

# What Kind of Game Encourages Connection and How Do Games Avoid Social Awkwardness?

## 1. Introduction

In today's world, games are more than just play, they can shape how people connect socially, form bonds, and communicate. This research explores **what game designs help build connections** and **how games can reduce social awkwardness** when people interact. Games can boost well-being and reduce loneliness, but only if built with social interaction in mind.

## 2. Game Features That Encourage Connection

### 2.1 Cooperative Goals & Interdependence

Research shows that games with **shared goals and meaningful cooperation** help players feel connected. When players must rely on each other, they communicate and build bonds. In cooperative games, roles and tasks are balanced to require teamwork.

*Example: "Keep Talking and Nobody Explodes" forces players to communicate, one has the info, the other has the instructions, creating **shared responsibility and bonding**.*

**Key concept:** *Interdependence increases social closeness.*

### 2.2 Social Presence and Communication Mechanics

Games that support **voice/text chat, gestures, and shared screens** make it easier for players to express themselves and signal intent. Social presence (feeling like others are *really there*) is essential for connection. Especially in online MMOs, players report increased **competence and camaraderie** when the game supports expressive communication.

## 3. How Games Avoid Social Awkwardness

### 3.1 Structured Interaction Through Game Loops

Games avoid awkward silence by creating **clear loops and goals**. Players always know what to do next. This reduces hesitation and social anxiety because the task is shared and explicit.

*Example:* Cooperative puzzles force players to keep the conversation flowing (e.g., “I found this, you handle this”).

### 3.2 Anonymity & Safe Roles for Shy Players

Online environments let players choose **avatars** or roles that feel safe. This lowers social pressure, letting people talk without awkward face-to-face hesitation. In MMO research, players with social anxiety still connected because they controlled what others saw/heard.

## 4. Designing for Positive Social Experiences

### 4.1 Balanced Challenges

Games should be challenging enough to interest players but not frustrating. When players succeed together, they build **shared pride** and trust. Designs that scale difficulty based on group skill help avoid lulls in conversation.

### 4.2 Game Patterns That Promote Interaction

Designers can apply social game patterns like:

- **Shared Resources** : players negotiate how to spend them.
- **Turn-Taking** : forces everyone into the interaction cycle.
- **Complementary Roles** : each player has something valuable to contribute.

## 5. Case Studies

### 5.1 Coop Games With Social Bonds

Games where players must coordinate (like team quests or puzzles) consistently produce stronger connections. Cooperative challenges lead to higher **social support and relationship satisfaction** compared to solo play.

### 5.2 Avoiding Awkwardness in Group Play

Studies show that when games offer guided social mechanics (tutorials, clear rules, prompts), players report less social discomfort than in unstructured group interaction.

## 6. Conclusion

Games encourage connection when they are designed to make players communicate, rely on one another, and share goals. Avoiding social awkwardness depends on clear structure, safe roles, and game mechanics that *naturally* prompt interaction. With thoughtful design, games can be powerful tools to strengthen social bonds in both online and offline communities.

## 7. References (APA)

- Depping, A. E., & Mandryk, R. L. (2017). *Cooperation and interdependence: How multiplayer games increase social closeness*. Unpublished article.
- Gonçalves, D. (2023). *Social gaming: A systematic review*. ScienceDirect.
- Kowert, R. (2014). *The relationship between online video game involvement and social interaction*. PMC.
- Vella, K., Johnson, D., & Hides, L. (2015). *Playing alone, playing with others: Differences in player experience and indicators of wellbeing*. Retrieved from ResearchGate.
- *Exploring social awkwardness in digital games*. (n.d.). Retrieved from ResearchGate.