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Manningham YMCA presents

Parent's Guide to **GAMING**

Keep gaming fun and safe

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PUBLISHER'S STATEMENT

The Parents Guide to Gaming is intended as a practical guide to assist parents on how to deal with the impact of video games on their children. Every care has been taken to ensure accuracy and the contents of this book was accurate at the time of writing.

A book can never be a replacement for professional medical advice and if you are concerned about the health of your child in any way you should seek appropriate assistance from your doctor or health care professional.

The author, editor and publisher cannot accept any legal responsibility for anything arising from any part of this guide.

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PARENT'S GUIDE TO GAMING

Keep gaming fun and safe

By Steven Dupon

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

INTRODUCTION

- 7. The Good and Bad of Gaming

02

UNDERSTANDING VIDEO GAMES

- 11. A bit of history
- 12. Profile of a gamer
- 13. Some more stats

03

BENEFITS OF GAMING

- 17. Cognitive Development
- 20. Emotional Development
- 23. Skills Development
- 26. Social Development

04

RISKS AND CONCERNS

- 31. Gaming Disorders/Addiction
- 35. Gambling in Games
- 40. Cyber-Safety
- 43. Violence and other Inappropriate Content

05

CONNECTING WITH YOUR GAMER

- 47. Gaming genres
- 49. Gamer language

06

MANAGING YOUR DEVICE

57. Understanding the classification

59. TOOL: Parental controls

07

TAKING CONTROL

71. Choosing the right game

73. Setting the appropriate limits

75. Controlling the environment where games are played

77. Get ready to brace yourself for the impact

78. Make sure your kids have other toys/activities/things to do

79. Make games a social activity

81. Teach your child about video game development

82. Be wary of free mobile games

83. No gambling simulation games for children and young people under 18

84. Stay safe online

85. Know the parental controls and classification

86. Get help!

08

WHEN THINGS GET OUT OF HAND

90. How to identify gaming disorders

91. The Nine Criteria

94. TOOL: Gaming Disorder Questionnaire

95. Where and how to get help

96. What if your child doesn't want any help?

97. Links and Referrals

98. References

101. Key Words

102. How this guide came about

103. About the Author

01

INTRODUCTION



The good and bad of gaming

It's no secret that video games are one of today's most popular forms of entertainment. According to the latest statistics, 96% of children, between the ages of 6 - 15 engage in some form of gaming screen time on a regular basis. Gaming devices are becoming more and more portable and children are much more computer savvy than ever before.

So what can we do to make sure that gaming remains a positive influence on a child's development?

In this manual we will look at:

- The positives and negatives of gaming.
- Some practical tips on how to better manage your child's gaming devices.
- Tips on how to better manage the gaming environment within your home.
- Resources to help you to connect with your child in relation to gaming.
- How to identify when it is time to seek professional help.

Parents, this guide is for you! Whether you're children are 2 or 22!

All parents have a responsibility to their children to ensure that they are safe and well equipped to deal with life's challenges. Gaming can be one of those challenges for many parents.

Before we begin it is important for us to recognise that gaming, like everything, has its fair share of its pros and cons. This guide will focus primarily on how to avoid getting caught in the negatives. Because, when used well, gaming can be educational, empowering and frankly, essential to a child's development.

Warning! This guide contains an abundance of information about video games; it can also be used as a practical resource so that you can better manage gaming in your home.

A person is shown from the back, wearing a VR headset with 'UNITRA' written on the strap. They are holding a VR controller. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a game screen or another person. The overall tone is blue and tech-oriented.

02

UNDERSTANDING VIDEO GAMES

P11 | A BIT OF HISTORY

P12 | PROFILE OF A GAMER

P13 | SOME MORE STATS

Sorry Pacman, we've moved on...

Strictly speaking, a video game is an electronic game that involves human interaction, with a user interface to generate visual feedback on a visual device. Visual devices include:

- ☛ Consoles (Xbox, PlayStation, and Wii)
- ☛ Handheld devices (Nintendo 3DS and Game Boy)
- ☛ PCs
- ☛ Mobile phones
- ☛ Tablets

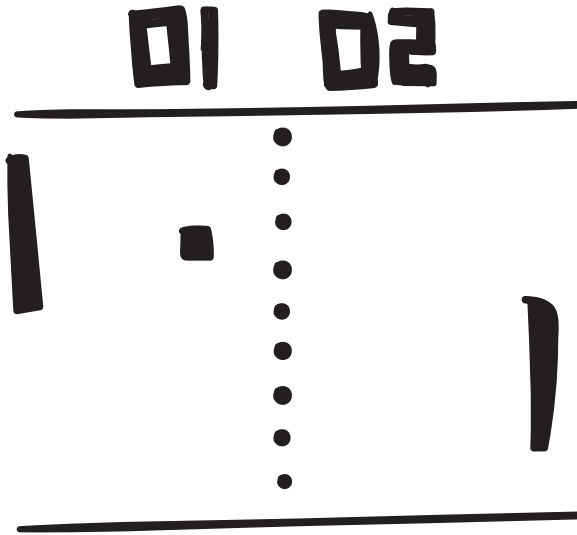
So, in short any game played on a screen can be referred to as a video game.

Today, the term 'gaming' is being used more and more in place of the more longwinded 'playing video games'. 'Gaming', however, can also be used to describe the practice of 'gambling'. (Particularly betting and casino style gambling). In Chapter 3, we will take an in-depth look at the similarities between gaming and gambling.

A BIT OF HISTORY

The first video game was developed in the 1970s. It was a text-based strategy game similar to the popular real life role-playing games such as *'Dungeons and Dragons'*.

Soon after the game *'Pong'* was introduced. This is the first video game to involve graphics. This led to the development of the famous title *'Pacman'* in the 1980s involving one person playing against a machine.



As technology improved, video games have become more advanced and complex, with realistic imagery and interactive software. A further step in complexity occurred in the 1990s, with the introduction of titles such as *'Doom'* involving players customizing their character's appearance, creating interactive rooms and first person shooting experiences.

By the late 1990s, more genres were appearing and players were given the ability to create their own parts of the game. This feature has come to be known as 'Modding' or 'Modifying the game'.

PROFILE OF A GAMER

According to the Digital Australia 14 Report, which is produced each year by IGEA, the profile of a typical gamer mirrors the profile of a typical Australian.

- The average age of a gamer is 32 years old
- 76% of all gamers are over 18 years of age
- Gamers in their 40s and 50s make up the largest group of new gamers in the last two years

Gone are the days when gaming was predominantly a teenage boys' pursuit! The gender split for gamers these days is 47% female to 53% male.

There is, however, a difference in how boys and girls are playing. Boys are more likely to play action/shooting games whereas girls are more into puzzles and social games.

SOME OF THE MOST POPULAR GAMES ARE:

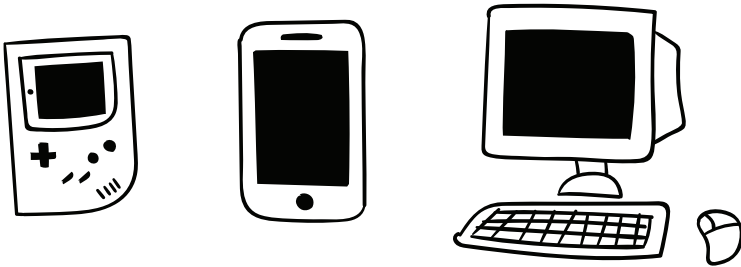
- | | |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| • Minecraft | • Lego Games |
| • Call of Duty | • Mario Kart |
| • World of Warcraft | • Battlefield |
| • Grand Theft Auto | • League of Legends |
| • Candy Crush | • Sims |
| • Super Smash Brothers | • Skyrim |
| • FIFA | • DOTA |

SOME MORE STATS FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT

According to the Digital Australia 14 Report produced each year by IGEA the profile of a typical gamer mirrors the profile of a typical Australian.

- ☛ 26% of gamers play on tablets
- ☛ 47% of gamers play on smartphones
- ☛ 63% of households use a console
- ☛ 90% of gaming households own three or more screens

The Video Game industry is exploding! Experiencing a surge in popularity never seen before, with more and more people playing. Children can be found interacting with games on their parent's mobile devices from as early as one year old.



There has been a lot of research on the positive and negative impact of video games. And you'll read more about this in the next few chapters. But we will have to wait at least another two decades until we find out what the impact of video games will be on those who started playing from the age of one.

03

BENEFITS OF GAMING

P17 | COGNITIVE SKILL & DEVELOPMENT

P20 | EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

P23 | MANUAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

P26 | SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Newsflash!!

Video games can be good for you

Video Games are an incredible form of entertainment! They are extremely engaging and if used well, they can be of real benefit to the education and the overall development of our children.

We all use digital technology on a daily basis. Technology has made our workplace more efficient; changed the way we connect with each other, how we keep up with current events and how we entertain ourselves. Technology has a real place in everyone's lives and increasingly, in the lives of our children.

Video games teach us:

- ☛ **Cognitive skills** like problem solving, strategy development, decision making
- ☛ **Emotional skills** and can be a vehicle for self-expression
- ☛ **Manual skills** like reading and hand-eye coordination skills
- ☛ **Social skills** by connecting and playing with friends

COGNITIVE SKILL DEVELOPMENT

One of the main benefits of video games is cognitive development. Games offer a deep learning experience and can help children develop many of the skills that today's employers are looking for. Although video games are often seen as a waste of time, they can actually promote a wide range of cognitive skills. By being able to identify which games are the best at developing these skills, we will be able to use them in the overall cognitive development and education of our children.

Problem solving/decision making skills

By being asked to solve increasingly complicated problems within a specified time limit, gamers can develop speed in their decision-making. Studies have also shown that playing video games can help increase creativity in young people.

OPPORTUNITY: VIDEOGAMES IN THE CLASSROOM

Video games combine instruction with demonstration, making them an effective tool for educators. As such video games can be highly beneficial in a classroom environment as they engage children and make learning fun. Many video games have been specifically developed with the classroom in mind. Some examples are: reading eggs, mathletics and spelling games.

Strategic development

Gaming is like exercise for the brain. In most cases they will involve working with some sort of strategy to stay alive or defeat a boss; build a structure or blow one up. This makes it a very active pastime, at least on a cognitive level. Video game principles continue to be implemented in training situations, rehabilitation and other cognitive development exercises. First Person Shooting games are often regarded as games that feature great cognitive development.

