

Children and Video Games: Healthy Practices



Playing video games is a popular activity for people of all ages. On average, girls spend more than an hour per day playing video games and boys spend more than two hours. Teens often spend even more time than younger children. Video games have become very sophisticated and realistic. Some games connect to the internet, which can allow children and adolescents to play games and have discussions with unknown adults and peers.

While some games have educational content, many of the most popular games emphasize negative themes and promote:

- On average, girls spend more than an hour per day playing video games and boys spend more than two hours.
- Studies have shown that children exposed to violent media may become numb to violence, imitate violence, or show more aggressive behavior.
- Parents can help their children enjoy video games appropriately by selecting games suitable in both content and level of development and by setting clear rules about game content and playing time, both inside and outside of the home.
- The killing of people or animals
- The use and misuse of drugs and alcohol
- Criminal behavior, disrespect for authority and the law
- Sexual exploitation and violence toward women
- Racial, sexual, and gender stereotypes
- Foul language and obscene gestures

Store-bought video games are evaluated by the Electronic Software Ratings Board (ESRB) and rated for their appropriateness for children and teens. The ratings are featured prominently on the game packaging.

Studies of children exposed to violent media have shown that they may become numb to violence, imitate violence, and show more aggressive behavior. Younger children and those with emotional, behavioral or learning problems may be more influenced by violent images.

In moderation, playing age-appropriate games can be enjoyable and healthy. Some video games may promote learning, problem solving and help with the development of fine motor skills and coordination. However, there are concerns about the effect of video games on young people who play video games excessively.

Children and adolescents can become overly involved with video games. They may have difficulty controlling the amount of time they play. They may resist their parents' attempts to limit their time playing video games.



Wheeler

**CONNECTICUT
Clearinghouse**

a program of the Connecticut Center
for Prevention, Wellness and Recovery

800.232.4424 (phone)

860.793.9813 (fax)

www.ctclearinghouse.org

A Library and Resource Center on Alcohol, Tobacco, Other Drugs, Mental Health and Wellness

Spending excessive time playing these games can lead to:

- Less time socializing with friends and family
- Poor social skills
- Time away from family time, school work, and other hobbies
- Lower grades
- Less reading
- Less exercise and becoming overweight
- Decreased sleep and poor quality sleep
- Aggressive thoughts and behaviors

Tips For Parents

Parents can help their children enjoy these video games appropriately and avoid problems by:

- Avoiding video games in preschool-aged children
- Checking the ESRB ratings to select appropriate games—both in content and level of development
- Playing video games with their children to share the experience and discuss the game’s content
- Setting clear rules about game content and playing time, both in and outside the home
- Monitoring online interactions and warning children about potential dangers of Internet contacts while playing games online
- Allowing video game playing only in public areas of the home, not in the child’s bedroom
- Remembering that you are a role model for your children including which video games you play and how long you play them
- Enforcing total screen time limits
- Ensuring video games are only played after homework and chores are done
- Encouraging participation in other activities, particularly physical activities

If parents have concerns about their child’s gaming habits or if their child is having difficulty with mood or behavior, they can ask their child’s pediatrician, family physician, or school counselor to help arrange a referral to a trained and qualified mental health professional.

Connecticut Resources

**CT Department of Mental
Health and Addiction Services**
www.ct.gov/DMHAS

**CT Department of Children and
Families**
www.ct.gov/DCF

United Way 2-1-1
www.211ct.org
2.1.1 or 1.800.203.1234

National Resources

**Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention**
www.cdc.gov

Reprinted with permission of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP).
From the Facts for Families© series, developed and distributed by AACAP, (202) 966-7300,
www.aacap.org. 2015

