National Institute on Media and the Family

The challenge: Watching out for our kids.

Our children are in trouble. Kids from preschool through high school are laying building blocks for success in school and life. They include self-discipline, the ability to delay gratification, perseverance, imagination, and respect. Study after study shows that poor media habits undermine every single one of these building blocks. Instead of being given the tools and experiences they need to succeed, more and more kids are shaped by a media culture that promotes more, easy, fast, fun, violence and disrespect.

Since 1996, the National Institute on Media and the Family has worked tirelessly to help parents and communities “watch what our kids watch.” The National Institute on Media and the Family is the world's leading and most respected research-based organization on the positive and harmful effects of media on children and youth. The National Institute on Media and the Family is an independent, nonpartisan, nonsectarian, and nonprofit organization that is based on research, education, and advocacy. Its MediaWise® movement is being adopted in communities throughout the country to help families make wiser media choices and encourage parents to “Watch What their Kids Watch.”

Mission: To maximize the benefits and minimize the harm of media on the health and development of children and families.

Vision: To be the trusted national voice and resource to help children and families thrive within the dynamic media culture.

Fact Sheet

Effects Of Video Game Playing On Children

Positives
1. Video game playing introduces children to computer and information technology.
2. Games can give practice in following directions.
3. Some games provide practice in problem solving and logic.
4. Games can provide practice in use of fine motor and spatial skills.
5. Games can provide occasions for parent and child to play together.
6. Players are introduced to information technology.
7. Some games have therapeutic applications with patients.
8. Games are entertaining and fun.

Facts
- 83% of kids, eight to eighteen, have at least one video game player in their home, 31% have 3 or more video game players, and 49% have video game systems in their bedrooms (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005).
- 97% of all teens play video games regularly (Lenhart, 2008).
- 63% of Americans have played a video game in the past 6 months, compared to only 53% of people who have gone out to the movies (NDP Group Inc., 2009).
- Video Games account for one-third of the average monthly core entertainment spending in the U.S. (NDP Group Inc., 2009).
- 45% of heavy video game players and nearly a third of avid gamers are in the 6 to 17 year old age group (NPD Group Inc., 2006).
• 97% of adolescents play video games (Rainie, 2008).
• One-Third of parents say they play video games with their children some or all of the time (Lenhart, 2008).
• Young Men randomly assigned to play Grand Theft Auto III exhibited greater increases in diastolic blood pressure from a baseline rest period to game play, greater negative affect, more permissive attitudes toward using alcohol and marijuana, and more uncooperative behavior (Brady, 2006).
• The most recent (May 2008) mystery shop study conducted by the U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) found that national retailers enforced their store policies by refusing to sell M-rated video games to minors 80% of the time (Federal Trade Commission, 2008).
• Of computer and video games purchased in 2008, as reported by the NPD Group, 84% were “E” rated games, “E10+” rated games, and “T” rated games (Entertainment Software Association, 2009).
• A study of over 2,000 8 to 18 year-olds (3rd through 12th graders) found the 83% of them have at least one video game player in their home, 31% have 3 or more video game players in their home, and 49% have video game players in their bedrooms (Roberts, Foeher, and Rideout, 2005).
• In the same study only 21% of kids reported that their parents set rules about which video games they can play, 17% reported their parents check warning labels or ratings on video games, and 12% reported they play video games they know their parents don’t want them playing (Roberts, Foeher, and Rideout, 2005).
• 11.9% of video game players fulfill diagnostic criteria of addiction concerning their gaming behavior (Grussser, 2007).
• Adolescents who play more than one hour of console or Internet video games have more or more intense symptoms of ADHD or inattention than those who do not (Chan, 2006).
• The most likely reasons that people play video games excessively are due to either ineffectve time management skills, or as a symptomatic response to other underlying problems that they are escaping from, rather than any inherent addictive properties of the actual games (Wood, 2008).
• Online Gaming Addictions display core components of addiction such as salience, mood modification, tolerance, conflict, withdrawal symptoms, cravings, and relapse (Chappell, 2006).
• Both novice and expert online game players are subject to time distortion and have difficulty breaking off from the game without interruption by others in the real world (Rau, 2006).
• Video game usage may be linked to a lower GPA and SAT score (Vivek, 2007).
• Those who play Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs) report more hours spent playing, worse health, worse sleep quality, and greater interference in “real-life socializing and academic work versus those playing other types of video games (Smyth, 2007).
• 8.5% of video-game players ages 8-18 exhibited pathological patterns of play as defined by exhibiting at least 6 out of 11 symptoms of damage to family, social, school, or psychological functioning (Gentile, 2009).
• Children burn about three times more calories playing some exercise-oriented video games than they do just sitting around watching TV (Graf, 2009).
• Kids used about two to 2½ times more energy playing Wii bowling and doing the beginner level of DDR as they did watching TV. They burned 2 to 2½ calories a minute during the activity (Graf, 2009).