OPPORTUNITY: VIDEO GAMES IN REHABILITATION

Video games are now being used as rehabilitation for patients with acquired brain injury. They have been found to help stimulate neurogenesis (growth of new neurons) and connectivity in the brain regions responsible for spatial orientation, memory formation and strategic planning. In fact, some studies have even demonstrated the direct casual link between video gaming and volumetric brain increase. This proves that specific brain regions can be trained by means of video games.

Attention Allocation skills

Gamers are able to develop faster, more accurate attention allocation skills. Giving them the ability to prioritise decisions and weigh up where their attention needs to be and for how long.

Spatial Skills

Spatial ability is the ability to think about objects in three dimensions and to draw conclusions about those objects from limited information. These skills are valuable in many real-world situations and can be improved with practice. Spatial skills are essential for maths, science, engineering and technology.



EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Video games are fun!

It's no secret that fun has an extremely positive effect on our mental wellbeing. The reason why games, such as *Angry Birds* or *Temple Run*, have become so popular is because that they give us instant gratification and plenty of positive emotional development. Games like these can be used as a form of relaxation and even help reduce stress.

For children and young adults in particular, this can be an important part in their maintaining a balanced mental outlook. Some people have even credited video games for saving their lives as they battle to overcome family problems, substance abuse, chemotherapy, and other health problems.

OPPORTUNITY: IDENTIFYING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES THROUGH VIDEO GAMES

Excessive video game playing can suggest the presence of an underlying mental health issue. It is widely accepted that early intervention still holds the best chance of recovery. In some cases, we can even use someone's gaming behaviour as an indication of his or her mental wellbeing.

Stress reduction / relaxation

Playing a quick game after a hard day's work or a tough day at school can do wonders for your mind. Video games can help take your mind off the daily pressures we all live with. Games relax us, placing us in a comfort zone, where for that brief moment in time we don't have to think about real life.

Self-expression

Many young people use video games as a way to express their view on life, their opinions, or even, their emotions. This is made possible through video game development. By being able to create a video game that tells their story or helps express their emotions; aspiring developers have been able to express themselves through art or game-related culture.

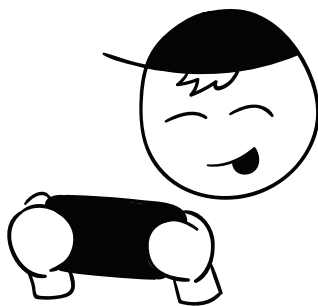
**OPPORTUNITY:
TREATMENT OPTIONS USING VIDEO GAMES**

Gamers often feel more comfortable in the game than they do in real life. Many feel that it is the only place they can feel totally accepted and free from judgment – unlike the 'real world'.

In therapy, video games are already being designed and used as an alternative therapy for depression in young people. This therapy has proven to be just as effective as traditional face-to-face counselling and may even be more appropriate for some young people.

Feeling of achievement

Developers use the technique of instantly rewarding players as a way to keep them hooked on a game. When you receive positive rewards, even through an impersonal machine, like a computer or tablet, it makes you feel good. After you have completed multiple levels within a game or ultimately the game itself there is an overwhelming feeling of accomplishment, which is, again beneficial to your mental wellbeing.



OPPORTUNITY: REBUILDING SOCIAL CONFIDENCE BY INTERACTING IN VIDEO GAMES FIRST

Gamers often credit video games for their being able to reconnect with the community. Many feel that a game can be a safe place to express themselves and socially interact at their own pace. Online interactions are often quite basic. There is no body language, no eye contact and one can leave the conversation with one press of the button. It can be argued that only real social interactions are valuable. But for someone with social anxiety, this controlled way of interacting can be a good way of rebuilding confidence and skills in socialising.

FACT - Video games can really benefit a player's emotional development providing that they are playing the right kind of games in moderation.

"It's thanks to video games that I've been able to deal with my depression and integrate back into real life" *Gamer – 22 years old*

MANUAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Aside from developing cognitive skills, video games can also help people develop a wide range of manual skills. This is especially of interest to education or training providers, in particular, those who are teaching difficult to engage groups of people.

Playing video games can help develop:

- Hand-eye coordination skills, as well as vision and speed skills
- Reading skills
- Children playing any type of video game show increased creativity
- Video games can teach time management, as the timing of a move is crucial in video games
- A player's fitness

Resource management is another key skill found in video games. Many games give players a limited amount of resources that need to be rationed to complete the game.

OPPORTUNITY: VIDEO GAMES IN TRAINING

The military uses video games as a training technique, which is known as (EST) Engagement Skills Trainer. Video games are created to simulate the environment and situations soldiers will face, allowing soldiers to practice their shooting in a safe environment; and to teach judgement skills in combat situations. Flight simulators are commonly used by pilots in training before they make the transition to controlling a real plane.

Reading skills

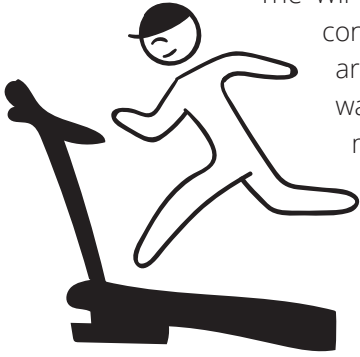
Video games actively engage the player in a range of cognitive tasks. Most will feature text as a way to explain the rules of the game or introduce new features. Some video games are more 'wordy' than others and if you find the right game for your child, their reading can really improve.

Hand-Eye Coordination skills

Video games require the player to use fine and gross motor skills with visual perception to execute a desired task. Games that require precision timing, a sensitive touch and detail will benefit hand-eye coordination. Video games have even been used to help surgeons perfect their skill in the operating room.

OPPORTUNITY: VIDEO GAMES AS THERAPY

Video games are fast becoming recognised as an important tool in rehabilitation settings, particularly in the rehabilitation of children. Video game consoles such as Wii involve whole body movement and the potential is there for their use in a therapeutic setting. Video game therapy or 'Wii-habilitation' has been particularly successful for children with cerebral palsy.

Fitness

The Wii and Xbox Kinect are consoles that utilise motion controllers to detect the movements of players. Games are played by actively moving your body in a particular way. This unique style of gameplay really suits the many sports games that are compatible with this system. Playing this type of game can be a successful way to introduce activity and sports to people who would otherwise not be inclined to do so. Video games usually get a bad rap for creating couch potatoes, but games, such as these, can actually be really good for you.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Contrary to public opinion, video games are actually a very social form of entertainment; with teams and players cooperating to reach a common goal. Video games are increasingly being played on social network sites such as Facebook promoting online gaming achievements and interactions.

Over 70% of gamers play with a friend, by playing against each other or working cooperatively in a team. Games such as, *World of Warcraft*, open up virtual worlds and communities that extend far beyond the computer screen.

Connect online

Gamers have the ability to connect with players locally or team up online with people from countries around the world. A large proportion of young people, playing multiplayer games, have developed good friendships with people they met online.

Video games have created a fun and engaging way of connecting with people and can act as an important teaching tool in developing social skills. In many games, players have the option to work together to form alliances and create teams. They can also provide the players with the opportunity to take on a leadership role, which requires even greater social networking skills and teamwork to keep the other players happy.

These skills are important in the outside world for creating and maintaining friendships, especially in school and work environments. Studies have shown that playing video games, including violent games, can create and improve friendships amongst players. Even players fighting against each other in a game can still be developing their friendship as they work together and share the experience.

HOW TO IDENTIFY A GAME THAT HAS THESE BENEFITS?

Ask the following questions:

Are there emotional benefits?

- ☛ Is it a fun game? Bad games don't give us positive feelings!
- ☛ Is there a good balance between relaxation and excitement?
- ☛ Does play get interrupted sometimes?
- ☛ Are there clear achievements made?
- ☛ Does the game utilise motion controllers to get players more active?

Are there cognitive benefits?

- ☛ Do you need to solve problems in the game? Puzzles, riddles?
- ☛ Do you need to develop a strategy to successfully finish the game?
- ☛ Do you need to make decisions? How stressful is this? Do you get enough time to make these decisions?
- ☛ Does the game feature a rich graphic environment?
- ☛ Does the game require your undivided attention for periods of time?
- ☛ Is there lots of text that needs to be read? Instructions that need following?

Is there creativity required to play the game?

- ☛ Do you build stuff?
- ☛ Do you develop characters?
- ☛ Can you direct your own story?
- ☛ Can you modify the game?

Is it a social game?

- ☛ Do you connect with other players?
- ☛ Is this connection a safe one?
- ☛ Does anyone monitor the conversations?
- ☛ Can you easily report anti – social behaviour?
- ☛ Do the developers act on the reports?

04

RISKS AND CONCERNS

- P31 | GAMING DISORDERS/ADDICTION
- P35 | GAMBLING IN GAMES
- P40 | CYBER SAFETY
- P43 | VIOLENCE & OTHER
INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Risky Business!

So, as you can see, there are plenty of benefits to video gaming. But there are also some areas of concern that must be looked at. These include: Video game addiction, gambling, and violence, etc.

The following section will help raise awareness to these concerns and can be used as a reference to educate both children and their parents on how to address these issues.

The risks and concerns of gaming include:

- ☛ Excessive gaming/Gaming Disorder/Gaming Addiction
- ☛ Gambling
- ☛ Violence and other inappropriate content
- ☛ Cyber-safety issues

GAMING DISORDERS/ADDICTION

When does gaming become addiction?

Unlike substance abuse or gambling, video game addiction is not a formally recognised addiction. We do, however, see a number of young people play games so frequently that it clearly has a negative impact on their lives. With symptoms and impact comparable to addiction, it is important to be aware of the risk of video gaming.

Several studies have been undertaken to define the percentage of gamers that end up playing excessively. Results ranging from 5 to 15% of gamers play at a frequency that leads to a negative impact on their life.



What is excessive video gaming?

When is video game playing excessive? Is it 10 hours per week, 20 hours, or more? It is impossible to put a figure on this. Excessive gaming has similar symptoms to addiction: it becomes completely absorbing for players, often used as a coping strategy. Players' tolerance to the game increases therefore more time is spent playing to get the same effect on their mood. Players often experience withdrawal symptoms when trying to quit gaming and can relapse.

