

# Is Your Child Obsessed with VIDEO GAMING?

By Larry Deavers

Excess video gaming seems to be an epidemic among children and teens today. For some, it has many characteristics similar to addiction, including obsessively thinking about gaming when they are not playing and showing some symptoms of withdrawal when they are deprived access, such as changes in mood and temperament. Parents are often at a loss as to how to handle this behavior that seems to dominate their children's minds, alter their personalities, and steal away their time from family activities.

While many children and teens can participate in gaming without experiencing these problems, there are some who have a much more difficult time with self-control. Just as some adults can drink socially for years without becoming addicted, there are others who struggle with setting limits on their drinking and it ends up damaging their lives in several ways.

If you recognize that your child may be dealing with some addiction-type responses to video gaming, it is definitely one of those times that calls for you to prioritize your role as the parent and set limits on their behavior, even though it will be very uncomfortable and may be met with a backlash of anger. However, if you think of responding to this in the same way you might if you discovered your child was using drugs, I think you have a pretty accurate picture of what you will need to do to help your child regulate this behavior.

That may sound extreme to some, especially given the peer pressure among children and teens to engage in gaming and share their experiences online. But, if you have a child in your home who experiences this kind of obsession about gaming, then you know what this looks like and you know the personality change and social isolation that comes over them is very real.

If you think your child may have an obsession over gaming, here are some steps you can implement to begin regulating

Begin by discussing your concerns with your child, including your observations about the changes in their mood, withdrawal from family, social isolation, or other effects you see. They probably will not agree with your concerns, but at least they should understand why you think making changes is necessary.

Invite their input on how much game time is appropriate and will still allow them to meet all their other obligations. This does not mean they can game anytime they are not doing homework or chores; there still needs to be sufficient unstructured family time to just leisurely be around the rest of the family. This is often when the most important memories are made or the most valuable conversations take place. So, don't fall into the trap of letting them play just because there does not appear to be anything else going on.

Agree on consequences for negative reactions when you tell them it's time to stop playing. Often, children give an angry response, ignore their parents, or insist on continuing to play until the game is over. If you have dealt with this, you know the game may not be over for a very long time and they can re-start another game without you realizing it. An appropriate consequence for failure to comply with the time limits would be less game time at their next appointed time.

Set a timer to help regulate the game time, so that when the game is over is not arbitrary, but is a set amount of time that everyone knows. It would be good to set two timers, one where the child can see as he or she plays and another for the parent. (You can use the timer on your phone for this.)

Ultimately, you have to be willing to completely take gaming away, if they just cannot handle balancing gaming with other activities in their lives. Truly obsessed children and teens are very creative about playing when they think no one will know, such as during the night or on their phone. Do not be afraid to take their phone or gaming devices with you when you go to bed each night. That may be inconvenient, but, again, think of what you would be willing to do if your child was on drugs.

Take the initiative to keep your child engaged. If you see an opportunity to play a board game, go out for ice cream, or create some special family moments, taking steps to relieve their boredom will help your child learn to interact with the family, develop social skills, and see the value of spending time together.

Depending on the nature of your child's obsession over gaming, you may face significant hostility when you first begin imposing limits. However, after some time, you will likely see the emergence of your child's old personality again, and they will adjust to the new conditions. You may be surprised to discover that the relaxed, fun and charming person you used to know is still in there somewhere!

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