
Common Sense on Gaming

What is gaming?

Kids love playing games. They play them online and with handheld devices like Gameboy. They also play them on their cell phones and through systems like the Xbox that you hook up to your TV.

Some games help kids be more creative in music and art. Gaming can also help to develop a child's interest in science and history. But most of the popular games are made up of action and violence.

How do you know if the games are okay?

Use the game's rating as a guideline, but ratings are not always accurate. If your kids like to play games on the Internet, be aware that a lot of Internet games are not rated. You should also know that many games let your kids play against people all over the world. While this may be OK for older kids, it's not recommended for younger kids.

It doesn't matter if the game is rated or not, or if your child plays alone or with other people. You should still look at the game yourself to judge whether or not it's OK for your child.

Why does gaming matter?

There are two big reasons you should care about what your kids are playing: violence and addiction. As kids get older, games become violent. Some game controls let your child stab or slice someone on screen. This kind of violence affects kids. Many studies have shown that playing violent games makes kids more aggressive and less able to feel compassion for others.

Also, kids can play games for hours without stopping. Gaming addiction is very real and it can harm their health, schoolwork, and social lives.

What can parents do?

Tips for parents of all kids:

- » **Set limits.** Be firm from the beginning about how much time kids can play.
- » **Make sure games are okay for their age.** Know the content of what your kids play, both at home and at friends' houses.
- » **Be aware of multiplayer choices.** Many games let kids play against other people all over the world. While that's not necessarily bad, you should just be aware of it and know what your kids are doing.
- » **Talk about online ads.** Most online games give away free things and downloads. These can be full of software that can harm your computer.

Tips for parents of preschoolers:

- » **Be there for them.** Sit alongside your preschoolers to help guide them and explain what the game is asking them to do.
- » **Choose carefully.** Look for preschool games that are educational and make the kids think.

Tips for parents of elementary kids:

- » **Watch for chat options.** Many games for elementary kids offer something like chat. We do not recommend this for elementary kids. If this is offered, you can usually turn it off.
- » **Carefully consider the cost of online game subscriptions.** Many online games cost money instead of showing ads. If your child's friends use this game, he will want to also. It's your money, so check out the site yourself to see if it is worth the price.

Tips for parents of middle school kids:

- » **Check the multiplayer options.** Preteen and teen games often have players from all over the Internet. But this can be controlled by the player, so set the controls that are okay with you.
- » **Watch the language.** When kids play multiplayer games, they often get excited and use strong language. If you are not okay with what you hear, use the parent controls that stop online play.
- » **Watch out for violence.** The violence increases quickly in these games. Check what your kids are playing and watch for games with too much violence.

Tips for parents of high school teens:

- » **Be aware of games that can cause addiction.** Games like Halo 3 let kids play against others anywhere in the world of computers. They are designed to take up a lot of time, and it is up to you to stop it.
- » **Talk to your kids.** Talk to teens about the games they play and look for games that respect your family's values.
- » **Watch the money.** Games are expensive, and many games let kids buy things while playing. Talk to your kids about how much money they spend on games. Ask if that money could be better spent somewhere else.