

The Stuck Timer

GAME

SKILL: FRUSTRATION TOLERANCE

AGES 6–10

30–45 MIN

RECOMMENDED AGE RANGE

Ages 6–10 — this age group is still forming their relationship with difficulty, making it the ideal window to rewire the instinct to immediately outsource hard things to a tool.

WHAT YOU NEED

Kitchen timer or stopwatch

2–3 age-appropriate puzzles or riddles

Paper and pen

Optional: small reward for completing a round

ACTIVITY STEPS

01

Set the Only Rule

Tell your kid the rule: when something feels hard or confusing, they cannot ask for help, use a phone, or quit. They just have to stay with it. Set the timer for 5 minutes.

2 min

02

Start the Clock

Give them the first challenge and start the timer. Their job is to keep trying for the full 5 minutes, even if they feel completely stuck. You watch but say nothing.

5 min

03

Name the Feeling

When the timer goes off, ask them to write or say one word describing how they felt while stuck. Common answers: frustrated, annoyed, dumb, focused. Write them all down without judgment.

3 min

04

Try Again, Longer

Let them finish the challenge with help if needed, then immediately try the next one solo. This time set the timer for 7 minutes. The goal is to extend how long they can stay with difficulty.

10 min

05

Connect the Lesson

At the end, look at the word list together. Point to the hard feelings and say: "That is what building something actually feels like. AI skips this part. You didn't."

5 min

THE DEEPER LESSON

The whole point of this activity is to make the feeling of being stuck visible and survivable. Kids who learn to sit with frustration without panicking or outsourcing are building exactly the skill the Brookings researchers say AI is quietly eroding. The timer is not pressure. It is permission to stay uncomfortable a little longer than they thought they could. That five-minute experience of "I stayed with it" is a data point your kid carries forward. The more times they collect it, the stronger the belief that they can handle hard things.

CONVERSATION STARTER

"If a tool could do the hard part for you every time, what would you actually get good at?"