We define excessive video gaming as playing so often that it has a negative impact on the person's life.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF NEGATIVE IMPACT EXCESSIVE VIDEO GAMING CAN HAVE:

- ◀ Missing school, work or other important commitments
- ◀ Losing or neglecting significant relationships
- ◀ Physical health impacts (like back pain or strain)
- ◀ Sleeplessness
- ◀ Reduced mental wellbeing

What are the signs of video game addiction?

A gaming addiction is rarely a standalone issue. We see a range of signs, which often appear to be linked to excessive gaming.

Below are some signs you may notice when your child struggles with excessive gaming:

Psychological signs

- ☛ Becoming depressed or anxious
- ☛ Becoming angry or violent when prevented from playing
- ☛ Decreased interest in school, work, and/or other hobbies

Physical signs

- ☛ Difficulty sleeping
- ☛ Poor eating habits
- ☛ Decrease in overall physical health

Behavioural signs

- ☛ Inability to quit playing
- ☛ Increased amount of time playing video games
- ☛ Lying
- ☛ Decrease in social connection or time spent with friends

Excessive Gaming – How much is too much?

Research has linked excessive television viewing and computer use in children and adolescents to a variety of health and social problems. Current recommendations are that screen time in children and adolescents should be limited to no more than two hours per day.

On the other hand, the University of Oxford recommends that a moderate amount of gaming is better for young people than no gaming at all. This is especially true for boys!

1 hour of gaming per day is a moderate amount of gaming and is beneficial for young people in general.

This doesn't mean that if you play for more than one hour per day that you're automatically addicted. If gaming is nicely balanced with other parts of life, then there is usually no concern. There are many gamers who are perfectly able to game a lot AND study at University. Hold down a job, have great social relationships and feel happy.

Chapter 7 and 8 give more information on how to manage gaming in the home and on how to identify gaming disorders.

GAMBLING IN GAMES

The video game industry and the gambling industry have quite a bit in common. Both are play based applications and attempt to engage the player in a fun, interactive environment. It should come as no surprise that both industries learn player engagement tactics from each other.

The gambling industry learned how to better engage players through game design and graphics. The video game industry learned how to 'hook' players to their game.

Video games also provide the gambling industry with an opportunity to connect with a whole new player demographic: children and young people.

This happens through:

- Simulated gambling games
- In-game practice gambling
- Advertising within games

Video game addiction and gambling addiction are both behaviour based addictions. We see many similarities in the techniques used to hook the player. Players also display similar behaviour patterns and symptoms.

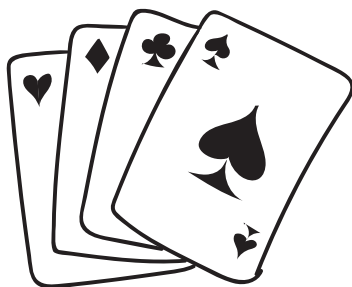
**These gamblified games are introduced to two year olds.
What the impact of this will be, we will only know in
another decade or so.**

Simulated gambling games

Simulated gambling games are those games that look, feel and play exactly the same as the popular casino games. Poker, Slots or Pokies, Blackjack, and so on are very popular gambling games offered on mobile gaming platforms. Some popular simulated gambling games are: *Slotomania*, *Zynga Poker*, *Doubledown Casino*.

20% of the top grossing mobile games are simulated gambling games.

This type of game offers the opportunity to practice gambling. No money is wagered or won because the player plays with points or virtual coins. Because no money is involved, simulated gambling is not classified as real gambling and as such escape the strict regulations that are placed on real money gambling.



Simulated gambling apps are readily available to children via social media sites or the app stores. This gives children and young people unprecedented access to practice gambling.

We know that the younger one gambles, the more likely it is that they may end up with a gambling issue.

Practising gambling through these gambling apps makes gambling look fun, harmless, and a normal part of everyday life. Because the odds are set by the developers (in contrast with physical poker machines) you're very likely to win and have a great experience playing these games. As such, kids get exposed to gambling at a very early age and are led to believe that gambling is fun and harmless.

Currently, these apps are not rated by an independent ratings board (unlike films and big video games) making it very difficult for parents to identify which apps feature gambling or not.

In-Game Gambling

It is quite common for video games to include gambling. This means that a player can engage in games like poker or blackjack. (e.g. *The Sims*, *Grand Theft Auto*,...) In other games, gambling may take the form of a poker machine giving the player the ability to win extra items or coins. Sometimes poker machines are built into the actual game so that the player needs to play the pokies to progress further into the game.

Having unmoderated in-game gambling in video games introduces gambling to children and young people at a very young age. This will result in desensitising your children to gambling and make them believe it is harmless and fun!

Advertising in video games

Free games on mobile devices need to make revenue somehow. One of the ways developers can monetise their work is through advertising. Because video games are largely unsupervised and unregulated the gambling industry has seen it as an opportunity to advertise in games. Many free games that are not generating big profits will feature advertising. **The only way to know what the game is advertising to your child is to actually supervise your child whilst playing.**



Gambling techniques used in games

Another method of raising revenue in mobile games is the in-app purchase. By purchasing extra credits a player can progress further in the game or gain an advantage over another player. Video game developers design their games using well-known techniques to get the player hooked.

- ☛ Random Reward Schedules
- ☛ Illusion of skill
- ☛ Audio and visual tricks
- ☛ Immediate and easy to play with no complicated rules or strategy
- ☛ Very limited storylines making the game quite mindless

These techniques keep the player in 'the zone', making it harder for them to stop playing. Then, suddenly, the game introduces a new level that seems unachievable or sets a time limit. The easiest option to continue playing is to make an in app purchase.

These gambling techniques are used predominantly in games and it is not surprising that this is the fastest growing segment of the gaming industry.

One could argue that games are even more addictive than gambling. As stated before, there are no rigid regulations to deal with and games offer added functionality to hook players.

These games are connected with social media (we've all received requests on Facebook to join a particular game). They don't have to stick to the odds like real money gambling and of course, they can offer the experience to children as young as one!

Some big name gambling industry players have entered the video game development market by setting up game development companies.

CYBER-SAFETY

Video game players are often able to create avatars to represent them in a game. An avatar is an online character that is created by the player. Through these avatars, the player is able to interact with other people who are playing the game at the same time. Because of this, video games are often referred to as being a social pastime. But beware! They can also expose players to anti-social behaviour.

Staying safe within a video game requires basically the same strategy to staying safe online. We must always be mindful of the fact that just because there is an element of social play in a game, it doesn't mean that we know who the other players really are. As such video games can be used as a potential place for grooming children or cyber bullying.



Cyberbullying

Cyber-bullying is bullying that occurs when using technology. It can be an incredibly powerful, quick, and ultimately, very public way for users to experience humiliation. Cyber-bullying doesn't just occur in the schoolyard. As most young people these days have easy access to the Internet on the go, as well as at home, in the form of phones, tablets, or computers. This means that bullies can access their victims anywhere.

Common examples of cyber-bullying include:

- Having people share embarrassing photos of you online.
- Receiving harassing or abusive calls, texts or emails from people they may or may not know.
- People posting upsetting or embarrassing things about you online.
- Having people post humiliating things about you on Facebook and Twitter either publicly or through private messages.
- People setting up fake profiles pretending to be others, or posting messages or status updates from their accounts.
- Having your profile information changed by people using a stolen password to get into your account.
- People trying to stop a person from communicating with others.

Cyber-bullying can have an extremely negative impact on a victim's mental wellbeing so it's important to stay safe. The effects of cyber-bullying gradually take their toll over time and can lead to some serious mental health issues.



Bullying in Games

Video games provide a social connection between players. By using headsets and chat-services gamers connect, talk to each other, and make new friends. The game is the playground. Rules are set for the game but not for the interactions that players have with each other.

VIDEO GAMES PUT CHILDREN IN A VIRTUAL COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT WITHOUT ANY REFEREES. THIS CAN LEAD TO:

- ❏ Bad language
- ❏ Threats of violence
- ❏ Ganging up against a player
- ❏ Verbal abuse

VIOLENCE AND OTHER INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

Video games can be violent, racist, sexist, and more. We wouldn't let our kids watch a film or TV show that we felt was inappropriate. The same rules apply for websites and games.

But how do you find out if a game contains potential inappropriate content without playing it yourself? Well, the bad news is - you can't. The fact is that although we know that some video games can contain questionable content; we are not so sure of the impact this has on young people.

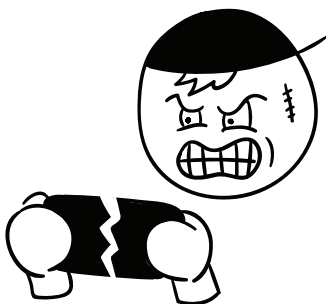
Many people are either for or against violence in games. We must accept that gaming is just like any other form of entertainment or form of art. Boundaries are pushed in art and video games should have the same liberties as books, film, music, or other visual arts.

But violent video games can be harmful when young children are exposed to material that is unsuitable. Parents can use their own discretion to decide what material is suitable for their kids. It is however a crime to expose underage children to material that is rated R (adults only).

Violence

There are certain video games that depict graphic violence, however, there are two schools of thought on the implications that this violence has on young people. Most popular video games do contain some form of violence. This is often portrayed as being insignificant and with no consequence to the victim or perpetrator. As we know this is not the case in real life.

The inclusion of violence in video games can send players, particularly younger players, the message that violence is harmless, funny, or even, an acceptable way to get what they want. Violence as an acceptable solution surely cannot be seen as a positive message.

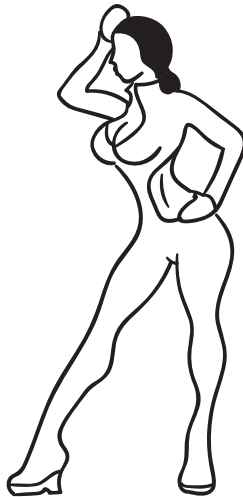


On the other hand, we find that there is no evidence to suggest any real connection between violence in video games and violent behaviour in real life. Although we do often see tragedies, such as school shootings, blamed on the influence of video games. No causal link has been found between the two.

Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are often used in video games, as well. For young people that are still developing their perception of the adult world, commonly used stereotypes can be harmful and create a distorted representation of player's roles and abilities.

Female characters, in particular, suffer the most from stereotyping. Male characters appear more frequently in video games compared to their female counterparts and talk significantly more. They typically are able to achieve more; demonstrate greater leadership skills and have more opportunities in games compared to female characters.



Women are often represented as passive and subordinate characters that depend on men, while often sexual relationships are key to their role in the game. Female characters are often categorized into four groups of characters:

- sex objects or prizes
- victims
- feminists
- heroes

In a recent study of popular video games, 41% had no female characters; 21% represented women as victims; 28% portrayed them as sex objects; and only 15% portrayed women as heroes.

Female characters are significantly more likely to be pictured in a hypersexual way, such as being half-naked, wearing inappropriate clothing, having an unrealistic body image. This could potentially be damaging to both male and female players' perception of gender, the development of their own identity and their attitude towards the opposite sex.

Also of concern is the fact that these female stereotypes can appear in any game, regardless of the rating, potentially exposing children to inappropriate content.

Racism

Characters that show some ethnicity, Black, Asian, or Hispanic for example, seem to appear far less frequently in video games, with main characters being predominately white males.

Often, ethnic characters are portrayed as stereotypes, which can be damaging to the development of a young person's perception of race and ethnicity. Young gamers with ethnic backgrounds can often feel degraded or left out, and Caucasian youths form a generalised view of an entire race or ethnicity. Video games often follow the typical racial stereotypes; black criminals, white heroes, and Asians being good at martial arts.

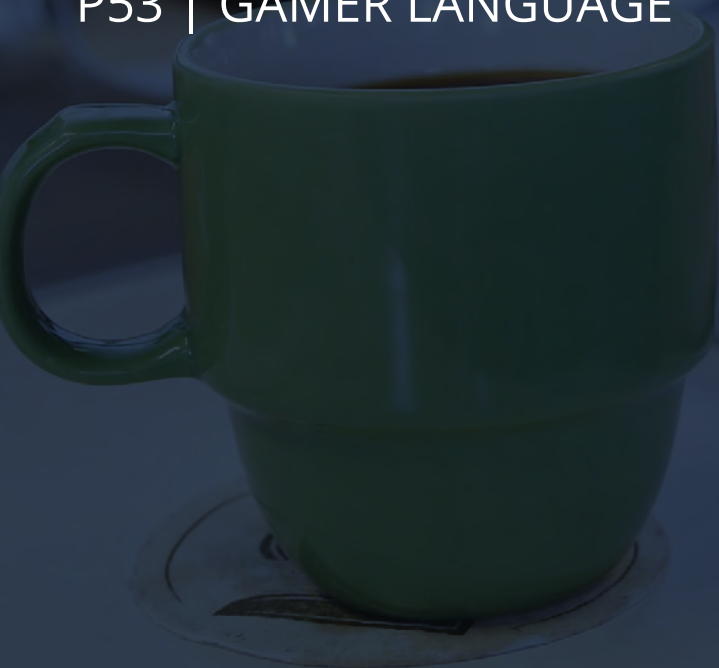
Studies have shown that racial stereotypes depicted in video games often shape players perceptions of that race in the real world. Characters of different races are very rarely heroes, rescuers or champions. These characters are widely stereotyped as overly muscular athletes with unnatural abilities or exotic fighters. Stereotyping characters leaves young people with an unrealistic view of different races.

05

CONNECTING WITH THE GAMER

P49 | GAMING GENRES

P53 | GAMER LANGUAGE



Talk the Talk

In the previous chapter, we outlined the benefits and the potential risks of gaming. By being able to identify and understand these risks, you will be able to make an informed decision as to whether your child's video game playing is beneficial or detrimental to their overall wellbeing.

But let's take it one step further.

To keep your children safe from any potential threat you need to begin communicating with them about gaming, even if you have never played a video game before.

So how do you communicate with someone who prefers to look at a screen than talk to you?

To connect with a gamer, you not only have to understand gaming, you also need to know how to talk about it. In this chapter, we dive headfirst into gaming vocabulary and try to give you some pointers on how to talk the talk.

GAMING GENRES

Gaming today is a very diverse form of entertainment which caters for everyone. Young, old, boys and girls, hardcore gamers or casual gamers, the gaming industry has a game that suits everyone.

So let's look at some of the most popular gaming genres. Understanding the genres will give you a better understanding of why your child is gaming and what s/he gets out of it.

First Person Shooter

FPS are games where the player assumes the character of a 'shooter', shooting his way passed hordes of enemies. Typically you get a mission at the start of the game and throughout the game you need to strategically work your way through mini-missions.

In a First Person Shooter you take the perspective of your character. This means you actually don't see your character but you usually do see the weapon you are using. This is different in a Third Person Shooter where the point of view is from above and you can see the character you play as.

FPS games have become social games as well. Most games offer the option of going online and connecting with other gamers around the world. This allows you to make teams and play together versus other teams. FPS are high adrenaline games so at times these games can get very heated. Look out for abusive language and violent content.

Some popular First Person Shooters are:

Call of Duty
Battlefield
Unreal Tournament,
Quake,
Half-Life,
Counter Strike,
Halo

MMORPG - massively multiplayer online role playing game

MMORPG's are vast, interactive worlds where millions of players get together and engage in social play. Every player is a character in this virtual world and together they go on missions or quests to defeat monsters, dragons, or whatever the enemy may be.

These fantasy worlds offer the gamers an alternative to the real world, a place to discover new places and experiences but also a place to connect with like-minded people and socialize together. The more you play, the better or stronger your character is in this virtual world.

Some popular MMORPG's are:

World of Warcraft

Guild wars

Eve Online

Star Wars

The Old Republic

Lord of the Rings Online

Sports Games

Sports games are a very popular genre of video games. They essentially simulate a sport as best and as realistic as they can. The game usually imitates the real sport by simulating real world events and adding real world players. This allows the player to play as their favourite real world sports star.

Competition is at the core of these games and they are a lot of fun! These games again offer the option to go online and play versus other gamers.

Some popular sports games are:

FIFA16

NBA2K15

Madden NFL15

EA Sports UFC

Action Games

Action Games are quite similar to First Person Shooters or Third Person Shooters but usually without or with less shooting. In action games the focus is more on jumping, running, fighting, solving problems, puzzles etc. You'll require a sharp mind and quick reflexes to successfully work your way through these games.

Action games have typically captivating storylines and engage a player into movie like scenarios. The further you progress in the game the more difficult they get and as a reward you're able to unravel more of the storylines. Some action games are developed to mimic movies.

Some popular Action games are
Grand Theft Auto
Uncharted
Assassins Creed
Batman
Portal 2
Tomb Raider

Real Time Strategy Games

In Real Time Strategy games you collect resources, build units and go into combat to defeat your opponents, knowing that you're opponents are doing the same thing to defeat you. RTS gamers require tactical thinking, planning, careful building of assets/troops and deployment. The best RTS gamers in the world are reputed to be able to undertake 300 actions every minute.

RTS Games have experienced a slow decline in recent years but the introduction of the mobile platform may lead to an resurgence of Real Time Strategy Games.

Some popular Real Time Strategy Games are
StarCraft,
WarCraft,
Dawn of War,
Red Alert

Platform Games

A Platform Game is a video game in which the game-play revolves heavily around players running and jumping onto platforms, floors, ledges, stairs or other objects. Platformers are one of the earliest genres of video game.

Platform games are very popular in video game arcades. Classic titles that have been around since the eighties include Donkey Kong, Sonic the Hedgehog and Mario Bros.

Some popular games include:

Super Mario

Fez

Rayman Origins

Braid

Super Meat Boy

Casual games

Casual games are games that don't require a long-term commitment to the game. Players can play infrequently and spontaneously. Casual games are usually played on mobile devices and are easy to download, and easy to learn.

Casual games are designed to be played for short amounts of time, multiple times throughout the day. Often these games are linked to social media and often offer social connections.

Some popular games include:

Candy Crush

Clash of Clans

Crossy Road

Temple Run

Subway Surf

GAMER LANGUAGE

Gaming language is unique. Below we have compiled a list of some of the most commonly used terms for your reference.

With gaming getting bigger and bigger; attracting more and more players of all ages, some of these “Modern Internet Colloquialisms” are fast becoming mainstream.

Some of these gaming words originated as typos when people were typing fast during a game. Some examples of this are: “pwn” which means ‘to own’ and “teh” which means ‘the’. Speed is more important than correct spelling when you battle a “mob”.

Gaming terms worth knowing!

Frag - To kill an enemy in a first person shooter game.

Noob or Newb - A term used to describe an inexperienced gamer/person/etc. Unlike Noob, a Newb is often someone who wants to get better.

DLC - (Downloadable Content) This term applies to all additional content that can be purchased online and downloaded onto your system. This includes new levels, characters, and costumes, etc.

Nerfing - When a game developer decreases the performance of a gaming element (*e.g., Gun/jetpack/Sword*). Developers will usually do this in an attempt to balance the game.

PWN - When a player gets a kill with great style.

Grinding - repetitive actions completed in order to gain further experience in the game.

PVP - (Player vs. Player). This term refers to games (or portions of games) that see one or more human players face off against one or more other human players.

NPC - (Non-Player Character). This gaming term refers to all characters in a game not controlled by the player or a human opponent. The behaviour of NPCs is controlled by AI (artificial intelligence).

Easter Eggs - hidden elements in the game.

Guild/Clan - Term for a clan or group of players who play online games together.

FTW - (For The Win) Used as a general expression of enthusiasm – example: Make Use Of FTW! – on the Internet as well as in video games.

Kill Ratio - Most online shooters rank players according to their kill ratio. You'd be ranked higher for ending a game with 6 kills and 0 deaths than you would for 10 kills and 6 deaths.

XP - (Experience Points), which are racked up as you progress through a game. Hitting certain levels of XP usually sees your character level up and gain new abilities or weapons.



Lag - If your internet ping (or latency) is too high then you may experience lag. This is when your real-life actions take too long to translate to the actions on screen, making a game virtually unplayable.

Beta - a nearly complete prototype of a game. Users often test beta versions to alert developers of bugs or problems.

