



CANADA'S CENTRE  
FOR DIGITAL AND  
MEDIA LITERACY

## Managing Video Game Playing in the Home

The best way to manage games in the home is to get involved in what your kids are playing. Your kids will be much more likely to follow your advice if you show them you are genuinely interested in their games.

Get involved:

- For younger kids, choose video games for them. Look for games that don't contain violence or stereotyping. Talk to other parents for advice and suggestions of good games. For more information see the tip sheet [Choosing Good Video Games](#).
- Always check the rating and content descriptors on a game before renting or buying it.
- As they get older, talk to your kids about the games they like, and be there when they buy or rent them.
- In their book *Grand Theft Childhood*, Drs. Cheryl K. Olson and Lawrence Kutner report that parents are often frustrated by how little they know about the games their children are playing. Sit down and play with your kids, particularly if they have a new game and you're unsure about the content. (Be aware that games can become more violent as you play them longer, so be prepared to invest some time in playing a new game with them.)
- If possible, have your computer or video game console in a public area of your house so you can closely monitor what your kids are playing.
- Buy games that can be played by more than one person and which several people in the family will enjoy.

Restrict access to violent games:

- Approach your local video store and ask them to put a restriction on your account to prevent your children from renting or buying games that are rated for older players. (Most stores will honour this kind of request. If they don't follow through, find a more cooperative, family-friendly store.)
- Discuss video game content you find objectionable:
- Talk to your kids from a young age about why you find certain video game content objectionable. Most teens will play video games with violent or sexist content from time to time, so it's unrealistic to try to ban them outright at this age. However, if you talk to your teens, about why you find certain games offensive, they will better understand your feelings, and will hopefully carry your values with them even when they play games away from home.
- Encourage critical thinking. Discuss with kids how believable events or story lines in games would be if they happened in real life. Challenge stereotypes when you see them, and encourage your children to do the same.



- Discuss with your kids the prevalence of violence as a solution in video games. Ask them to think about what might be other, non-violent solutions to the same problem, and encourage them to play games that allow for non-violent solutions (many "action" games allow players to succeed through stealth or careful planning as well as through violence; a good game review site will steer you towards these.)

Control the amount of time your child spends playing video games:

- Don't ban game playing outright—it is an important part of kids' social lives, particularly for boys.
- Establish rules for how much time per day your kids can play games, and stick to them. Many homes have "not until homework is completed" or "only on the weekend" rules.
- If you put limits on how long a gaming session can last, keep in mind that many games take a certain amount of time to finish.
- Remember that while a new game will sometimes completely consume your kids, the novelty will pass and other pursuits will eventually hold more appeal.

Encourage other activities:

- Do whatever is necessary to encourage and support your child's participation in other activities. If your child doesn't seem to be interested in anything other than video games, try a tie-in to one of his or her favourite games. If your son prefers fantasy role-playing games, for example, you might encourage him to read books with fantasy themes.

Control video game spending:

- Video games, consoles and online video game subscriptions are expensive. To keep costs down, you can rent or borrow games and consoles.

