

One player knows every button, spots the enemy before it appears, and can land a perfect jump without thinking. The other is still checking which button picks things up. That difference can turn a promising co-op night into a frustrating cycle: one person takes over, the other feels like a passenger, and both wonder why they bothered playing together.

The fix usually isn't to tell the experienced player to "just go easy" or ask the newer player to practice more. A better approach is to choose games that reward communication, agree on what kind of night you want, and set up the session so nobody has to fight the menu—or their teammate—to have a good time. These co-op skill gap tips can help you make the gap part of the fun instead of the whole story.

Start by Changing What “Good at Co-op” Means

In a competitive game, being better often means winning more, scoring higher, or reacting faster. A good co-op game gives you other ways to contribute. One person might be quick with the controls; the other might notice a clue, remember a route, make a plan, or keep everyone laughing after a failed attempt.

Before you start, agree that the goal is to have a good shared experience—not to prove who has the better reflexes. If the skilled player treats every puzzle or fight like a speedrun, the newer player can feel unnecessary. If the newer player apologizes after every mistake, the skilled player may feel pressured to pretend nothing is challenging. A little expectation-setting goes a long way.

- **Ask what each person wants:** a challenge, a relaxed story, silly chaos, or a short session?
- **Make room for different contributions:** navigation, puzzle-solving, support, exploration, and comic relief all count.
- **Agree on how to handle mistakes:** retry together, offer a hint, or laugh and move on.

Pick Games Built for Teamwork, Not Just Shared Screens

One of the most reliable co-op skill gap tips is to pick games built for teamwork. “Two players can play” is not the same as “two players have satisfying things to do.” In a game with bolted-on co-op, the experienced person may end up doing all the meaningful work while the other follows along. Look for games where players have different abilities, complementary roles, or problems that are easier to solve by communicating.

Hazelight is a useful studio to know when you're looking for games designed specifically around two people. Its co-op adventures are built around shared progress and interaction between partners, rather than simply adding a second character to a solo game. That kind of design can help a skill gap feel less important because the players are meant to work together, not compete for the same job.

As you browse, check how the game handles failure and difficulty. Can the less experienced player recover quickly after falling behind? Are there checkpoints? Does each person get meaningful choices? Can the game's pace accommodate a conversation, or does it demand constant precision? You don't need a perfect match; you just want a game where both players can participate without one person becoming the unofficial instructor for the entire evening.



Good signs when choosing a game

- Each player has a distinct role, tool, ability, or perspective.
- Progress depends on communication or cooperation—not only on speed.
- There are checkpoints or forgiving retries, so mistakes don't waste the whole night.
- The game offers adjustable difficulty, accessibility options, or a gentle learning curve.
- Players can contribute in different ways, including exploration, support, and puzzle-solving.

Match the Game to Your Mood and Your Available Time

A game can be excellent and still be the wrong choice for tonight. A demanding action game may be a poor fit when one person is tired, while a slow story game may not scratch the itch for a quick, energetic session. Decide what kind of night you're having before choosing what to play. That simple habit prevents a lot of "I don't know, what do you want?" menu scrolling.

Tonight's mood What to look for Helpful question Relaxed and chatty Low-pressure exploration, puzzles, or a story you can enjoy at your own pace Can we pause or take our time? Short and energetic Quick rounds, bite-size levels, or easy-to-restart challenges Can we have a satisfying session in 30 minutes? Ready for a challenge Coordination-focused action with forgiving checkpoints or adjustable difficulty Will we be excited to retry if we fail? Silly and social Games that create funny surprises and memorable mishaps Is the fun in playing together, even when we mess up?

Time matters as much as mood. If you have an hour, it may be frustrating to begin a long campaign, learn unfamiliar controls, and stop just as things get interesting. Keep a few shorter options ready for busy nights and save longer adventures for evenings when you have room to settle in. A quick check of the game's session length, level structure, and save system can save you from turning a fun plan into a rushed one.

Make a Shared List So Choosing Takes Minutes, Not Twenty

A shared notes app list is one of the least glamorous and most effective co-op tools around. Add games you already own, games you're curious about, and a quick note on why they might suit the two of you. The point isn't

to build an encyclopedic database. It's to avoid standing in front of a store page for twenty minutes while both players repeat, "I'm fine with anything."

Tag each game with a few practical details:

- **Player count:** Is it actually built for two, or does one person mostly spectate?
- **Play mode:** Couch co-op, online co-op, or both?
- **Session size:** Good for a quick round, a one-hour session, or a longer campaign?
- **Energy level:** Relaxed, tactical, chaotic, story-focused, or demanding?
- **Skill-gap friendliness:** Forgiving, role-based, adjustable, or best when both players know the controls?

Then use a tiny decision process: each person picks one option from the list, and you choose between those two. If you can't decide, use a rotation—one person chooses this time, the other chooses next time. The list is there to make decisions easier, not to become another task you have to manage.