Sandbox - A game in which the player ignores the game's objectives so as to explore the game's environment. Sandbox games are also referred to as nonlinear or open-ended. The *Grand Theft Auto* series allows for open-ended play.

06

MANAGING YOUR DEVICE

P57 | HOW TO READ THE AUSTRALIAN
CLASSIFICATION

P59 | PARENTAL CONTROLS

P60 | PARENTAL CONTROLS (WINDOWS)

P61 | PARENTAL CONTROLS (IOS/APPLE)

P63 | PARENTAL CONTROLS (ANDROID)

P65 | PARENTAL CONTROLS (XBOX 360)

P68 | PARENTAL CONTROLS (PS4)

Management is Key!

So, what steps can we take to ensure that your child's gaming experience remains a positive one? Well, we can start by trying to manage the actual game and the device it is played on.

The government provides a classification to provide guidance and information to parents on the content of the games. Understanding and using the classification will give you peace of mind about the content your child is exposed to.

Every game developer and all gaming platforms want your gaming experience to be a positive one. To reduce potential harmful impacts a number of parental controls are introduced in most popular games. In this manual, we give you a guide for the most popular platforms.



HOW TO READ THE AUSTRALIAN CLASSIFICATION

Some films and computer games that are exempt under section 5B of the *Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995* may be suitable for children to see and play at home. These include films of an educational, sporting, live performance or musical presentation type and computer games of an educational type.

G rating

The General classification is suitable for everyone. However, some G-classified films or computer games may contain content that is of no interest to children.

PG rating

The impact of PG classified (parental guidance) films and computer games should be no higher than mild, but they may contain content that children find confusing or upsetting. Some younger children may prefer to watch PG classified films with parents or an adult guardian.

M rating

Films and computer games classified M (Mature) contain content of a moderate impact and are recommended for teenagers aged 15 years and over. Children under 15 may legally access this material because it is an advisory category. However, M classified films and computer games may include content such as depictions of violence, supernatural or horror elements that may be unsuitable for children under 15. Parents and guardians may need to find out more about the film or computer game's specific content, for example by making further inquiries with the retailer, before deciding whether the material is suitable for their child.

MA 15+ rating

MA 15+ classified material contains strong content and is legally restricted to persons 15 years and over. A person may be asked to show proof of their age before hiring or purchasing an MA 15+ film or computer game. Cinema staff may also request that the person show proof of their age before allowing them to watch an MA 15+ film. Children under the age of 15 may not legally watch, buy or hire MA 15+ classified material unless they are in the company of a parent or adult guardian. Children under 15 who go to the cinema to see an MA 15+ film must be accompanied by a parent or adult guardian for the duration of the film. The parent or adult guardian must also purchase the movie ticket for the child.

R 18+ rating

R 18+ films are restricted to adults. A person may also be asked for proof of their age before purchasing, hiring, or viewing an R18+ film at the video store or cinema.

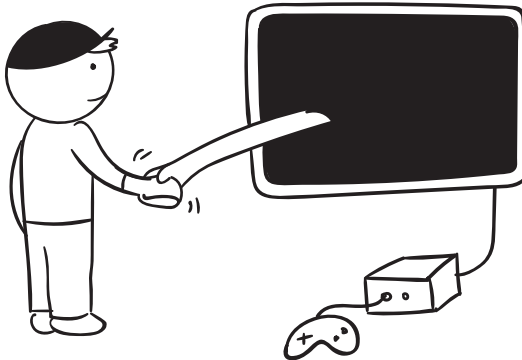
PARENTAL CONTROLS

All gaming platforms and devices feature parental controls and they're usually quite easy to set. They can be used as an extra safeguard against children viewing or downloading inappropriate material.

In the following pages we outline how to set the parental controls for:

- ◀ Windows
- ◀ IOS/Apple
- ◀ Android
- ◀ XBOX
- ◀ PlayStation

The information about parental controls was correct at the time of writing but please note that due to system updates these instructions may fall out of date. In that case, you can find updated instructions by performing a quick search on your internet search engine.



PARENTAL CONTROLS FOR WINDOWS

Set parental controls for Windows 7

1. Click on **Start**.
2. Select **Control Panel**.
3. Select **User Accounts and Family Safety**.
4. Click **Set up Parental Controls for any User**.
5. Under **Users**, click the user account you wish to manage or click **Create a new User Account** to set up a new account.
6. Activate Parental Controls by clicking **on, Enforce Current Settings**.
7. You can adjust the settings to suit your personal situation.

Set parental controls for Windows Vista

1. Click on **Start**.
2. Click on **Instant Search** field.
3. Type par to search for parental controls.
4. Click on **Parental Controls**.
5. In the settings menu click on **Create a new user account**.
6. Click on the text field and enter a username.
7. Click **Create Account**.
8. Set your personal settings according to your situation.

Set parental controls for Windows 8

1. Move your cursor all the way to the right until the 'Charm Bar' appears.
2. Click on **Settings**.
3. Click on **Control Panel**.
4. Click on **Family Safety**.
5. Click on **Manage settings on the Family Safety Website**.
6. Login to the family safety account using the same user password as is on your computer.
7. Click **view activity report** on the user you want to set up parental controls for.
8. Click on **Web Filtering**.
9. Select **Turn on web filtering**.
10. Select the **designed for children** option and click save.
11. Set other settings according to your situation.

PARENTAL CONTROLS FOR IOS/APPLE

The iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch all provide some parental controls to help keep your children safe online. The controls include Restrictions, In App Purchases Blocking, Blacklisting, and Whitelisting.

Restrictions

1. Launch the **Settings app** on your iPhone or iPad.
2. Tap on **General**.
3. Tap on **Restrictions**.
4. Tap on **Enable Restrictions**.
5. Type in a password you'll remember for when you need to disable restrictions again. (This can and should be completely different from the Lock screen passcode, otherwise the kids will know it!)
6. Under the **Allow section**, turn **Off** any apps that you don't want someone accessing without your permission. (This section is for built-in apps and not third party apps.)

In-App Purchases Block

1. Launch the **Settings app** on the iPhone or iPad you want to block in-app purchases on.
2. Tap on **General**.
3. Tap on **Restrictions**.
4. Tap on **Enable Restrictions** if you don't already have them on. If you do, skip to step 6.
5. Choose a passcode that only you will know — it should not be the same as the Lock screen passcode and be sure you *never* give it to your child.
6. Under the **Allow section**, disable the option for **In-App Purchases**.

Blacklisting Specific Content or Sites In iOS 7 Safari

If you want to prevent your kids from running into specific sites, you can use the automatic settings, and the blacklist feature.

1. Launch the **Settings app** from the Home screen of your iPhone or iPad.
2. Tap on **General**.
3. Enable **Restrictions** and set a passcode if Restrictions aren't already enabled.
4. Under **Allowed Content**, tap on **Websites**.
5. Now tap on **Limit Adult Content** under the **Allowed Websites** section. That will automatically block many (but not all - they change too quickly - adult websites).

To block specific websites:

- a. Tap on **Add a Website...** under the Never Allow section.
- b. Type in the full URL of the website you'd like to block and tap **Done** on the keyboard.

Whitelisting specific content or sites in iOS 7 Safari

If you simply want to make sure nothing is accessible except what you specifically allow, you can disable everything and then only turn back on the sites you consider permissible.

1. Launch the **Settings app** from the Home screen of your iPhone or iPad.
2. Tap on **General**.
3. **Enable Restrictions** and **set a passcode** if Restrictions aren't already enabled.
4. Under **Allowed Content**, tap on **Websites**.
5. Under **Allowed Websites**, tap on **Specific Websites Only**. Apple pre-populates the allowed website list with their own defaults.

To add more:

- a. Tap on **Add a Website...** at the very bottom of the list.
- b. Type in the **full URL** of the website you'd like to block and tap **Done** on the keyboard.

PARENTAL CONTROLS FOR ANDROID

Android has no general built-in parental control features, but does include rudimentary controls in the Google Play store. Google Play is Android's market place or shopfront for apps, music, books, magazines, movies, and TV. Google Play features App Filtering and Block Purchasing as:

Google Play App Filtering

Built-in content filtering is only available for apps. It does not affect content in music, books, magazines, or movies and TV. To enable app content filtering, follow the steps below.

1. Open the **Google Play** app from the home screen.
2. Press the menu button. This is the button with three vertical dots in the upper right-hand corner, adjacent to the search icon.
3. Select the **Settings** option.
4. Scroll down to **User controls**.
5. Choose the **Set or change PIN** option to set a PIN in order to restrict access to the settings.
6. Select the **Content filtering** option.
7. Select the highest maturity level you wish to allow, without using the PIN to override.

Please note that in the Google Play store, this only filters apps.

Google Play Block Purchases

You can set a PIN to prevent accidental or unapproved purchases. Once you set up this PIN, any purchase in the Google Play Store (app, book, movie, or any in-app purchases) will require you to enter this PIN. Note: this will not restrict any free apps.

To set a PIN follow the steps below:

1. Open the Google Play Store app.
2. Press **Menu** and touch **Settings**.
3. Press **Set or change PIN**.
4. Enter a PIN, and press **OK**.
5. Re-enter your PIN.
6. Check the box **Use PIN for purchases**.

Another way to restrict use of the Google Play Store is to use an app blocker. This will then require the user to input a pin or passcode to be able to open the Google Play Store. This should prevent any unplanned purchases or downloads. You can use an app blocker like *Perfect App Protector*, *APP Lock*, or *App Locker II* to do this. *MobileMinder tablet edition* also has this function.

PARENTAL CONTROLS XBOX 360

Set parental controls on your Xbox 360 console

1. On your console, go to **Settings**.
2. Select **Family**.
3. Select the **gamer-tag** of the child whose settings you want to adjust.
4. Under **Privacy & Online Settings**, select **Change Settings**.
5. Update the settings and then exit the screen to save.

Set parental controls through your computer

1. Sign in to your Xbox account.
2. Tap or click **My account**.
3. Tap or click **Security, family & forums**.
4. Tap or click **Xbox 360 Online Safety**, and then select the account you want to adjust. (Your child's avatar will be shown here next to your own.)
5. Select **Allowed** or **Blocked** next to the areas you want to limit or allow access to, and then tap or click Save.

