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## Science of Parenting: Video Games and Other Media: Pros and Cons

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TURN OFF THE MEDIA. IMPROVE YOUR CHILD'S HEALTH.

## Video Games and Other Media: Pros and Cons



**Think about how video games can affect players. Research shows that people learn by repeating actions and skills used while playing video games. Find out what types of actions and skills your child will be practicing before allowing your child to play any video game.**

### VIDEO GAMES RATINGS

- M** are not for anyone under 17 years old.
- E** are supposed to be for everyone. However, many E-rated games reward players for harming other characters, and should not be played by children.
- E10+** may be suitable for everyone 10 and older. Look for some violence, abusive language, and suggestive themes.
- T** are for teens (ages 13 and older). Look for violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, strong language.
- ONLINE** although rated, can change in content based on the people who are playing online with your child.

**PARENT:** Corey, your birthday is coming up. What would you like?

**CHILD:** There is this really cool video game that's out.

**PARENT:** What's it called?

**CHILD:** Smash Crash Bandit

**PARENT:** Where can you buy it?

**CHILD:** I think you can get it at Gamers.

**What other questions might be important to ask before deciding to purchase this game?**

Parents are faced with requests from their children and want to make good decisions. When it comes to deciding what video or computer games, and television shows are appropriate for kids, think about the following guidelines from the American Academy of Pediatrics:

- No screen time for children age two or under
- No more than one hour of total screen time for children ages 3 to 12 years during a day

Healthy, helpful video games

- are available for all ages
- encourage physical activity
- reward helpful and healthy actions
- do not reward players for hurting others
- do not reward players for dangerous, harmful, or risky actions
- can improve skills, such as reading, spelling, rhythmic movement, typing, balance, flexibility, hand-eye coordination
- can be about sports, puzzles, problem-solving, and traditional educational subjects

Aggressive or violent games

- reward players for hurting or killing others and practicing dangerous actions such as road rage, reckless driving, etc.
- may be rated "E" for everyone but not appropriate for all ages

## WARNING SIGNS OF TOO MUCH SCREEN TIME

Symptoms may include reduced functioning in two or more of the following areas:

- School
- Relationships with friends
- Relationships with family members
- Emotions
- Work
- Sleep
- Caring for self (bathing, eating, etc.)
- Physical activity, such as less than 60 minutes of moderate aerobic activity each day

Ask yourself: As a result of playing video games or spending time in front of a screen, does my child:

1. Lie?
2. Miss school or work?
3. Spend a lot of time planning his day so he can play a video game or watch TV?
4. Spend less time with family or friends?
5. Lose sleep?
6. Not eat, or eat too much?
7. Not bathe or get dressed?
8. Become irritated when not playing video games or not sitting in front of a screen?
9. Get less than 60 minutes of moderate aerobic activity each day?

If you answered “yes” to two or more of these questions, your child may be spending too much screen time. Limit your children’s screen time and video game playing to reduce these negative effects.

## SHORT- AND LONG-TERM EFFECTS

Twenty minutes of playing violent or aggressive video games can have effects. Short-term effects can include increased:

- heart rate
- blood pressure
- stress hormones
- fighting with others
- risky actions during daily activities such as speeding, cutting people off while driving, road rage

Long-term effects can include:

- increased use of violence and aggression in every day activities
- using violent words, language, or actions
- responding to others with violence or aggression
- thinking violence and aggression are “normal”
- less helpful, healthy actions with others
- reduced aerobic activity
- stress
- obesity

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## VIDEO GAME CHECKLIST

Answer these questions before allowing your child to play any video game.

### CONTENT: What is the game about?

- Review all games by playing or watching them
- Read at least two online reviews for each game

### ACTIONS: What actions or skills will be practiced?

- Are players rewarded for helping other players or characters?
- Are players rewarded for hurting or trying to hurt other players or characters?
- Do I want my child rewarded for these actions?
- What activities, skills, or abilities will be practiced or learned?
- Do I want my child to learn these skills?
- Will this game help my child be a better person?

### LANGUAGE:

#### What type of language is used in the game?

- Do I want my child to use or learn this type of language?

**PARENT:** Corey, your birthday is coming up. What would you like?

**CHILD:** There is this really cool video game that’s out.

**PARENT:** What makes it so cool?

**CHILD:** You chase each other and get into car crashes. If you hit other cars you get points. The more you hit, the more points you get. If you hit a car and it crashes into a wall and blows up, you get a lot of points. You have to dodge bullets. If you cause someone to crash, you get points. Whoever has the most points in the end wins.

**PARENT:** That does sound like a lot of action. Let’s look it up on the Internet and see what is said about it. The rating guide says it’s M for mature audiences, which means it’s not intended for anyone under age 17. On your birthday you will turn 9. Why do you think the people who gave it an M rating think kids under age 18 shouldn’t play this game?

For more information see:

#### The Family Discussion Guide

[www.esrb.org/about/news/downloads/Family\\_Discussion\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.esrb.org/about/news/downloads/Family_Discussion_Guide.pdf)

#### A Parents’ Guide to Video Games, Parental Controls and Online Safety

[www.esrb.org/about/news/downloads/ESRB\\_PTA\\_Brochure-web\\_version.pdf](http://www.esrb.org/about/news/downloads/ESRB_PTA_Brochure-web_version.pdf)