



PHOTO BY TL BROWN

Card, board, and role-playing games provide creative, fun ways to bond and interact – without electronic devices.

Off-screen gaming helps teens bond

By T. Lee Brown
Correspondent

Stephen King helped form a new, non-religious youth group at the Episcopal Church of the Transfiguration. He regularly volunteers to hang out with the group’s off-screen gamers, who meet most Saturdays. Outlaw Gamer Group (OGG) provides an environment where teens can socialize and get creative, as long as they’re willing to avoid electronic devices.

As a parent and a Sisters School District director in recent years, King believes that the school day no longer offers “opportunity for bonding and for being creative — everything is so structured in school nowadays. The school schedule barely has a lunchtime.”

Between that factor and the intrusion of smartphones and other technologies, some kids don’t have “the chance and space to form meaningful relationships.”

Such relationships are important for health and wellbeing, as pediatric occupational therapist and child development expert Cris Rowan discussed in a recent webinar. She stressed the importance of brain development at different stages in life.

“When a child is born, they’re born with their full complement of neurons,” she said. “If looking at a brain is like looking at a roadmap—all the roads are already there.”

As the brain develops, it prunes away neurons that are not being used.

A full two-thirds of “those roads, those neurons, will be pruned back... because they’re not being used,” she explained. In other words, use it or lose it. (Some research into brain plasticity indicates that loss need not

be permanent — new neural pathways can be developed).

In recent years, using phones and video games has encouraged kids’ brains to respond to high levels of screen stimulation. Their parents are often glued to digital devices, resulting in less face-to-face interaction time between parents and children.

What aspects of brain development are kids losing in the balance? The ability to empathize, according to some research. Screen time is also linked to a spike in depression, anxiety, and suicide among young people.

“By age 12, half the brain is still plastic, half is hardwired,” Rowan estimated. “At age 20, it’s almost fully hardwired.” She stressed, “Early intervention is key.”

King said the local program starts at eighth grade, for now.

“I would argue that the issue starts earlier,” he said. “The issue is that kids know how to operate an iPhone before they can tie their shoes.”

Youth group activities include gaming, music, and other creative and recreational activities that don’t involve screens or electronics. Dungeons and Dragons is popular, and King noted, “there’s a resurgent interest in board games.”

That approach is similar to Rowan’s.

“I used to push screen reduction,” she said.

She found that many parents and children were unwilling to do that difficult work. Now Rowan focuses on positive, off-screen activities.

“We want to increase access to movement, touch, human connection, and nature.”

As King bluntly put it, “You’re less likely to kill yourself if you’re part of a group, if you’re bonded.”

The Nugget Newspaper Crossword

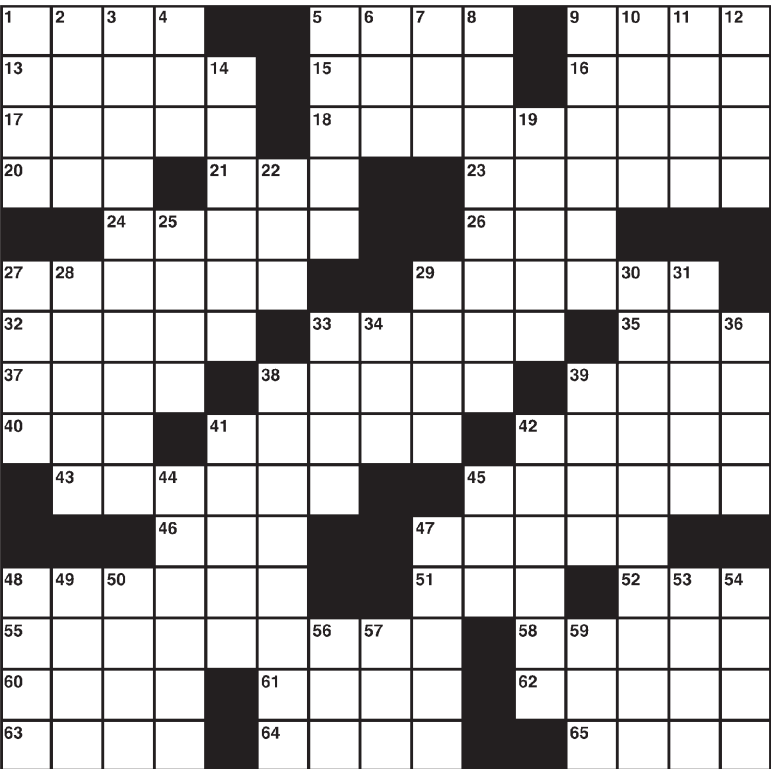
By Jacqueline E. Mathews, Tribune News Service

ACROSS

- 1 Quarrel
- 5 Read over quickly
- 9 Red Muppet
- 13 More pleasant
- 15 Not vivid in color
- 16 Hockey score
- 17 Male relative
- 18 Plato’s famous pupil
- 20 “Wow!”
- 21 Saloon
- 23 Licorice sticks
- 24 Gets closer to
- 26 Fleur-de—
- 27 Spin
- 29 Champion
- 32 Sudden & sharp, as pain
- 33 Complain childishly
- 35 Soft drink
- 37 Tiny veggies
- 38 Antler feature
- 39 ___ on; incite
- 40 Tit for —
- 41 Battle
- 42 Zodiac sign
- 43 Isaac or Wayne
- 45 Free-for-alls
- 46 Coop dweller
- 47 Slacks
- 48 1 of 13 on the U.S. flag
- 51 Recipe verb
- 52 Plant
- 55 Mentor
- 58 Popeye’s love
- 60 Chief Norse deity
- 61 Watercraft
- 62 Fray
- 63 Actor Randall
- 64 Fluctuate
- 65 Repair

DOWN

- 1 ___ as a bug in a rug
- 2 Forest tree
- 3 Emphasize
- 4 ___ Aviv
- 5 Ship poles
- 6 Auto
- 7 Actress MacGraw
- 8 Baby bird
- 9 Self-centered person
- 10 Plenty
- 11 Sweet creamy drink
- 12 Bullring shouts
- 14 Partial refund
- 19 Once and again
- 22 TV’s “The Kids ___ Alright”
- 25 Polishes off
- 27 Engrossed
- 28 Body of water
- 29 Grape bearer
- 30 Tyrannical
- 31 Baton ___, LA
- 33 Songbird
- 34 Road ___; inconsiderate driver
- 36 Experts
- 38 Covered wagon travelers
- 39 Sandy residue



Created by Jacqueline E. Mathews

6/19/19

— Last Week’s Puzzle Solved —

D	I	P	A	T	R	E	E	S	C	O	T
G	A	M	A	G	R	I	L	L	T	O	M
E	M	M	Y	R	E	M	E	M	B	E	R
T	E	A	P	E	A	S	E	O	P	E	N
T	R	I	E	D	H	O	P				
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P	E	A	C	R	A	P	S	B	L	E	A
S	L	A	L	O	M	T	O	U	C	H	Y
O	F	T	E	N	S	P	I	R	E	L	A
W	R	O	N	G	D	O	I	N	G	T	E
N	E	R	D	O	U	N	C	E	E	S	P
S	E	E	S	G	R	E	E	T	E	S	S

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