You can control the following on your Xbox 360 console:

- ☛ **Ratings and Content:** These settings let you restrict games and video content based on the content's rating. You are also able to set up whether or not unrated or explicit content can be played on this console. Tip - You are able to set exceptions for individual games that are outside the rating restrictions you've set.
- ☛ **Family Timer:** This setting allows you to limit the time your console can be used on a daily or weekly basis.
- ☛ **Xbox Live Access:** This setting allows you to decide if your family can connect to Xbox Live from this console.
- ☛ **Xbox Live Membership Creation:** This setting allows you to control whether or not new Xbox Live memberships can be created from your console.
- ☛ **Change Pass Code:** This setting allows you to change your pass code.
- ☛ **Reset to Default Settings:** This setting allows you to reset the settings to their original factory settings.

To change your pass code:

1. On your console, go to **Settings**, and then select **Family**.
2. Enter your 4-button pass code.
3. Select **Change Pass Code**.
4. Select **Change Pass Code** again.
5. Enter a new 4-button pass code twice.
6. Select **Done**.
7. Select **Save and Exit**.

If you've forgotten your pass code, you can reset it by answering the pass code question you set up previously using parental controls. Here's how:

1. On your console, go to **Settings**, and then select **Family**.
2. Select a content control setting to change.
3. When you're prompted, enter any pass code (even though it's incorrect).
4. When you're notified that your pass code is incorrect, select **Reset Pass Code**.
5. When your pass code question appears, use your controller or chat pad to enter the answer, then select **Done**.

If you can't remember the answer to your pass code question, you'll have to contact Xbox Support for further help.

Set the Family Timer

Use the Family Timer to limit the amount of time your family can use your console on a daily or weekly basis. Family members can see how much time remains by pressing the **Guide** button on the Xbox controller. When the time expires, the console shuts down and can't be used again until the Family Timer automatically resets the next day or week.

1. On your console, go to **Settings**, and then select **Family**.
2. Select **On** to turn on Console Safety.
3. Enter a 4-button pass code using your controller.
4. Select **Family Timer**.
5. Select whether you want to set a **Daily** or **Weekly** timer.
6. Move down to the time period and use the left stick to increase or decrease the time period, then select **Continue**.
7. Select **Save and Exit**.

When the Family Timer is on, notifications will appear 1 hour, 30 minutes, 15 minutes, and 5 minutes before the time runs out. These give players sufficient warning so that they can save their games. However, when one of these notifications appears, you can add time or disable the timer altogether by entering your pass code.

To add time or suspend the Family Timer

1. When a Family Timer notification appears, press the **Guide** button to see the Family Timer options.
2. Enter your pass code using your controller.
3. Choose to add more time, suspend the timer, or turn the console off.

PARENTAL CONTROLS PLAYSTATION 4

PlayStation has easy to use Parental Controls. You can Restrict Use of PlayStation or Create a Sub Account.

Restrict Use of PS4 Features

1. Go to **Settings** in the Dynamic Menu.
2. Select **Parental Controls** by pressing the X button.
3. Select the **"Restrict Use of PS4 Features"**.
4. Select **"Application"**.
5. Select **"Change Passcode"**.
6. Enter the current password and then you'll be prompted to enter a new Passcode.
7. Select a number ranging from Level 1 through Level 11.
The numbers correspond with an ESRB rating Category.

2: EC (Early Childhood)

3: E (Everyone)

4: E10+ (Everyone 10+)

5: T (Teen)

9: M (Mature)

10: AO (Adults Only)

Create a Subaccount

1. Go to **Settings** in the Dynamic Menu.
2. Select **Parental Controls** by pressing the X button.
3. Select the **"Create New Sub-Account"** option.
4. Enter the new user's Language and Date of Birth.
5. Verify your Billing Information.
6. Follow the steps in the email that was sent to you.

07

TAKING CONTROL

- P71 | CHOOSING THE RIGHT GAME
- P73 | SETTING THE APPROPRIATE LIMITS
- P75 | CONTROLLING ENVIRONMENT
WHERE GAMES ARE PLAYED
- P77 | BRACE YOURSELF
- P78 | HAVING OTHER ACTIVITIES TO DO
- P79 | MAKING GAMES A SOCIAL ACTIVITY
- P81 | TEACHING YOUR CHILD ABOUT
VIDEO GAME DEVELOPMENT
- P82 | BE WARY OF FREE MOBILE GAMES
- P83 | NO GAMBLING SIMS FOR U18
- P84 | STAY SAFE ONLINE
- P85 | KNOW THE PARENTAL CONTROLS
AND CLASSIFICATION
- P86 | GET HELP!

Manage gaming in your home

As a parent, it is essential that you are able to maintain control of your child's media and technology consumption. You should be the one setting the boundaries. You wouldn't allow your child to watch an R rated movie, for example, for very good reasons.

With gaming, this can be a bit more challenging. Games are so accessible these days and you may be one of those people who find the workings of them quite daunting. There is no shame in this but it can make controlling gaming in the house a real challenge.

This chapter is about taking control. We'll give you a series of tips and things you can do to help you better manage gaming in your home, for your family.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT GAME

If you let your child play video games you need to be able to decide which games are appropriate and suitable. The same way you would assess the safety and suitability of any other toy.

So how do you do this?

Well, the first step is to check the Classification for a neutral rating of the content in the game. If you are unsure about how the Classification system works, please read the previous chapter.

To get a feel for the game you can preview some of its gameplay on YouTube. This is the best way to quickly find out what the game is all about.

If you like what you see, then the next step would be to purchase the game and play it yourself or at least watch as your child starts playing the game. Explain that this is the review phase and that you still have not made a decision on whether they get to play the game or not.

Check your child's reaction to the content and assess whether they are ready for this style of game.

This is even easier on the mobile platform. You can first download the game in your own time to check it out. Then you either re-download it so your child can start from the beginning or simply hand it to your child.

Make sure the game is beneficial for your child.



By using the checklist we provided at the end of the BENEFITS chapter you should be able to determine whether this game will have a positive influence on your child's life.

If the game passes all of the checklists and you're happy with it, you can then pass it on to your child.

By doing this, you will find that you now have a good understanding of what the game entails and your child will recognise that you've actually chosen the game for them. Not the other way around. This is really important.

Also, because of the prep work you've put in, you will know the game and its gameplay. This will make it a lot easier to have a conversation about the game later on down the track.

SETTING THE APPROPRIATE LIMITS

So, what is the answer to the million dollar question: How long can I let my child play video games? Research into this was undertaken recently by Dr Prybylski of Oxford University fame. It was an attempt to give parents a guide; an actual measurable and practical answer to what is a difficult question.

But the results were inconclusive: it depends on your child, their age, their understanding of technology, the game itself, its content, and so on... There were just too many variables involved to provide a general answer that would suit every child in the world.

However, the research did have an interesting outcome:

'A moderate amount of gaming (one hour per day) is better for your child than no gaming at all. And this is particularly true for boys.'

So, one hour of gaming per day, as a guide, seems to be a good piece of advice. Of course you need to take other things into account as well such as violent content, gambling content, and so on...

Time limits are especially good when you are unfamiliar with or are unable to monitor the game. However, if you do have a good understanding of the game you can set limits that make more sense. For example:

- 3 races of 3 laps in a racing game.
- 3 matches in a football game
- Recreate your room in Minecraft
- 2 levels in a platform game

This shows your child that you understand the game and that you've defined exactly what you're allowing them to do.

**You've chosen the game and now you've shown
them what they can do within this game.
You have control!**

As a parent you should be the one who sets the limits or rules within your household.

For example: It may be time to stop handing over the iPad blindly without knowing what your kids are playing and without setting any limits. If you do this you've already given away control of the device and it will be very difficult to get it back!

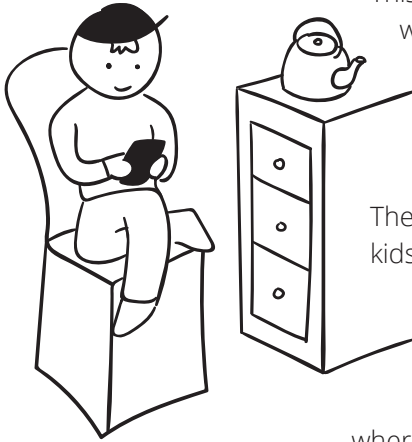
A final word about limits.

If you are the one who sets the limits, then, you can change the limits and you can change them at random. This really depends on your child and how they deal with rules. Some families work best with set limits for schooldays and set limits for holidays. Others are comfortable with deciding on the day what the limits are going to be.

Setting limits makes it very clear and predictable for your child. Write them out on the fridge if you like so that you can refer to it any time they come and ask to play.

CONTROLLING THE ENVIRONMENT WHERE GAMES ARE PLAYED

Now that you've chosen which game they can play and how long they can play it for, it is time to set up an area where they can play and that should be in an area where, once again, you have control.



This can be the kitchen, the living room or wherever you feel like you are in control. Not the bedroom, or the kids' playroom or any other room where the kids feel like they have ownership.

There are many parents however that will let their kids play wherever they want. And if you feel that you are in control of the gaming, then that's fine. But if it's hard for you to manage the gaming behaviour of your child, it would be advisable to keep gaming in common areas where you can monitor what's happening.

Another trick is to put away the consoles or devices when not in use. Out of sight is out of mind. Again this may not work depending on your situation. But seeing the device will definitely trigger the desire to play it.

If your kids play in the common areas you should try and be a part of it as much as you can.

You don't have to like the games, but you do need to know what your kids are doing!

Seeing the game in action will give you a better understanding of what your child is doing and it will also help create a dialogue about the game.

You want to avoid your child feeling like he or she has complete ownership and control over the video game. In this scenario, you are unable to choose if you're involved in this gaming or not. If you have a young child playing video games, it is your responsibility to know what happens in this space.

GET READY AND BRACE YOURSELF FOR IMPACT

You've just allowed your child to play a video game; now it's time to take responsibility for the impact it's having on them.

Your child has just been exposed to a barrage of stimuli causing increased dopamine levels in the brain. Video games are exciting, engaging, and can be one of the most captivating things that you can expose children to. So, when you take this away from them, you will definitely see a reaction!

