

# USING GAMES TO SUPPORT TEENS' STRENGTHS: FOUR TIPS



**ithrive**  
GAMES  
PLAY TO YOUR STRENGTHS



**TIP 1:  
USE GAMES TO FOSTER  
TEENS' SOCIAL &  
EMOTIONAL GROWTH**



# IN GAMES TEENS CAN PRACTICE



## SELF-AWARENESS

Assessing strengths and weaknesses, adopting a growth mindset, and developing resilience to feedback about performance.



## RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING

Watching consequences of choices play out in a low-stakes environment, building in a pause between thought and action, and trying different approaches and assessing results.



## SOCIAL AWARENESS

Empathizing with characters, playing from multiple perspectives, reflecting on how decisions impact other players or characters.



## SELF-MANAGEMENT

Persisting through difficulty, and feeling and managing a broader range of emotions than in most media: pride, frustration, gratitude, betrayal, guilt, forgiveness, complicity, and triumph.



## RELATIONSHIP SKILLS

Negotiating and collaborating with other players through cooperative play.



## TIP 2: USE GAMES TO ENHANCE REGULAR INSTRUCTION



**HINT:** You don't need 30 computers or game licenses to teach with games. Buy one copy and let students take turns playing over projection while others give input.



# ENRICH LEARNING BY



## ENGAGING STUDENTS AS REVIEWERS

Invite students to play games you want to teach with, provide feedback, and make the case to parents and administrators for why games are great learning tools.



## USING GAMES AS TEXTS

Deep, story-driven games are everywhere. Students who struggle with traditional texts might find interactive, contextualized game narratives more accessible. Try *What Remains of Edith Finch*.



## ANALYZING CHOICES IN REAL TIME

Games like *This War of Mine* prompt self-reflective discussions about what students value and how they make choices around helping themselves or others.

# TO SUPPORT STUDENTS'

- Agency and Sense of Respect:** Students know that their interests and input matter in the classroom
- Competence:** Students who learn differently can engage and demonstrate their strengths through new modalities
- Self-Awareness:** Students see in real-time how they deal with feedback, challenge, and failure to build resilience

# TIP 3:

## USE iTHRIVE'S CURATED GAMES CATALOG



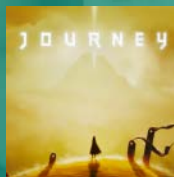
In *Never Alone*, players practice **empathy** as they learn about an Indigenous people's beliefs and culture and play from multiple perspectives.



*Undertale* models that fighting is not the only way to get the outcome players want when facing enemies — more **optimistic** approaches like empathizing and befriending can also work.



In *This War of Mine*, while trying to survive the destruction and deprivation of war, players consider their values as they struggle to choose between self-interest and showing **kindness** to others.



In **cooperative** games like *Journey*, *Brothers*, or *Overcooked*, players appreciate other players' or NPCs' unique abilities, benefit from others' kindness, and help each other succeed in a reciprocal way.



In *Her Story*, players must investigate a crime using video clips. Players use **curiosity** and **empathy** to read people, determine who can be trusted, and solve the mystery.



“Helper apps” with gamified elements like *Fitbit* and *Happify* let users track their progress on specific goals and **learn that they can improve** and change with effort, help, and good strategies.



**Purpose-driven** characters like Link from *Legend of Zelda*, Mario from the *Super Mario* series, and Aloy from *Horizon Zero Dawn* model persistence on the journey to save others and learn about themselves.



In *Valiant Hearts*, veterans have to try to live with the atrocities they participated in during wartime, touching on themes of **self-forgiveness**.

Visit our games catalog for more recommendations:  
[ithrivegames.org/curatedgames](http://ithrivegames.org/curatedgames)

**TIP 4:  
ENGAGE TEENS BY  
ANALYZING AND  
DESIGNING GAMES  
TOGETHER**





# IN iTHRIVE'S GAME DESIGN STUDIO PROGRAM, TEENS:



Design core elements of games: Narrative arc, characters, game world, rules, and win states



Practice empathy for others as they create the rules and roles in the game and predict how the game will impact players' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors



Grow their STEM competencies and engage in design thinking as they collaborate with peers to create games



Work on topics they choose that are relevant to their lives

**TO PARTNER WITH US ON GAME DESIGN STUDIO  
OR ANOTHER ITHRIVE INITIATIVE,  
EMAIL [JANE.LEE@ITHRIVEGAMES.ORG](mailto:jane.lee@ithrivegames.org)**

# **iTHRIVE SUPPORTS TEACHERS IN INTEGRATING GAMES INTO STRENGTHS-BASED, POSITIVE EDUCATION**

**FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND CHECK  
OUR WEBSITE FOR INFORMATION ON OUR:**

## **TWINE CONTEST FOR TEENS**

High school students have the chance to express themselves, experiment with game design, and win prizes by creating text-based games around positive themes using the free online game design tool, Twine 2. With resources and mentorship from iThrive, they'll engage deeply with positive psychology topics on an active level and share their perspectives with the world.

## **EDUCATOR HUB**

Visit our website for resources from experts in game-based and social and emotional learning, as well as stories from the field from teachers like you! We recommend games that support meaningful learning experiences for teens and share curricular resources you can use right away.

## **ONLINE, GAME-BASED LEARNING COMMUNITY**

Finding resources, partners, and mentors is critical to trying a new teaching method. We are launching an online learning community which provides step-by-step challenges and feedback for teachers eager to use games to deepen learning, all with plenty of support from other educators who've been there.

# FROM iTHRIVE'S PARTNERS IN EDUCATION

“Video games are highly malleable instruments and...can be bent, repurposed, and reshaped to fit the lesson. Educators don't have to use the entire game, but can choose to play only what is applicable.”

- *Paul Darvasi, high school English and Media Studies teacher*

“There are entire genres of story-driven digital games that are part of a new media landscape, and, like the graphic novels and other new media that have come before, they should be brought into classrooms.”

- *Matthew Farber, former middle school teacher and Assistant Professor of Teacher Education, University of Northern Colorado*

“Games give learners a chance to immerse themselves in new information, apply that information in problem solving, and take new perspectives. They offer exposure to new content, and ways to practice tasks. Students can fail safely in games, and they can experiment with different types of solutions. Games allow students to work in self-directed, independent ways, and also on collaborative teams.”

- *Barbara Chamberlin & Jesse Schell, game-based learning experts and educational game developers*



# ithrive

G A M E S

iThrive Games works at the intersection of game development and positive psychology to promote teen thriving. Our team of social and emotional learning experts, psychologists, and game developers works with educators to create meaningful learning experiences.

VISIT [WWW.ITHRIVEGAMES.ORG](http://WWW.ITHRIVEGAMES.ORG)  
TO LEARN MORE

iThrive Games is a nonprofit organization.