Negatives
• Over-dependence on video games could foster social isolation, as they are often played alone.
• Practicing violent acts may contribute more to aggressive behavior than passive television watching. Studies do find a relationship between violent television watching and behavior.
• Women are often portrayed as weaker characters that are helpless or sexually provocative.
• Game environments are often based on plots of violence, aggression and gender bias.
• Many games only offer an arena of weapons, killings, kicking, stabbing and shooting.
• Playing violent video games may be related to aggressive behavior (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Gentile, Lynch & Walsh, 2004). Questions have been raised about early exposure to violent video games.
• Many games do not offer action that requires independent thought or creativity.
• Games can confuse reality and fantasy.
• In many violent games, players must become more violent to win. In "1st person" violent video games the player may be more affected because he or she controls the game and experiences the action through the eyes of his or her character.
• Academic achievement may be negatively related to over-all time spent playing video games. (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Gentile, Lynch & Walsh, 2004)
Questions to ask: Is the violence rewarded or punished? What are the consequences? How graphic is the violence? Is the violence against humans or inanimate objects? Is the violence sexual? Is the time spent playing video games out of balance?

Reasons children give for playing video games:
- It's fun
- Like to feel in control
- Releases tension
- Relieves boredom
- Develops gaming skills
- Feel a sense of mastery

Bottom line
- Many video games are fun and appropriate.
- Violent video games may be linked to an increase in aggressive behavior.
- Out of balance video game playing may lead to symptoms of addiction.
- There are many questions about the cumulative effect of video games, computers, and television.
- Parents are urged to monitor and limit video game play the same way they need to monitor television.

What to look for in choosing a game
- Be aware of advertising and marketing to children. Advertising pressure contributes to impulse buying.
- Check the ESRB rating symbols (on the front of the box) that suggest age appropriateness for a game and content descriptors (on the back) that indicate elements in a game that may have triggered a particular rating and/or may be of interest or concern.
- If there are violent and sexual themes in the title and cover picture, you can assume these themes are also in the game.
- Look for games involving multiple players to encourage group play.
- Pick games that require the player to come up with strategies, and make decisions in a game environment that is more complex than punch, steal, and kill.
- Go online and check out a game content and description before buying.
- AVOID the "first person shooter", killing-machine games.

Virtually all video games sold at retail in the U.S. and Canada carry one of six rating symbols that suggest age appropriateness.

**Titles rated EC (Early Childhood)** have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.

**Titles rated E (Everyone)** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.

**Titles rated E10+ (Everyone 10 and older)** have content that may be suitable for persons ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language, and/or minimal suggestive themes.
Titles rated **T (Teen)** have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language.

Titles rated **M (Mature)** have content that may be suitable for persons 17 years and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content, and/or strong language.

Titles rated **AO (Adults Only)** have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity.

Title listed as **RP (Rating Pending)** has been submitted to the ESRB and is awaiting final rating. (This symbol appears only in advertising prior to a game’s release.)

Games may list content descriptors that describe violence, language, sex, tobacco, drug, and alcohol use.

**Tips for Parents**

1. LIMIT game playing time.
2. CHECK the age game ratings and descriptors on the box.
3. USE other content sources and reviews to help you choose a game.
4. Check the ESRB rating symbols (on the front of the box) that suggest age appropriateness for a game and content descriptors (on the back) that indicate elements in a game that may have triggered a particular rating and/or may be of interest or concern.
5. AVOID the "first person shooter", killing-machine games.
6. REQUIRE that homework and chores be done before game playing.
7. DO NOT PUT video game consoles or computers in children's bedrooms.
8. PLAY AND ENJOY a game with your child; check in as your child moves into deeper levels in the game.
9. TALK about the content of the games. Ask your child what's going on in the game.
10. EXPLAIN to your children why you object to certain games.
11. Most major retailers of games have store policies preventing the sale or rental of M-rated (Mature) games to children or youth. In the event you notice a store clerk not complying with this policy, talk to the store manager or contact ESRB at [http://www.esrb.org/retailers/contact.jsp](http://www.esrb.org/retailers/contact.jsp)
12. Finally, ENCOURAGE your child to play with friends, or other activities away from the video game set.
Sources