Don't be surprised if your child is grumpy and annoyed after gaming. They are just settling back into normal life.

Real life is nowhere near as stimulating as gaming and your child will feel that it is 'boring' in comparison. Which, in turn, will make them act up and demand more gaming time.

This is where you need to be strong and stick to the limits you've set. Be consistent so that your child knows what to expect when they get off the game.

Now that you know that you can expect this type of behaviour, you can brace yourself and prepare for how to deal with it. Don't panic, your child's desire to play more does not necessarily mean that they are 'addicted'!

MAKE SURE YOUR KIDS HAVE OTHER TOYS/ACTIVITIES/THINGS TO DO

As stated before, when you take away the game, your child will be bored because, in their eyes, there is simply nothing that offers the same level of excitement/stimuli. However, your child has to return to the 'real world' and will want to feel rewarded and entertained here as well.

If a child only gains their sense of achievement and reward from a video game they will be at risk of mental health concerns.

So, as a parent, we need to cultivate their perception of the real world and help your child find the rewarding things within it.

Your child may be perfectly fine entertaining themselves on their own whilst gaming but in the real world that may not be as easy.

By engaging in activities with your child you will help them develop other interests. For instance, kicking a ball around with them may help instil a love of soccer or reading a book together may lead to a passion for literature, etc.

Give your child some input in deciding what they do. A lack of power/control in real life is often the number one reason why children retreat into online worlds. Games give them a feeling of control, particularly online role playing games. Loosening the rules in real life may make real life seem a lot more interesting.

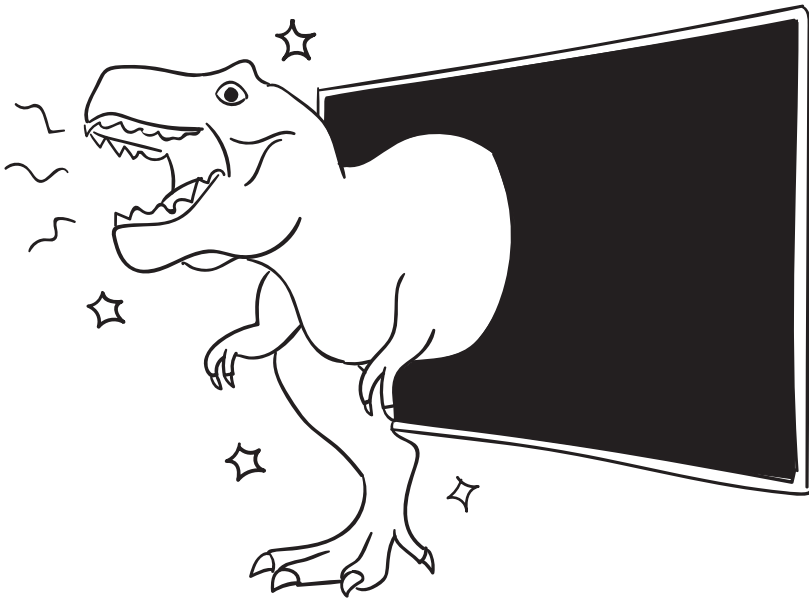
MAKE GAMES A SOCIAL ACTIVITY

Video games can be used as an escape from the real world. Young people who immerse themselves in this 'fantasy' world will feel for a moment that the real world doesn't exist.

Video games are becoming more and more realistic and their incredible graphics and immersive capability are definitely part of the attraction.

As parents, however, we want to make sure that the video game remains an integral part of the real world and not seen as an alternative.

We need to make them aware that it is not possible for them to live their entire life in this fantasy world.



One of the best ways to get your kids to understand that video games are a part of the real world is to introduce real life into video games. Inviting friends over to play video games together is a great, fun way of doing this.

Playing socially, together in the same room with others not only promotes real life social connections but also shows that there is a real person behind the avatar or online character.

Make sure that your children play in the common areas and that you're around to monitor them and perhaps even play along. Again, make sure you have control over what is played, when and how. You do this by making clear agreements beforehand!

If you organise these sorts of activities and manage them well, it will show your child that you're in charge. That you accept their hobbies but just want to make sure that they're safe in this space.

TEACH YOUR CHILD ABOUT VIDEO GAME DEVELOPMENT

So they love gaming and want to play all the time. No surprises there...

Why not use their love of gaming to teach them some essential skills. Skills that many of the top companies of today are looking for.

Video game development can be a great introduction into coding, programing, graphic design, engineering, and so on.

Children can start to develop games as soon as they can read and there are many age-appropriate software programs available to introduce children to the principles of game development.

Also, even more than the obvious gain in skill development that can be achieved. Children will also begin to develop an understanding for what makes games work.

Understanding how a game works and is developed will help make your child understand that gaming isn't just some fantasy world or place to escape to. It really is just a bunch of code on a computer.

This again introduces a 'real life' aspect to video games.

BE WARY OF FREE MOBILE GAMES

Because there is no such thing as a free lunch

However, in this day and age, we expect everything to be free. So the industry has found some creative ways to monetise their work without having to charge a fee upfront.

Games developers often work for months, even years to create their game. It would be unreasonable for us to expect there to be no charge. Therefore mobile games feature certain monetisation techniques that can be tricky to navigate for your child.

Look out for in-app purchases. Check whether you can unlock the complete game without having to spend money.

Free games are also likely to feature advertising that may not be suitable for your child. This advertising is usually managed by Apple or Google; not by the actual developers. The developers just assign different parts of the game to advertising. Apple/Google assigns the advertising to the game.

Again, check if you can unlock the game and its full content. It's likely to be only a few dollars and it is worth it for the peace of mind.

NO GAMBLING SIMULATION GAMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE UNDER 18

Research clearly tells us that the younger one starts gambling the more likely it is they'll develop a gambling issue later on in life. What we don't know is whether this is true when engaging in practice gambling like on the casino style games that you find in the app stores.

Teaching kids how to gamble at an early age, even if it is for points or coins, is unhealthy. There is no evidence yet to suggest that it is leading to any real-money gambling, but it's a risk you shouldn't take.

Gambling apps make gambling look harmless. It makes it look as if it is merely a game and it's not! Gambling can be risky and should always be done responsibly!



STAY SAFE ONLINE

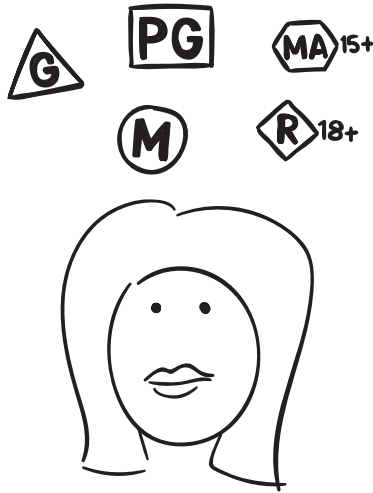
Here are a few simple tips to help protect your child online.

- Don't share private information like passwords, name and address or phone numbers with people or websites you don't know.
- Don't use your real name online, use a nickname or made up a name.
- Don't respond to messages when you are upset. You may regret what you have said. It can be used against you or even encourage bullies because they know how to make you angry.
- Log out and stop messaging others if you feel you are being harassed.
- Block, delete, and report anyone who is harassing you online and on your mobile to stay safe.
- Know how to report harassment on social media and online video games.
- Set up privacy options on social networking sites like Facebook to be safe and to protect yourself.
- Be careful about what pictures you are posting online, these can be copied by anyone and spread without your knowledge. Don't put pictures online you don't feel comfortable with everyone seeing.
- Don't open emails from an unknown person, delete them, these could be scams and contain viruses that effect your computer, phone or tablet.

KNOW THE PARENTAL CONTROLS AND CLASSIFICATION

As discussed earlier in this guide, most consoles and devices have excellent parental controls. They give you the power to choose what your kids are playing; what they are exposed to and what not.

Use them! They are very user-friendly.



GET HELP!

If any of these tips are difficult to put into practice you should consider seeking help. The next chapter is all about what to do when you feel that the gaming has become out of hand and you've lost control.

Help is available and there is no shame in having a conversation with a professional about what you can do; or which measures they can suggest you put in place to regain control.

08

WHEN THINGS GET OUT OF HAND

P90 | IDENTIFYING GAMING DISORDERS

P91 | THE NINE CRITERIA

P94 | GAMING DISORDER QUESTIONNAIRE

P95 | WHERE AND HOW TO GET HELP

P96 | WHAT IF YOUR CHILD DOESN'T WANT
ANY HELP?

P97 | LINKS AND REFERRALS

Houston, we have a problem

What if every attempt to negotiate or manage your child's behaviour ends up in conflict? Your child is playing video games obsessively and is becoming severely impacted by them?

Where do you go when you've tried everything? Good News!
Professional help is available

In short you'll need help from a professional if you're

- ☛ Dealing with an emotional issue that you don't seem to have a handle on
- ☛ Dealing with violence or aggression in the home
- ☛ Dealing with a partner who is undermining you

These are serious issues that can have a significant impact on your wellbeing and the wellbeing of your family. These issues won't go away by themselves. You will need to take action as doing nothing may lead to mental health issues, family breakdowns and even police involvement...

But even if your child's behaviour hasn't yet evolved to the high impact stage mentioned above. You still have the right to be concerned and may want to avoid it developing into a serious mental health issue down the track.

In order for us to identify whether your child needs extra help we'll need to measure the impact that video games are having on their life.

So, as a guide, we can use the same criteria as the one suggested by the international working group on Internet Gaming Disorders. This group has identified and made a consensus on how to identify Internet Gaming Disorder.

It's important to note that this is only a guide. The information in this page is designed to help you identify if you or your family needs further assistance.

It is NOT designed to self-diagnose! If you are concerned about your child's gaming, you should contact a professional to help you diagnose the situation and put an appropriate treatment plan in place.

HOW TO IDENTIFY GAMING DISORDERS

A group of international experts from Europe, North and South America, Asia, and Australasia collaborated to discuss and achieve consensus about how to assess internet gaming disorder as defined within DSM-5. A set of criteria was set to detect whether someone has a gaming disorder or problem gaming issue.

The nine criteria are outlined on the following pages. If 4 or more of these criteria are met within a one year period, you can conclude that gaming is having a considerable negative impact on your life.

PLEASE NOTE!

