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## Dos and Don'ts of Gaming

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concerns caused by the exercise trade off of games. If a child is playing 6 hours of games those 6 hours are usually spent sitting. There is increasing brain development research indicating that being physical and moving your body increases healthy brain development. Many therapists are requiring movement homework as part of psychotherapy.

Know the games and what behaviors are involved

I advise parents to be with their kids and play or watch their children and adolescents play the video games. See what your child is doing. See how amazing some of the games are in their graphics and creativity. Or see how you don't approve of the content. Then decide on what type of balance you would like to be part of your child's life. Create boundaries for your kids. When they are with people, have them interact with them and not play video games. When there is too much sitting, have them get up and move. Encourage and reward competing behaviors. It is hard to play video games while shooting baskets in the front yard or playing outside with friends. This means you reward those outside exercise behaviors rather than trying to punish the gaming behaviors.

Dangers to keep in mind

The research is pretty clear that exposure to violent video games has an impact on aggression of those who are playing. Violent video games are correlated with increases in aggression, arousal, aggressive thoughts, anger and

I was out to dinner the other night waiting for my table at Chow in Lafayette and a father approached me and asked me about my last article where I talked about summer activities. He specifically wanted to know about the dangers of video games. In my practice, I see boys who are dealing with becoming young men in a very complicated society. When my father-in-law tells his stories about getting dropped off at the farm for the summer or my father talks about being 12 and taking the street car to the Red Sox game by himself, I marvel at how independent, physical, and healthy that all seemed. Our kids have many different pressures, influences, and opportunities. Sorting all of those out can be complicated and difficult. Parenting is difficult enough in the areas we experienced. Today's parents simply did not grow up with video games or the tons of other media options our kids have. The following are some tips on dealing with video games and some of the recent research.

Video Games: What are they?

Video games are a behavior. They may be a complicated behavior but they are a behavior. Just like you monitor other behaviors your kids participate in, you should monitor their gaming. Psychologically, most video games use different types of what behaviorist call intermittent reinforcement schedules. This is the psychology that is most efficient at building behaviors and maintaining behaviors. It is the same psychology that casinos use with their gaming machines. In fact, more and more machines in casinos are using structures that were originally developed for video games. So these games are designed make you want to play more.

Medical doctors have been talking for years about health

a decrease in helping thoughts and behaviors. So you can decide to what level you want your child playing games that involve violence just as you would for television or movies. The catch is that video games build behaviors quickly and efficiently so they are hard to counteract once they are learned. There are psychologists talking about game addiction and treating adolescents and young adults for this behavior. Like any concerns you have with your children, reach out to those who are there to help you in your schools, places of worship, and experts in the medical field.

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