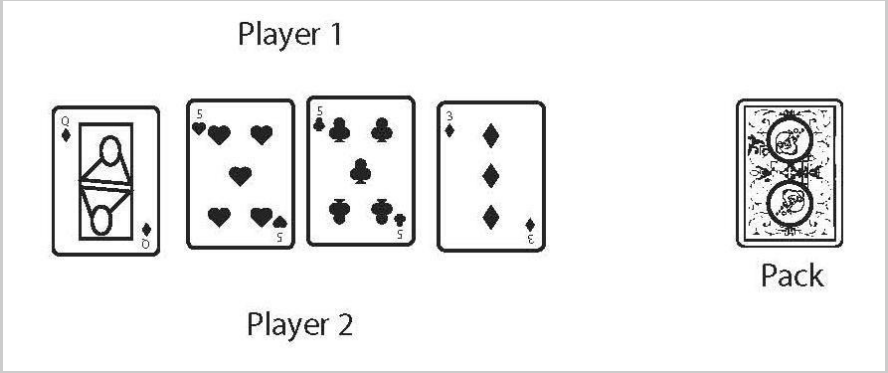
Term to Know:

sum: the answer to an addition problem

What You Need:

- Deck of playing cards

What You Do:



1. Shuffle the deck. Distribute four cards to each player. These are their hands. Place four cards face up in the center of the play area, and place the remaining deck face down in a stack.
2. For the purposes of this game, red cards represent negative numbers and black cards represent positive numbers. Face cards represent their respective values (jack = +/- 11, queen = +/- 12, etc.) Remove the face cards from the game if this concept is confusing.
3. Players take turns attempting to create a sum that equals zero. They may do this using a combination of any cards in their hand and cards on the table.
4. When a player's turn is over, their hand and the cards on the table are both replenished.
5. If a player is unable to make a play, they must pass. In the unlikely event every player is stuck, discard the four cards on the table and replenish them.
6. The game is over when no cards remain on the table, or no player is able to make a sum of zero. The last player to collect a card from the table earns any remaining cards on the table and all of the cards left in the other players' hands.
7. The winner of the game is the player with the most cards.

Keep the tone light and don't rush your players-- they're working addition, subtraction, positive and negative... all at the same time. But play this game with frequency and your child will become much more comfortable with the concepts. It's in the cards!

From Math Games Played with Cards and Dice, Grades 7-8
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