Separate Skill From Score

It's tempting to measure the session by kills, points, damage, or who reached the finish first. Those numbers can be fun when both players enjoy them, but they can also turn a shared game into a quiet contest. To avoid score obsession, agree on a different measure of success: did you solve the puzzle together, finish a level, discover something surprising, or get through a tough section without losing your sense of humor?

If the game puts scores on screen, try treating them as information rather than a verdict. The experienced player can focus on enabling the team—calling out useful information, sharing resources, or taking a less dominant role—without intentionally playing badly. The newer player can take on meaningful decisions, rather than being handed every simple task. The aim is not to manufacture a fake tie; it's to make the whole team's progress feel satisfying.

Small adjustments that keep the game shared

- Let the less experienced player lead the route or make the next plan.
- Offer one clear hint at a time instead of narrating every move.
- Ask before coaching: "Want a tip, or do you want to try it?"
- Share useful items and responsibilities instead of automatically keeping the strongest tools.
- Celebrate clever solutions and teamwork, not only fast completion.

Most importantly, don't confuse "helping" with taking control. If your partner is trying to solve a puzzle, resist grabbing the controller or blurting out the answer unless they ask. A pause may feel slow to the experienced player, but figuring something out personally is often the most rewarding part for the newer one.

Check the Setup: Couch Co-op Versus Online Co-op

Before settling on a game, check whether it supports the kind of co-op you want. Couch co-op means playing together on the same device and screen, often with two controllers or split-screen. Online co-op means playing on separate devices over the internet. Some games offer both; others only support one. Don't assume a game has local co-op just because its store page prominently says "multiplayer."

Setup Why it can work well What to check first Couch co-op, shared screen Easy to talk, point things out, and share the moment Does the game support two local players on your platform? Couch co-op, split-screen Each

player can move around independently Is the screen layout comfortable and readable on your TV? Online co-op Works when you're in different homes or want separate screens Do both players need a copy, an account, or a subscription? Online with a guest or pass option May let one player join without buying a second copy Which platforms and editions support the feature?

For couch play, check controller count, screen sharing, and <https://www.co-optimus.com/blog/article-poster/3410/couples-co-op-night-games-snacks-and-where-cbd-fits.html> whether the game supports local co-op on your specific console or PC. For online play, check internet requirements, platform compatibility, voice chat, and whether both people need to own the game. Also confirm that the game's current version supports the feature; store listings and editions can differ. A two-minute setup check beats discovering after dinner that your chosen game requires a second purchase or doesn't support local play.

Use Difficulty and Roles Without Making It Awkward

Difficulty options are there to help you enjoy the game, not to certify anyone's ability. Lowering the difficulty can be a smart way to let a newer player learn movement and teamwork without every mistake becoming a major setback. If the game offers character roles or abilities, choose them together. One player might prefer a support role while learning, or the more experienced player might pick a role that contributes through planning rather than constant high-speed execution.

Try a short warm-up instead of launching straight into the hardest part of the game. Spend a few minutes learning the controls, then check in: "Is this a good level of challenge?" That question is more useful than assuming the newer person is having a bad time because they're quiet—or assuming everything is fine because they haven't complained.

Keep the Ritual Easy and Comfortable

A good co-op night is more than the game, but the extras should make it easier to relax rather than more complicated. Keep controllers charged, update the game before your planned session, and put snacks where they won't interfere with the hardware. I'm firmly in the popcorn-with-chopsticks camp: crunchy snack, clean controller. It sounds fussy until you've had to wipe buttery fingerprints off a button mid-level.

If a pregame routine includes wellness products, be specific and read labels rather than making vague promises about what they'll do. For example, Joy Organics sells CBD products, but shoppers should distinguish THC-free products from full-spectrum options and review product details and local rules. CBD is not a substitute for communication, a sensible game choice, or medical advice. Keep it separate from the actual co-op plan: the goal is to make everyone comfortable and ready to play, not to rely on a product to fix a mismatched game.

A Simple Plan for Your Next Co-op Night

1. **Ask for a mood and time budget.** "Chill or challenging?" and "How long do we have?" are enough to start.
2. **Choose from your shared list.** Prioritize games designed for two players and teamwork.
3. **Confirm the setup.** Check couch co-op versus online co-op, player count, controllers, and ownership requirements.
4. **Agree on the goal.** Pick a level, story milestone, or simple "let's see how it feels" target.
5. **Check in after a little while.** Keep the game, change the difficulty, or switch titles without treating it as failure.

The Best Co-op Night Is the One You Both Want to Repeat

The Game Awards can put a spotlight on standout games, and awards or recommendations can be a helpful starting point—but the best choice for your pair is the one that suits your preferences, setup, and evening. Look for games designed around two-player teamwork, be honest about how much time and energy you have, and keep your shared list ready so choosing doesn't eat up the night.

Most of all, avoid score obsession and make space for both players to contribute. The more experienced player doesn't have to pretend not to know the controls; they can use that experience to make the partnership smoother. The newer player doesn't have to catch up before they're allowed to enjoy themselves. With the right game and a little communication, the skill gap becomes just one detail—not the definition of your co-op night.

