

“Addicted” to gaming

Hooked on video games

Millions of kids, especially boys, play video games. A national survey revealed that 97% of school-age children play them regularly. 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. For most kids and families, video games are a fun part of a healthy media diet. For others, video game play can start to replace or erode important activities like spending time with friends, doing homework, sleeping and, in some cases, even eating. A growing number of parents are worried that their kids are “addicted” to video games. Of course, a true addiction means more than doing something a lot. An emerging body of research on video game play and youth is just helping us understand the scope of the issue.

What does the research say?

Institute Director of Research Dr. Douglas Gentile collaborated with Harris Interactive* to conduct the first study with a nationally representative sample to demonstrate the prevalence of “pathological” game play among American youth ages 8 to 18. “Pathological” game play is defined as behavior patterns consistent with gambling addiction. More specifically, **pathological gamers exhibit at least six out of eleven symptoms of damage to family, social, school, or psychological functioning.** According to this study, nearly one in 10 young gamers (8.5%) displayed behavior patterns similar to addiction. According to Dr. Gentile, “The study was designed to demonstrate whether pathological gaming is an issue that merits further attention. With almost 1 out of 10 youth gamers demonstrating real-world problems because of their gaming, we can conclude that it does.”

“Addicted gamers”

Pathological gamers (compared with nonpathological gamers) spent twice as much time playing games (24 hr/week), 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.” More specifically, pathological gamers, displayed at least six of the 11 symptoms, including:

- Lying to family and friends about video game usage;
- Using video games to escape from problems or bad feelings;
- Becoming restless or irritable when attempting to stop playing video games;
- Skipping homework in order to play video games; and
- Doing poorly on a school assignment or test because they spent too much time on games.

Is it a real addiction?

The American Medical Association debated video game addiction in 2007. Its members correctly called for additional research into what many medical professionals saw as a growing problem. So while video game addiction is not yet an official diagnosis in the American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Dr. Gentile’s research gives the medical community and parents alike a better idea of the scope of the problem. Given that video game addiction is not yet an official diagnosis, “addiction” is put in quotes throughout this document. However, there is no question that pathological game play is having a real world impact on families everywhere.