# **Video games, online games and apps: children and teenagers - Parents role**

Video games, online games and apps are extremely popular with children and teenagers. Children might seem to spend too much time gaming, but most play video games in a healthy and balanced way. You can help your child get the benefits and avoid the downsides of gaming by guiding his/her choices of games and his/her playing habits.

### **About video games, online games and gaming apps**

Video games, online games and gaming apps are electronic, interactive experiences based on computer technology.

You can game on various devices:

* personal computers and laptops
* consoles like Sony Playstation 4, Microsoft Xbox One and Nintendo Wii U
* handheld or portable consoles like Sony Playstation Vita and Nintendo 3DS
* tablets and smartphones
* virtual reality headsets.

Video games, online games and gaming apps come in many forms: on physical media like discs and cartridges, internet downloads, and online games and apps. You can buy some games over the counter in shops, and others you download.

Some games give you full access to the game when you buy it. Other games offer extra downloadable content, like new levels, which you have to buy separately from the base game. Other games are free for the base game but you need to buy extra functions or features. These might be characters or digital goods that let you progress more quickly through the game.

You play some games by yourself. Some are multiplayer, which means you play them with other people. You can play some multiplayer games in the same room with friends, and you can play others online with people all over the world. You can chat to people within the game.

Games can involve social media, and the lines between the two aren’t always clear. For example, you can share progress, screenshots or videos of many games with your followers on social media.

### **Best video games, online games and gaming apps for children and teenagers**

The best video games for children have some learning value and positive messages. They also let children feel like they can do something well.

Children: 3-11 years

If your child is younger, the best games:

* reward creativity and planning – for example, Minecraft
* help your child learn about rules and strategy – for example, Fifa
* encourage your child to take turns and play with others as part of a team in the same room, rather than online – for example, Wii Sports
* have different levels of difficulty, so games can evolve and your child can progress through stages – for example, Fruit Ninja
* have simple controls – younger children can get frustrated if they can’t work the controls
* have positive messages about gender and diversity – for example, Playworld Superheroes.

At younger ages, it’s a good idea to choose games with a G rating and avoid games that involve playing with others online.

Teenagers: 12-18 years

For this age group, it’s best to encourage healthy gaming habits, rather than look for specific games or game features.

As children get older most games have benefits of one kind or another. If your child is aged over 12 years, games that give her/him a way to work with other people in a team can be a good choice. You and your child can also look for games that have positive messages about gender diversity.

It’s best to avoid games that have an R18+ rating, because these games have content that’s not suitable for teenagers.

### **Benefits of playing video games, online games and gaming apps**

Your child can get a lot out of playing video games, online games and gaming apps. The benefits depend on things like:

* what stories or activities are featured in the games your child plays
* how gender and diversity are represented
* why your child is playing games
* whether playing video games is interfering with other parts of your child’s life
* how many players games are designed for.

Developmental benefits

Video games can improve your child’s:

* hand-eye coordination and fine motor skills
* problem-solving, strategy and planning, decision-making and logic skills
* ability to set and achieve goals
* ability to do several things at once
* time management skills.

Emotional benefits

As long as your child doesn’t play video games too much, games can have emotional benefits. For example, video games can help your child feel:

* positive and satisfied with life and less likely to feel depressed
* relaxed and less stressed – video games can be a way to manage mood or ‘let off steam’
* able to do something well – his/her self-esteem can improve as he/she gets better at challenging games and moves through levels
* able to make his/her own choices
* connected to other people.

Social benefits

Playing video games can have social benefits. For example, video games can help your child:

* strengthen existing friendships and make new ones
* learn to play in teams
* learn to play fairly and take turns
* learn to behave in ways that help other people
* feel closer to family, when you all play games together.

Educational benefits

Video games can have some educational benefits too. These include helping your child get better at:

* remembering things
* thinking about things
* recognising and understanding visual information
* understanding concepts she’s learning at school, like maths
* thinking critically
* learning new words.

If your child enjoys playing video games, it’s good to show him/her that you understand how he/she feels. For example, ‘Your Minecraft world is really interesting – building something like that must be a lot of fun. Tell me about how you made it’. This helps to create an environment where you can also talk about the possible risks and negative experiences of gaming.

### **Problems of playing video games, online games and apps**

Playing video games in moderation and balancing video games with other activities are the keys to avoiding most problems that can come with gaming. When children play video games so much that they’re not spending enough time studying or being physically active, there can be problems. Playing video games too much can lead to:

* stress
* poor performance at school
* poor sleep or not enough sleep
* mental health problems.

There can also be problems if a child is playing video games in an obsessive way – that is, he/she feels like he/she has to play and is missing out on other activities and aspects of life.

As in any social situation, bullying can happen. For example, if groups of children are involved in multiplayer games like Minecraft, they might deliberately harass other players or try to exclude them from games.

It might help to know that only a few children (about 3%) play video games in an excessive and problematic way. Video game literacy helps children understand and make judgments about the games they play. Video game literacy is part of media literacy. You can help your child develop video game literacy by talking with him/her about how games are designed, how they’re played, how they represent gender and race, and how game developers make money.

### **About violence in video games**

Violent video games are not appropriate for younger children.

Younger children struggle to tell the difference between fantasy and reality in games. They’re more likely to copy what they see in violent video games and use it on other children outside the game. Violent content can also upset younger children, who might not understand mature themes or understand the reasons for the violence in the game.

For older children it’s more complicated. Experts don’t agree on whether violent video games lead to aggression in real life. Experts who think there’s a link between violent video games and real-life violence say that violent video games:

* make children less likely to be shocked or distressed by violence and less likely to recognise other people’s feelings
* lead children to use the violence they’ve seen in games in real life
* teach children violence through watching and copying.

But experts who think there isn’t a link say that:

* violent video games are mostly played in a spirit of competition and children generally behave in a good-natured way
* older children can tell the difference between a game and reality, and this stops video game violence leading to real-life violence
* violent video games allow children to let off steam and reduce feelings of tension or aggression.

Experts do agree that it’s a good idea to limit the violent video games you or your older children play when younger children are around.

Talking with your child about violent games

It’s best to deal with the issue of violence in video games by talking with your child about it and sharing your own family values. Here are some questions you could talk about with your child:

* Why do video games sometimes have violence, and how is real life different?
* In real life, how do we cope with anger or people who upset us?
* How are men, women and people from different ethnic backgrounds portrayed in these games? Are women always victims? How often are they the main characters?

If you’re concerned about your child’s gaming it might be a good idea to get some professional advice. For example, you might be concerned if your child is moody, if he/she starts withdrawing from friendships, or if he/she isn’t doing well at school. Try talking with the school counsellor. Keep in mind that gaming might not be the cause of the changes in your child’s behaviour. Your child might be using gaming to deal with another issue.

Source: http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/video\_games.html/context/2039