This list and questionnaire is only to be used as a guide. If you are concerned and recognise some of these criteria in your child's behaviour, we strongly recommend you seek professional help. Please read 'where to get help' and 'links and referrals' sections of this chapter to find out more.

THE NINE CRITERIA

Preoccupation or obsession with Internet games.

Pre-occupation relates to spending substantial amounts of time thinking about an activity. For this criterion to be met, your child must be thinking about games not only while playing but also during times of non-play, with excessive thoughts about gaming occurring throughout the day.

Withdrawal symptoms when not playing Internet games.

Withdrawal refers to symptoms that emerge when one is unable to engage in a behaviour or is attempting to reduce or stop it. Withdrawal symptoms associated with gaming must be distinguished from emotions that arise in response to an external force preventing or stopping a gaming episode. If a parent abruptly disconnects the internet during a game, a child is likely to express extreme emotions. These abrupt emotional responses, however, are not withdrawal. Withdrawal refers to symptoms that arise when one is unable to initiate gaming and/or when one is purposefully trying to stop gaming.

A build-up of tolerance - more time needs to be spent playing the games.

Tolerance is characterised by an increasing amount of time spent in an activity to feel its desired effects. For gaming, desired effects usually relate to excitement. Tolerance refers to feeling the need to play games for longer periods of time to experience excitement; it may also involve the need for more exciting games or more powerful media equipment.

The person has tried to stop or curb playing Internet games, but has failed to do so.

Inquiries about this criterion should focus not only on attempts to stop but also attempts to cut down or reduce gaming. Similarly, desiring to cease or cut back on a behaviour, but being unable to do so, would reflect the criterion, because such desires presume that play has risen to a problematic level.

The person has had a loss of interest in other life activities, such as hobbies.

This usually looks like the gamer expressing less interest in the hobbies or activities they were involved in. This may end up with the person quitting their other hobbies or activities or, at least, attempting to reduce their involvement.

A person has had continued overuse of Internet games even with the knowledge of how much they impact a person's life.

The individual continues to play even though he is aware of significant negative consequences of this behaviour, which are more likely to be psychosocial than physical in nature. Some negative consequences are: being late to school/work, spending too much money, having arguments, or neglecting important duties due to gaming.

Gaming may adversely influence health (e.g., losing too much sleep), although implicit in the criterion is that the problems are persistent and significant. To fulfil the criterion, negative consequences must involve central areas of functioning, and effects of little clinical relevance should not be considered (e.g. neglecting household chores that do not cause difficulties). Social and developmental aspects should be considered because dysfunction will manifest differentially based on age (e.g. school, work, parents, and partners).

The person lied to others about his or her Internet game usage.

Typically, deceit is directed towards family members, friends, or other important people. The social environment should be considered in assessing this criterion. Adults living on their own may be less likely to lie about or hide gaming than a child living with parents. Nevertheless, gaming that has risen to a level such that the individual is hiding it from others implies that it has become problematic.

The person uses Internet games to relieve anxiety or guilt – it's a way to escape.

Problem gaming becomes a method to modify moods or cope with difficulties. This criterion can relate to playing games to escape from or forget about real-life problems or relieve negative emotional states.

The person has lost or put at risk and opportunity or relationship because of internet games.

This criterion is intended to reflect more substantial issues than neglecting a homework assignment or being late for school or work due to gaming, behaviour more consistent with criterion 6. Arguments with parents about gaming usually do not rise to a level in which relationships are severed, but if a relationship is jeopardised due to gaming (e.g., arguments involving physical force or leaving home) then, this criterion would be met. Similarly, if neglecting studies in order to game occurs to the extent that a much worse than usual overall course grade is achieved, courses are failed or the person drops out of school, then this criterion would be met.

If four or more of these criteria are met within a one year period, you can conclude that gaming is having a considerable negative impact on your child's life. We strongly recommend you seek professional help immediately.

If you're not sure about these criteria or how to identify these criteria but feel your child is showing signs of an ongoing gaming issue, please seek professional help.

GAMING DISORDER QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire was developed by the DSM-5 international working group on gaming disorder. The questions relate directly to the nine proposed criteria of Gaming Disorder in the DSM-5.

To identify a Gaming Disorder one needs a minimum of four symptoms over a one year period.

Questions

1. Do you spend a lot of time thinking about games even when you are not playing or planning when you can play next?
2. Do you feel restless, irritable, moody, angry, anxious or sad when attempting to cut down or stop gaming or when you are unable to play?
3. Do you feel the need to play for increasing amounts of time, play more exciting games, or use more powerful equipment to get the same amount of excitement you used to get?
4. Do you feel that you should play less, but are unable to cut back on the amount of time you spend playing games?
5. Do you lose interest in or reduce participation in other recreational activities (hobbies, meetings with friends) due to gaming?
6. Do you continue to play games even though you are aware of negative consequences, such as not getting enough sleep, being late to school/ work, spending too much money, having arguments with others, or neglecting important duties?
7. Do you lie to family, friends or others about how much you game, or try to keep your family or friends from knowing how much you game?
8. Do you game to escape from or forget about personal problems, or to relieve uncomfortable feelings such as guilt, anxiety, helplessness or depression?
9. Do you risk or lose significant relationships, or job, educational or career opportunities because of gaming?

WHERE TO GET HELP?

So, you've looked at the criteria and now feel that there may be some cause for concern. What can you do?

We recommend contacting a professional early. It never hurts to have your situation looked at by someone who's seen these issues before and is experienced on how to deal with them.

Parenting isn't easy. Neither is asking for help.

Getting some advice or ideas/tips on how to deal with these kinds of behavioural issues can really help. The professional will definitely be able to advise if there is any cause for concern. Even if there is no cause for concern, the professional will be able to discuss with you many different ways that you can continue monitoring your family's gaming behaviour.

So, how do you find a counsellor that can deal with your issues?
Ideally you find a counsellor who:

- Understands addiction
- Understands and is comfortable with technology
- Specialises in working with children and young people
- Understands the positives and negatives about video game playing
- Takes a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy approach

WHAT IF YOUR CHILD DOESN'T WANT ANY HELP?

Young people, who game compulsively, are often shy and introverted. This is why the virtual world, with its limited and basic human interaction, works for them in the first place. So seeing a counsellor is often scary for them.

Telling your child to go see a counsellor is a big step in any case. You want to avoid your child feeling as if they're 'not good enough' or crazy. This means you will have to approach it very carefully. A few tips:

- Avoid conflicts about gaming
- Develop a supportive and positive relationship with your child around the gaming
- Make sure that 9 out of 10 conversations about gaming are positive. The 10th one can then be about the negative impacts on your child and your concerns

This will obviously be a challenge. You want your child to stop playing games all the time, so being positive about gaming is not going to come easy. However if you have gaming causes conflicts between you and your child, s/he may not accept any advice or guidance from you about gaming related issues.

LINKS & REFERRALS (AUSTRALIA)

Emergency Assistance

If you need emergency assistance, please phone 000 now.

Crisis Support Lines

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or www.lifeline.org.au – A crisis support and suicide prevention line for all Australians

Kids Help Line: 1800 55 1800 or www.kidshelpline.com – A counselling service specifically for young people aged between 5 and 25.

Counselling and Support

Your Local GP: Please visit your regular GP as a first point of contact. Discuss your personal situation and your GP should be able to give you a referral to the most suitable, local support service.

Headspace: 1800 650 890 or www.headspace.org.au – Visit the website to find your closest Headspace Centre. Headspace provides mental and health wellbeing support information and services to young people aged 12 to 25 years and their families. A range of youth friendly health professionals can help you with general health; mental health and counselling; education, employment, and other services.

Reachout.com: au.reachout.com is the leading online youth mental health service, providing help, information and support.

BeyondBlue: 1300 22 4636 or www.beyondblue.org.au – Beyondblue works to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related substance misuse disorders in Australia. Support is available 24/7.

Your local government youth service: Contact your local government to receive information about local services that provide support and counselling to young people.

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KEY WORDS

Addiction
Benefits
Problem solving
Strategic development
Emotional development
Stress
Expression
Manual skills
Hand- eye coordination
Fitness
Social development
Risks
Gaming disorder
Gambling
Advertising
Cyber-safety
Cyber bullying
Bullying
Violence
Gender
Racism
Gaming genres
MMORPG

First Person Shooter
Sports Games
Action games
Real Time Strategy Games
Platform Games
Casual Games
Language
Classification
Parental Controls
Windows
Xbox
Playstation
IOS/Apple
Android
Limits
Game Development
Mobile games
Symptoms
Questionnaire
Help
Links
Referrals

HOW THIS GUIDE CAME ABOUT

Manningham YMCA started studying the impact of video games on children and young people in 2011 when anecdotal reports were received from local young people being negatively impacted.

In October 2012 Manningham YMCA released '**The Video Games Report**' outlining the impact of video games on young people. The report was well received in the youth sector leading to several requests for presentations and workshops for youth services teams in and outside of the City of Manningham.

Manningham YMCA has developed a suite of programs to engage gamers in positive skill development. These programs included The Lab, Pixel Arcade and a Gaming Leadership Group. In 2014 Manningham YMCA received the READYS Award for excellence in the delivery of youth services and programs.

As a leading agency in this field Manningham YMCA delivers presentations and training workshops to parents and professionals. In 2015 Manningham YMCA proposed to develop a guide for parents. Manningham City Council provided the organisation with a grant to develop the guide.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Steven Dupon is the Manager of Manningham YMCA Youth Services, Founding Director of The Institute of Games and Author of the Video Games Report, Parent's Guide to Gaming and Manual for Dealing with Excessive Gaming.

Steven specialises in the wellbeing of gamers and their families. He provides resources for parents and professionals on how to better manage gaming at home but also looks at how we can use games as an agent for positive change.

Steven has initiated a range of video game related events, workshops and programs. These include:

- The READYS award winning Video Game Project,
- The XP program: improving mental wellbeing through gaming
- Pixel Arcade: positive, safe, and social video game events
- Game development workshops and courses in schools, libraries and learning centres
- Counselling for gamers and their parents

As an expert on the impact of video games on children and young people, Steven regularly presents on the risks and concerns associated with gaming.

To contact Steven Dupon, please visit:

www.manninghamymcayouthservices.org.au

