



## MEDIA DANGERS, Part Two

### VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES

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Video gaming or playing video games has become extremely popular although video games have been around for many years. Games have become much more sophisticated and realistic as ever-improving technology provides better graphics that give a very 'realistic' playing experience. Some games connect to the internet which can allow children and adolescents to play online with both adults and peers they don't know. Everyone agrees that these games are engaging and can be a lot of fun. Some games are educational, can promote problem solving and learning, and can encourage the development of fine motor skills and coordination. However some of the most popular games (*Call of Duty, Halo, Grand Theft Auto*) have repeated killing of people, criminal behavior, disrespect for authority and the law, racial, sexual and gender stereotypes, and all link killing with some form of success within the game such as reaching a 'higher' level.

Children and adolescents are drawn to the fast paced, interactive games that are more engaging than passively viewing TV or listening to music. Video games encourage players to identify with and role play their favorite characters, and they can make decisions affecting the actions of the character they are imitating. However about 80% of the most popular video games feature aggressiveness and violence as the primary theme. Many violent games are rated for older adolescents or adults, however you find many younger children regularly playing those games. Surveys suggest that younger children (pre teens) spend the most time playing computer games—on the average, 3 hours per day. Adolescent girls spend about 5 hours per week playing video games, while adolescent boys averaged 13 hours per week.

There are concerns about the effects of violent video games on young people who play video games excessively. Many studies have shown a definite correlation between the degree of violence in video games and the degree of aggressive behavior in children and teens that play violent games for extended periods of time

Children and teens exposed to a lot of violence become 'immune' or numb to the horror of violence, imitate the violence they see, show more aggressive behavior and accept violence as a way to handle problems. Studies have shown that the more realistic and repeated the violence the greater the impact on children and teens. Repeated exposure to violent games makes it easy to ignore suffering and the bad effects of violence, the characters provide poor adult role models, and teach children that violent acts are fun and acceptable.

Violent video games have been shown to alter the brains of young men even after 1 week of playing, including changes in the brain regions associated with thinking and emotional control. Many children and teens get so engrossed in the game that they spend many hours playing and some become addicted. The children and adolescents who have the least self-esteem and least success in relating to others are often attracted to these violent video games.

Spending large amounts of time playing these games can create multiple problems including impaired social skills, lower grades due to less time reading and studying, exercising less and become overweight, and spending less and less time with family, hobbies, and friends. Excessive time spent on video gaming leads to fewer hours of sleep at night and consequently difficulty getting up in the morning and problems concentrating during the day.

Violent video games have also been associated with negative reactions in children such as nightmares, stress, headaches, fatigue and problems eating. The videos can be scary and portray the world as a violent, dangerous, and fearful place. Other outcomes of pathological game playing can include depression, anxiety, social phobias, and lower school performance.

## TIPS for Parents

Parents can help their children avoid problems by:



- Monitoring the television and video games your child is watching or playing.
- Checking the rating of the video games you purchase to be sure they are appropriate for the age of your child.
- Renting video games prior to purchasing them to be able to preview the games and determine how appropriate they are.
- Encouraging less violent alternative programs and games.
- Setting clear guidelines about the number of hours per day spent on a variety of media (television, games, internet, etc) both in and outside the home.
- Getting involved and watching the television programs or playing the games with your son and daughter to experience the content and provide commentary and clarification.
- Remembering that adults or older siblings playing video games are providing models for younger children both in the amount of time and the content of video games played at home.
- Encouraging group or family games that can involve both competition and social interactions.
- Allowing access to television, video games, or social networking sites on the internet **only after** all other required activities, such as homework, are completed.
- Having children and adolescents involved in a variety of activities including social, exercise, and sports.

If parents are concerned about their child's behavior, or the effects of videogames a consultation with your physician or the school psychological consultant may be helpful.

## TIPS for Adolescents and Young Adults

- Learn about the dangers of excessive video gaming and time spent exclusively with violent games.
- Become aware of the potential dangers of internet contacts and relationships while playing games online.
- Appreciate the fact that extensive time spent online or playing video games prevents engagement in other activities such as exercise, time spent with friends and family, resting and sleeping, and time spent reading or doing homework.

If you are concerned that you are unable to limit the amount of time spent on video games and it is interfering with your school attendance and school work, consider talking to the school psychological consultant about ways to help.

For further information and suggestions contact the psychology staff at your school or Dr. D. Lean, Chief Psychologist.

