Children and Video Games
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Around 97% of teens between the ages of 12 and 17 years old play computer, web, portable, or console games. Video games have both positive and negative features. As a parent, it is important to be aware of the latest research so you can effectively monitor your child's video game use.

Types of video games and ratings

There are many types of video games that are made for people of all ages. It is important to understand the different types of games and their ratings so you can make a good judgment about what is appropriate for your children. The different types of games are:

- Action: Have a fast-paced nature and tend to be violent.
- Adventure and Role Playing: Have an element of fantasy and/or surrealism and are less intense than action games, but still often include violence.
- Arcade: Includes a broad range with different ratings. Some examples include Pacman and Soul Caliber 2.
- Strategy: Have a tactical movement element – often of troops or players.
- Simulation: Have a simulation element – often aircraft simulations.
- Driving: Have a driving element – often racing as well as crash derby or mission-based driving.
- Puzzle: Require thinking and logic skills and almost always have a low rating.

Just like movies, video games are rated based on the maturity of the game content. There are seven ratings:

- Early Childhood: Content is intended for young children.
- Everyone: Content is generally suitable for all ages.
  - May contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.
- Everyone 10+: Content is generally suitable for ages 10 and up.
  - May contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes.
- Teen: Content is generally suitable for ages 13 and up.
  - May contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling and/or infrequent use of strong language.
- Mature: Content is generally suitable for ages 17 and up.
  - May contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.
- Adults Only: Content is suitable for adults ages 18 and up.
  - May include prolonged sense of intense violence, graphic sexual content and/or gambling with real currency.

- Rating Pending: Has not yet received a rating.
  - Appears only in advertising, marketing and promotional materials related to a game that is expected to carry an ESRB rating, and should be replaced by a game's rating once it has been assigned.

The "Everyone 10+" is the lowest rating that allows mild violence, mild language and minimally suggestive themes.

There are many different types of fun video games for children

- The top 10 most frequently played video games range from action games to logic games. Only 3 of the top 10 games are considered violent. There are popular video games available that are appropriate for children of all ages. Many of these games are fun for parents too. Spend some time playing video games with your children. Not only will you get to monitor what they are playing, but you will bond with your children too!

Gaming is a social event

- A majority of children play video games while others are in the room or with others online. It is likely that your children will witness antisocial behaviors in these settings. Encourage your children to use good manners even in these types of settings. Research shows that 75% of teens respond to these situations by sometimes asking the aggressor to stop. Though online gaming gives children the opportunity to interact with other people, it also poses many risks that come with using the Internet. Many experts suggest that your child should not interact online with anyone they do not know in "real life" unless you or another trusted adult is with them. In terms of general Internet safety, it is important that your child not use a real name as a username, but rather use a made-up name if playing games online. Often children do not understand that the Internet is accessible to anyone and therefore, any shared information can be seen by others. It is important to explain this to your children and make sure you help them take the proper precautions.

Gaming can improve attention

- When compared to a random sample of people, action gamers did better on tasks that tested eyesight and ability to see different shades of gray. This means action gamers can see better and pay better attention to surroundings in many situations, such as driving.

Certain video games promote an aerobic workout

- Video games that require physical activity, such as Dance Dance Revolution and games played on a Wii console or the Xbox Kinect can improve fitness, and develop motivation for physical exercise. These games should not be seen as an alternative to other forms of fitness, but they can be used as a fun and energy-expending activity for children, especially when weather does not permit playing outside.

Video games have potential for education in the future

- Researchers are curious about the educational potential of video games. A study found that children learned science material better when they played a game about a science topic and had a supporting lecture from a teacher compared to children who just had a lecture. Though there are not many games or school curriculums that support this type of learning yet, it may be more common in the future.

Violent video games have been linked to aggression

- Violent video games have been linked to an increase in aggressive behavior in children. However, it is important to understand that it is difficult to truly know if children become more aggressive because they play violent video games, if aggressive children are drawn to violent video games or another outside factor makes children violent. In any case, ensuring that children play games that are only suited for their age level is best.

Recommendations

- Though video games have potential benefits, be aware of what your children are playing and how often they play. It is recommended that parents have a family discussion and set family rules about the type of games and amount of time that children can play.
- Video games are fun even for adults so try playing them with your children. Children enjoy showing you something they know how to do so let them be the teachers. This will also give you the opportunity to monitor what your children are exposed to, as well as give you time to bond.
- Though video games keep children engaged for long periods of time, make sure your children do other fun activities that do not involved sitting in front of a screen. Playing family board games and reading together are other great ways to interact with your children while having fun.