

MediaWise[®] Network Parent Guide to Video Game Addiction



**What is it? Is it real?
How do you recognize it?
What can you do about it?**



Larger than the Hollywood movie industry, video games are the fastest growing form of media entertainment. With their use of cutting edge technologies, video games involve the player in ever-more realistic, complex, and involved gaming situations. Because of their high appeal playing video games can be highly rewarding and also potentially addictive.



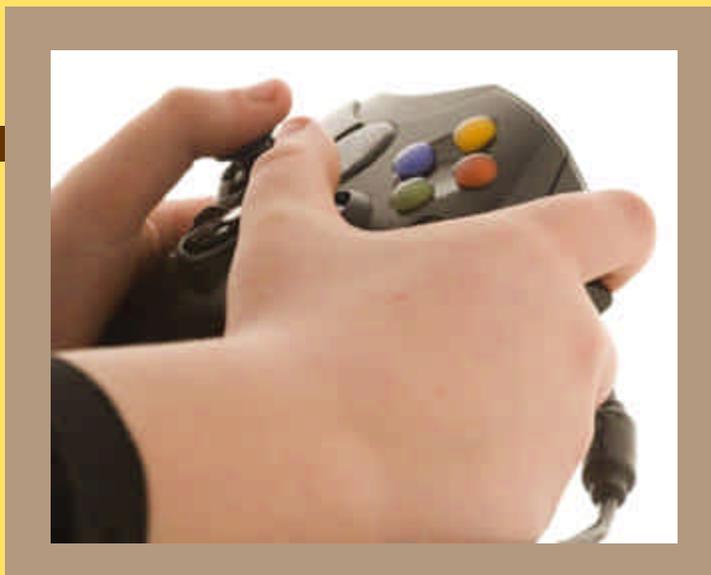
What the research says: 8.5% of youth gamers demonstrate pathological play.

Damage to family, social, school, or psychological functioning.

Institute Director of Research Dr. Douglas Gentile collaborated with Harris Interactive® this year to conduct the first study with a nationally representative sample to demonstrate the prevalence of pathological video gaming among American youth. They found that 8.5% of youth video gamers, ages 8 to 18, displayed pathological patterns of videogame play as defined by exhibiting at least six out of eleven symptoms of damage to family, social, school, or psychological functioning. According to Dr. Gentile "given that 9 out of 10 children play video games, this is not a trivial percentage of youth who are having real world problems because of their video game play."

Pathological gamers.

Pathological gamers (compared to non-pathological gamers) spent twice as much time playing games, were more likely to have video game systems in their bedrooms, reported having more trouble paying attention at school, received poorer grades in school, had more health problems, and were more likely to feel "addicted."



What are the symptoms?

For kids:

- Most of non-school hours are spent on the computer or playing video games.
- Falling asleep in school.
- Not keeping up with assignments.
- Worsening grades.
- Lying about computer or video game use.
- Choosing to use the computer or play video games, rather than see friends.
- Dropping out of other social groups (clubs or sports).
- Irritable when not playing a video game or on the computer.

For adults:

- Computer or video game use is characterized by intense feelings of pleasure and guilt.
- Obsessing and pre-occupied about being on the computer, even when not connected.
- Hours playing video games or on the computer increasing, seriously disrupting family, social or even work life.
- Lying about computer or video game use.
- Experience feelings of withdrawal, anger, or depression when not on the computer or involved with their video game.
- May incur large phone or credit bills for on-line services.
- Can't control computer or video game use.
- Fantasy life on-line replaces emotional life with partner.

Physical signs of addiction:

- Carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Sleep disturbances
- Back, neck aches
- Headaches
- Dry eyes
- Failure to eat regularly or neglect personal hygiene



Take the MediaWise Video and Computer Game Addiction Survey™

If you agree with these statements about your child please check the box.

- ◇ My child feels great while playing the video game.
- ◇ My child feels unhappy, cranky or irritable when not playing.
- ◇ My child is angry, has a temper tantrum, when I ask him/her to stop.
- ◇ My child craves more playing time.
- ◇ My child spends much of his/her time in their bedroom playing games.
- ◇ My child thinks about the game when not playing.
- ◇ More and more of my child's friends are "on line friends."
- ◇ More and more of my child's friends are gamers.
- ◇ My child would rather play video games than be with family and friends.
- ◇ My child neglects responsibilities, such as homework and family chores.
- ◇ My child tries to cut back on playing time but can't.
- ◇ My child plays more often than he/she plans.
- ◇ My child plays for longer periods than planned.
- ◇ He/she can't seem to quit.
- ◇ My child sometimes lies about his/her playing time.
- ◇ My child sometimes sneaks time to play, before school or late into the night.
- ◇ My child stays (or wants to stay) home from school to play video games.
- ◇ My child spends more than twenty hours a week playing.
- ◇ My child continues to play in spite of negative consequences.
- ◇ My child has arguments with me about how much time he/she spends playing.
- ◇ My child's games turn up as a top priority when he/she takes the [MediaWise "I'd Rather" Test.](#)

The higher number of boxes checked, "agree," the more likely video game addiction is a problem.



