

VIDEO GAMES VS. HOMEWORK

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Home video games are extremely popular in this country. Over one third of American homes have computerized game systems connected to the television. With hundreds of selections available, video games are currently the most popular toy in our country. Portable video games are the latest option. Every day the number of 6- to 16-year-olds playing video games increases.

Boys who play video games on school days spend 30 percent less time reading and girls spend 34 percent less time doing homework than those who do not play such games

Video Games Versus Television

Compared to watching television, video games are a better form of entertainment because they are interactive. Your child's mind has to be turned on and working. The following are some potential benefits of playing video games.

- They promote attention to details (such as clues), memorizing, sequencing and using strategies.
- They promote eye-hand (visual motor) coordination.
- They improve visual perception (spatial awareness).
- They allow use of imagination.
- They provide entertainment children and adults can share.

Disadvantages of Video Games

The drawbacks of playing video games are similar to those of watching TV:

- If allowed to dominate your child's leisure and study time, video games can decrease development of skills in sports, music and art. Performance in school can be affected if reading and homework are neglected.
- If pursued as a solitary activity, playing video games can decrease important social interactions with family and friends. A child's interactions with friends may become limited to pumping them for information about hidden passageways and secret doors. Encourage your child to play video games with others.
- Violent games can teach acceptance of violent behavior in real life.

You need to be concerned if your child's grades fall, if he doesn't do his homework, if he doesn't get enough sleep, if he doesn't play outdoors, if he becomes a loner, or if he seems preoccupied with aggressive behavior as seen in a video game.

Take A Stand on Video Games

Don't expect your child to set his own limits on the amount of time he spends with this bewitching form of entertainment. You are responsible for your child's well-being and must set appropriate limits for him. If the rules are broken, deny your child access to the game for a day or more. Insist that homework and chores be completed before your child can play video games. Game time can even be used as an incentive for finishing these tasks properly.

- **Limit video game time.**

Two hours a day or less is a reasonable limit. Or allow an hour of play on school nights and two or three hours a day on weekends. Some parents allow the video games only on weekends. If your child is doing poorly in school, temporarily eliminate video game time on school nights. Some parents allow their children to earn video game time by putting in equivalent reading time.

- **Don't allow your child to postpone bedtime because he wants to finish a video game.**

Remember that children who stay up late are usually too tired the next day to remember what they are taught in school. Don't allow your child to have a video game set in his bedroom, because this eliminates your control over time spent playing. When bedtime is drawing near, give your child a 10-minute warning.

- **Encourage your children to settle their own disputes over using the video game.**

Try to stay out of disagreements, as long as they remain verbal. Children can't go through life having a referee to resolve their differences. If the dispute becomes too loud, remove the game until your children work out a solution.

- **Help your child choose video games that are not excessively violent.**

Encourage your child to buy or rent sports, puzzle, maze, or adventure games. Avoid games that contain lots of murder, combat and destruction. Research suggests that video games encourage more aggressive behavior than violent TV shows because your child is an active participant in the destruction and not just an observer. If your child borrows or rents a new game, insist on approving its contents before he uses it.

- **If you own a computer, take advantage of some of the educational games available.**

Educational computer games tap the motivational power of arcade games and help your child learn. They combine academics and entertainment, and also teach

computer skills. If you have a choice, buy computer games instead of video games.

- **Try to channel your child's leisure time into a variety of activities.**

Video games are not bad for children. They can teach certain skills and they are more educational than watching TV. If you try to forbid video games, your child will play them at an arcade or a friend's home. So teach your child to play them in moderation after the first weeks of normal infatuation pass. Encourage reading, music, hobbies, sports and playing with friends as well.

VIDEO AND COMPUTER GAME ADDICTION SURVEY

Are you concerned about your teen?

Think about your teen's video game playing.

Look at the statements below. If you agree with the statement, check the box.

Agree

- My teen feels great while playing the video game.
- My teen feels unhappy, cranky or irritable when not playing.
- My teen is angry when I ask him/her to stop.
- My teen craves more playing time.
- My teen spends most of his/her time in their bedroom (with video game systems).
- My teen thinks about the game when not playing.
- More and more of my teen's friends are "on line friends."
- More and more of my teen's friends are gamers.
- My teen would rather play video games than be with family and friends.
- My teen neglects responsibilities, such as homework, family chores, or work.
- My teen tries to cut back on playing time but can't.
- My teen plays more often than he/she plans.
- My teen plays for longer periods than planned. He/she can't seem to quit
- My teen sometimes lies about his/her playing time.
- My teen sometimes sneaks time to play, before school or late into the night.
- My teen stays (or wants to stay) home from school to play video games.
- My teen spends more than twenty hours a week playing.
- My teen continues to play in spite of negative consequences.
- My teen has arguments with me about how much time he/she spends playing.

The higher the number of boxes checked, "Agree", the more likely that video game addiction is a problem.