Board & Tabletop Games for SEL in Schools and Carceral Settings:
Peer-Reviewed Annotated Bibliography

K–12 Schools (board & tabletop games → SEL outcomes)

Noda, S., Shirotsuki, K., & Nakao, M. (2019). The effectiveness of intervention with board games: A systematic review. BioPsychoSocial Medicine, 13(1), 22. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13030-019-0164-1

Systematic review (27 studies): board-game programs improved knowledge, interpersonal interaction, and motivation—core enablers for SEL.

Eriksson, M., Kenward, B., Poom, L., & Stenberg, G. (2021). The behavioural effects of cooperative and competitive board games in preschoolers. Scandinavian Journal of Psychology, 62(5), 682–690. https://doi.org/10.1111/sjop.12708

Cooperative and competitive games both elicited prosocial behaviors; cooperative games were enjoyed more—useful for climate-building and inclusion.

Cès, P., Duflos, G., Palazón, R., Tricard, E., Jhean-Larose, S., & Giraudeau, C. (2024). Playing board games to increase emotional competencies in school-age children and older people: A systematic review. Leisure Sciences. https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2024.2373415

Across 2011–2024 studies, board games supported emotion talk, reduced problem behaviors, and enhanced prosociality (emotion regulation/social awareness).

Dell'Angela, L., Zaharia, A., Lobel, A., Vico Begara, O., Sander, D., & Samson, A. C. (2020). Board games on emotional competences for school-age children. Games for Health Journal, 9(3), 187–196. https://doi.org/10.1089/g4h.2019.0050

RCT of EC-targeted board games: positive play experiences; links between emotional competences and lower perceived task difficulty—feasible SEL design.

Vita-Barrull, N., Estrada-Plana, V., March-Llanes, J., Guzmán, N., Fernández-Muñoz, C., Ayesa, R., & Moya-Higueras, J. (2023). Board game-based intervention to improve executive functions and academic skills in rural schools: A randomized controlled trial. Trends in Neuroscience and Education, 33, 100216. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tine.2023.100216

Cluster-RCT during school time: modern board-game sessions improved cognitive flexibility and boosted some academic skills—SEL self-management/decision-making.

Moya-Higueras, J., Solé-Puiggené, M., Vita-Barrull, N., Estrada-Plana, V., Guzmán, N., Arias, S., … March-Llanes, J. (2023). Just play cognitive modern board and card games, it's going to be good for your executive functions: A randomized controlled trial with children at risk of social exclusion. Children, 10(9), 1492.
https://doi.org/10.3390/children10091492

Quadruple-blind RCT with at-risk children: targeted modern board/card games improved executive functions (inhibition, updating, flexibility) underpinning SEL.

Lok, K. I., Chiang, H.-M., Lin, Y.-H., & Jiang, C. (2022/2024). Trying a board game intervention on children with autism spectrum disorder in Macau: How do they react? International Journal of Developmental Disabilities, 70(3), 418–423.
https://doi.org/10.1080/20473869.2022.2095861

Repeated-measures study in inclusive classrooms: board-game play significantly increased social communication during intervention—scaffold for Relationship Skills.

Carceral & Community Justice Settings (SEL, wellbeing, re-entry)

da Silva Carvalho, I., Mendes, R. C. M. G., Lima, L. H. S. S., Pessôa da Silva, G., Gonçalves Lima, M. de F., & Guedes, T. G., et al. (2023). Effect of a board game on imprisoned women's knowledge about STIs: A quasi-experimental study. BMC Public Health, 23, 15646.
https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15646-3

In-prison classroom board game ("Previna") produced significant knowledge gains retained at follow-up—supports decision-making/self-management.

da Silva Carvalho, I., Mendes, R. C. M. G., Lima, L. H. S. S., Pessôa da Silva, G., Gonçalves Lima, M. de F., & Guedes, T. G., et al. (2024). Board game on sexually transmitted infections for imprisoned women: Development and validation. BMC Women's Health, 24, 24.
https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-023-02801-6

Methodological paper validating the "Previna" board game for incarcerated women—feasibility and pedagogical value in secure settings.

Pensavalle, C. A., Solinas, M. G., Gardoni, C., Giorgi, G., Antognozzi, T., & Alessio, F. (2024). Boardgames as an innovative approach to promote life skills and well-being among inmates: A scoping review protocol. PLOS ONE, 19(2), e0298728.
https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0298728

Protocol mapping board-game interventions for life skills/well-being in prisons—useful framework for program design and evaluation.

Yücel, I. D., & Yararbaş, G. (2024). Active games for increasing social and emotional competencies of young adults in probation: A one-sample trial. BMC Psychology, 12, 797. https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-02309-0

Probation-site program grounded in CASEL: structured group games improved social-emotional competencies and mental wellbeing.

Yuliawati, L., Wardhani, P. A. P., & Ng, J. H. (2024). A scoping review of tabletop role-playing game (TTRPG) as psychological intervention: Potential benefits and future directions. Psychology Research and Behavior Management, 17, 2885–2903. https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S466664

Across clinical/educational contexts, TTRPGs support empathy, communication, and coping—transferable SEL mechanisms for low-cost, discussion-driven groups.

Decembrotto, L., & Mari, G. (2025). Board games in prison: An explorative case study. Italian Journal of Educational Technology. https://ijet.itd.cnr.it/index.php/td/article/view/1397

Case study of Italy's "Giocare Dentro" program: tabletop play facilitated communication, conflict management, and personal agency within carceral constraints.

Note: All items are peer-reviewed. URLs/DOIs are included for easy access. Annotations summarize SEL-relevant findings/mechanisms.