MediaWise “I’d Rather” Test Page 1

Background:

This test helps a gamer see how his/her gaming fits in with other life priorities. Use this test with children, teens, and adults to help them form a more realistic picture of their attachment to gaming.

A true-life priority needs three ingredients: thought, feeling, and behavior. Only one or two ingredients does not make a priority.

For example, I may think that I value education, but then never study. Education is only a priority if I feel motivated and then act on it. Conversely, behavior alone does not necessarily mean something is a priority. For example, I may show up at a place of worship regularly so the behavior indicates that I value my religion. However, the real reason I show up is because I think it will make me look good in the eyes of my boss who attends the service regularly.

Helping a person form an honest picture of his/her life priorities involves assessing which activities are those where thinking, feeling, and behavior come together.

"I'd Rather" Test:

- 1. With this background in mind ask the gamer you are concerned about to write down a list of all the things they do during the course of a week. The list usually includes things like eating, sleeping, spending time with family, playing a sport, engaging in a hobby, school and/or work, chores, going to movies, studying, hanging out with friends, etc.**
- 2. Then have the gamer check as many of the statements on the following page he/she thinks are true.**



MediaWise “I’d Rather” Test Page 2

- ◇ I'd rather play games than hang out with my friends.
- ◇ I'd rather play games than play any sports.
- ◇ I'd rather play games than spend time with my family.
- ◇ I'd rather play games than eat.
- ◇ I'd rather play games than sleep.
- ◇ I'd rather play games than talk on the phone.
- ◇ I'd rather play games than go to school or work.
- ◇ I'd rather play games than go to a movie.
- ◇ I'd rather play games than watch TV.
- ◇ I'd rather play games than watch TV.
- ◇ I'd rather play games than listening to music.
- ◇ I'd rather play games than exercise.

Now, list the things you'd rather do than play video games.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

If you have trouble thinking of things you'd rather do than play video games, they may have become the most important priority in your life. This could be the start of a slippery slope to video game addiction.

"Computer games are ruining my life. If I'm not playing, I'm thinking about playing. I have, like, no real friends."

- High School student addicted to Everquest



"His grades are down the tubes, he skips meals, and he hardly spends any time with his friends."

- Concerned parent



What can I do to prevent addiction?

Some parent-child arguments about video and computer games are part of 21st century America. So don't panic if you have your share of those. On the other hand, don't ignore signs of a real problem with compulsive playing. Here are some tips to make sure computer and video game playing remains a positive part of your children's lives.

- Set clear ground rules about when, where, how much, and what kind of game playing is allowed as soon as your child starts to play games.
- Intervene early before things get out of hand.
- Limit video game playing time.
- Have clear consequences if time limits are not observed.
- Enforce consequences consistently.
- Make sure your child is not playing in the middle of the night.
- Require that homework and other chores be completed first.
- Keep video and computer games out of child's bedroom.
- Be firm. Consistently enforce the rules. If your child refuses to cooperate, restrict access to video games for a period of time.
- Be clear with your child that constant arguments about game playing will result in loss of game playing privileges.
- If nothing else works, go cold turkey. Get rid of the games.
- Encourage other activities. Have younger children help make a list of "Fun Things to Do".



If I think that my child is addicted, who can help?

Video Game Addiction is an emerging problem so there are not many video game specific treatment centers. However, here are some important things to ask when you are looking for help -

Questions for mental health professionals -

1. Do you believe that video games can be addictive?
2. Have you ever treated anyone for computer or video game addiction?
3. If not, what is your approach for treating addiction?
4. Do you believe that video game addiction needs to be treated directly as a primary problem? Or merely as a symptom for an underlying problem?

***You want to work with someone who will treat video game addiction as a primary problem, not as a secondary issue.**

**The National Institute on Media and the Family does not offer counseling services.
The Institute does not officially endorse any of the following resources.
We offer these resources for your information.**

1. Dr. Maressa Orzack, Licensed clinical psychologist, on the Harvard Medical School faculty, Coordinator of Computer Addiction Services at McLean Hospital, at www.computeraddiction.com.
2. Dr. Kimberly Young, Executive Director, Center for Online Addiction, at www.netaddiction.com.
3. Support group for people addicted to computer or video games, at www.olganon.org/Links/links.html.
4. Intervention Center, intervention for addiction, at www.intervention.com.
5. Parents Network Advice about Teenagers - Computer Game Addiction, at www.parents.berkeley.edu/advice/teens/gameaddiction.html.



Millions of kids love video games, especially boys. Our national survey revealed that 92% of kids age 2-17 play regularly. That translates into 59 million young players. The overwhelming majority of these kids play their video games, do their homework, keep up their responsibilities, and have other interests. No problem.

So it's clear that video and computer games are not inherently bad for kids.

Some kids, however, get hooked. Computer game addiction is real and growing. Research shows that 8.5% of gamers demonstrate pathological play . If you think that you, or your child are struggling with video game addiction seek professional help.

