

Controlling the Video and Computer Game Playground

Here are several suggestions for establishing or regaining control of video game playing in your home.

PLAYING GAMES IS A PRIVILEGE, NOT A RIGHT

If you make it clear to your child on the day you set up the video game system that playing video games is a privilege you have allowed him, you will be well on your way to regulating game play in your home. This approach enables you to use the system as a reward for positive behavior.

SET TIME LIMITS

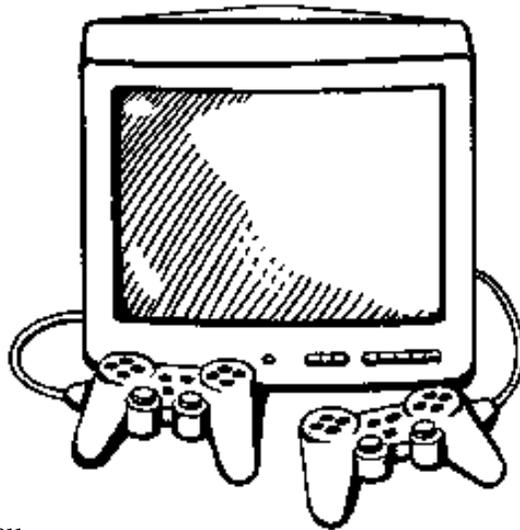
One way to avoid 5-hour playing stretches is to set a daily limit or establish a specific period each day when games can be played. Be flexible, though. A 1-hour limit for some games will make them unplayable.

HOMEWORK COMES FIRST

Make your priorities clear. If your child fails to complete her homework and chores, or does a slipshod job of them, restrict access to the game system. To offset this punitive approach, you can reward your child by extending playing time or by renting a new game when extra effort is put into homework or chores.

CONTROL THE CONTROLLERS

If your child insists on playing longer than you would like or plays in direct disobedience to your wishes, remove the controllers. Games cannot be played without the controllers.



ENCOURAGE COOPERATIVE PLAY

Video games frequently cause squabbles among siblings. Consider the following solutions to this problem:

- Look for two-player games that offer a “cooperative play mode.”
- In some two-player competitive games, it is possible to set different difficulty levels for each child. You can use this feature to balance their playing skills.

- If the children really don’t want to play together, schedule separate playing sessions for each child. Use a timer to signal when play stops for one child and starts for another.

ENCOURAGE OTHER ACTIVITIES

It is easy for children to get hooked on video games, to the exclusion of almost everything else. Encourage and support the child’s participation in other activities. If your child does not seem to be interested in anything other than video games, try getting him interested in other activities that are related to one of his favorite games. If your child prefers fantasy role-playing games, for example, you might encourage him to read some books with a fantasy theme or, using inexpensive art or building materials, help him construct a miniature fantasy kingdom.

CONTROL GAME-RELATED SPENDING

Consider some of the following ideas to keep game-related expenses down:

- Rent rather than buy games.
- Swap games with friends.

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- Explore other avenues before granting your child permission to call a video game tip line. Other children in the neighborhood may have the game that is giving your child trouble. Game magazines and books can also provide the information needed to succeed at popular games.

CHOOSE GAMES APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR CHILD'S AGE AND ABILITY

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) is an independent, voluntary board set up to classify and provide information for parents and consumers on the content of video and computer games.

The ESRB offers the following tips for consumers:

- Look for the ESRB ratings on the front of the game package and for the content description on the back. If the game has an ESRB rating, you will find the distinctive black and white ESRB icon on the front of the package. The

ESRB content description, if applicable, can be found on the back of the package in a black and white box.

- If you can't find a rating, call the ESRB's toll-free number, (800) 771-ESRB (3772), to obtain rating information.
- Examine the package carefully to see if the publisher recommends the game for particular age groups. ESRB ratings assess the content of the game, not the skill level.
- Examine the pictures and text on the product's packaging for clues to the game's content.
- Ask the salesperson if you can try the product in the store before purchasing it or if someone at the store can demonstrate it for you.

More information about the ratings of video and computer games is available on the Media Awareness Network Web site at <http://www.media-awareness.ca/eng/indus/games/esrb.htm> and on the ESRB Web site at <http://www.esrb.org>.

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Information on the ESRB adapted from Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) Web site. 2000. ESRB Parents Guide. Web site: http://www.esrb.org/parents_guide.asp.