



THERAPY NEWS

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Impact of Video Games

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As digital opportunities expand in terms of electronic media, video games and social networking, experts and parents are concerned for kids. Escaping the news headlines that describe the dangers of these types of activities is now nearly impossible. Recently, the Supreme Court decided that it is unconstitutional for the state of California to bar minors from buying violent video games due to curtailing freedom of expression [High Court Strikes Down California Videogame Law - WSJ.com](#).

Medical authorities say video gaming decreases

activity in the frontal lobe and promotes anti-social and/or hostile behaviors. Mental health clinicians are aware of the exposure effects in their clients to various forms of media. Some video games, TV, movies and music may contribute to anxiety, desensitization to violence, aggressive behaviors, nightmares, and fears of being harmed by others.

Sensible online practices with wise choices in content of electronic media is key to good mental health for all folks, young and old alike.



From [Ghostbusters \(1984\)](#):



*Giving up playing video games is a lot easier than you'd think. I'd know-I've done it hundreds of times.
-Ryan G. Van Cleave*



Parents: How to Tell if a Game is Harmful

- Play the game, or have someone else demonstrate it.
- Does the game involve characters harming others?
- Does hurting others happen more than twice in 30 minutes?
- Is wounding others rewarded in any way?
- Is harming others portrayed humorously?
- Are nonviolent solutions absent or less "fun" than violent ones?
- Are realistic consequences of violence absent from the game?
- If two or more answers are "yes," think very carefully about the lessons being taught before allowing your child access to the game.

Electronic Media

Today there are many ways in which people can connect with one another. Social networking is the use of Internet and other technologies to link with others. It takes its shape in texting, chat rooms, e-mail, Twitter, blogging, electronic postcards, as well as logging into a multi-player game, traveling through virtual landscapes, posting your own video on YouTube or creating an online identity with sites such as MySpace or Facebook. There are potentials and challenges in this new age of social media. Supporters of electronic media

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In addition to serving adults,
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Back to School and Cooler Weather...

argue that video games can play a part in cognitive growth and neurological development. It can help children become aware of others' viewpoints, feel more at ease expressing themselves, empathize with those who have similar issues, practice social skills and experiment with new ways of being who they aspire to become. On the contrary, the American Academy of Pediatrics, made a statement that "exposure to violence in media represents a significant risk to the health of children and adolescents." (AAP, 2009). According to Anderson (2006,) the occasional playing of a violent video game is not harmful, but *repeated exposure* increases later aggression; therefore, limiting time and access is important.

Cyber-bullies, cyber-predators and compulsive behavior regarding Internet activities are real safety issues for kids. There has also been debate about whether excessive video game playing should be considered a mental illness or not. The American Medical Association and the American Psychiatric Association are thinking about including obsessive behavior related to Internet pursuits as a diagnosable addiction. So the question remains, "What is a parent supposed to do to make sure their kids are safely protected?" Well, first of all, being a wise consumer

with appropriate parental screening is essential. As for video games, the *age-based rating* is not a good indication of violent content (even for educational games.) Watch for the descriptors of the game being 'action' or 'comic mischief,' which can indicate violent content. It is crucial to teach cautious and proper conduct to kids; not just monitor their activities. Parents should set ground rules and codes of conduct for the earned privilege of using the Internet. Instruct kids how to think critically about what they view, post and read. Remember that an adolescent's developmental task is to become independent. They will most likely consider your watchful presence, when they are online, to be intrusive. So give them reasonable privacy while reminding them periodically about safety issues. Look for websites that offer helpful recommendations for parents to make good decisions about what kids can securely watch and play. The following site reviews/rates movies, games, TV shows, music, websites and books:

<http://www.common sense media.org/>

