

MANAGING VIDEO GAME PLAYING IN THE HOME

Good-quality video games offer lots of benefits to children and teens.

They can:

- provide a fun and social form of entertainment
- encourage teamwork and cooperation when played with others
- make kids feel comfortable with technology—particularly important for girls, who don't use technology as much as boys
- increase children's self-confidence and self-esteem as they master games
- provide points of common interest and opportunities for socialization
- develop skills in reading, math, technology and problem-solving
- encourage participation in related offline activities, such as reading or sports
- encourage civic participation
- improve hand-eye co-ordination and fine motor skills

CHOOSING GOOD GAMES FOR YOUR KIDS:

- Look for games that encourage **free play**. Here are some of the qualities of free play you can look for in a game:
- Does it encourage use to use your **imagination** and **creativity**?
- Do you get a **feeling of achievement** when you learn to do something new or overcome a challenge?
- Does it encourage you to **socialize** with other people in a meaningful way? (Younger kids mostly want to play online with people they already know in real life. If your kids want to play with their friends in an online game, have them turn off the in-game chat and communicate with their friends on a different, private channel, like FaceTime or Messenger Kids. That way people they don't know can't contact them.)
- Does it **let you play when you choose to**, and only make you play **because you're enjoying it**? (Some games have feature that make kids spend more time playing or play more often. There are some tips on the next page to help you recognize and deal with them.
- Does it **let you decide what will happen next**, or are you just playing through a path or story that's been laid out for you?
- Does it **challenge you** and **engage your emotions**?
- Are there **lots of different ways you can play it**, not just one thing over and over?
- Does it let you **take risks** while still **feeling safe**? (Safety can include not seeing **content** you weren't expecting to see, not being **contacted** by people you don't know, and that other players don't **bully** you.

These are also great questions to ask your kids about the games they're already playing!

- 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. Talk to other parents for advice and suggestions of good games or check out the reviews by parents and kids at [Common Sense Media](#).
- Always check the rating and content descriptors on a game before renting or buying it. Check out our tip sheet [Understanding the Rating System for Video Games](#) for more information.
- As they get older, talk to your kids about the games they like, and be there when they buy them. Use our tip sheet [Co-Viewing With Your Kids](#) for advice on how to talk to kids about the media they watch and play.
- 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. If kids play on mobile devices, make sure those devices stay out of bedrooms.
- Encourage gaming as a shared and social activity. Buy games that can be played by more than one person and which several people in the family will enjoy.
- Make sure kids understand that the other players they interact with in online games are real people. It's easy to forget that other people have feelings when you can't see them or hear their tone of voice. See our tip sheet [Building Empathy in Children and Teens](#) for more information on how to do this.
- Tell your kids to come to you if anyone is mean to them in an online game. Our [Parents' Guide to Cyberbullying](#) has tips on how you can teach your children what to do if they experience or witness cyberbullying.
- Help kids get started making their own video games! [Scratch](#) is a programming language designed for kids that they can use to make and remix games and play and share games made by other kids.
- 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.
- Help kids recognize the ways that games keep us playing: giving us new abilities to use and things to explore, making us do repetitive tasks to get to “the good stuff,” and (in multiplayer games) making us feel like we owe it to other players to be there more often.
- Remember that while a new game will sometimes completely consume your kids, the novelty will pass and other pursuits will eventually hold more appeal.
- The feeling of achievement that good games provide can also be part of why kids don't want to stop playing. Encourage your kids to end a gaming session when they've accomplished something big rather than continuing to play.
- For more tips on controlling gaming time, see our tip sheet [Four Tips for Managing Your Kids' Screen Time](#).

ENCOURAGE OTHER ACTIVITIES:

- 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 child prefers fantasy role-playing games, for example, you might encourage them to read books with fantasy themes. Some games, like *Minecraft*, even have book and comic series!

CONTROL VIDEO GAME SPENDING:

- Many libraries have console games available to borrow. You can have your kids try a game from the library before they decide whether it's worth spending money on.
- Avoid games that have advertising or in-game purchases. Make sure your kids understand that in-game purchases cost real money! If they want to play a game that has them, buy a prepaid gift card instead of putting in your credit card information. You can find out how to stop in-game purchases on iOS devices [here](#) and how to stop them on Android devices [here](#).