

What Are The Symptoms?

The behaviors often reported include:

For kids

- Spending non-school hours on the computer or playing video games.
- Falling asleep in school.
- Not keeping up with assignments.
- Worsening grades.
- Lying about computer or video game use.
- Choosing to use the computer or play video games rather than see friends.
- Dropping out of social groups (such as clubs or sports) in order to play games.
- Stealing money in order to buy or play games.
- Irritability when not playing a video game or on the computer.
- Unsuccessful attempts to cut back on game play.

For adults

- Computer or video game use is characterized by intense feelings of pleasure and guilt.
- Obsessing and pre-occupation about being on the computer, even when not connected.
- Hours playing video games or on the computer increasing, seriously disrupting family, social or even work life.
- Lying about computer or video game use.
- Feelings of withdrawal, anger, or depression when not on the computer or playing video games.
- Incurring large phone or credit bills for online services.
- Inability to control computer or video game use.
- Fantasy life online replacing emotional life with partner.

Physical symptoms of addiction

- Carpal tunnel syndrome or other repetitive stress injuries
- Sleep disturbances
- Back or neck aches
- Headaches
- Dry eyes
- Failure to eat regularly
- Neglect of personal hygiene

Take the MediaWise Video and Computer Game Addiction Survey

If you agree with these statements about your child, please check the box.

- My child feels great while playing video games.
- My child feels unhappy, cranky, or irritable when not playing.
- My child is angry or has a temper tantrum when I ask him to stop.
- My child craves more playing time.
- My child spends much of her time playing games.
- My child thinks about the game when not playing.
- More and more of my child's friends are "online friends."
- More and more of my child's friends are gamers.
- My child would rather play video games than be with family and friends.
- My child neglects responsibilities, such as homework and family chores, to play games.
- My child tries to cut back on playing time, but can't.
- My child plays more often than he plans.
- My child plays for longer periods than planned.
- She can't seem to quit playing.
- My child sometimes lies about his playing time.
- My child sometimes sneaks in time to play, such as before school or late into the night.
- My child stays (or wants to stay) home from school to play video games.
- My child spends more than twenty hours a week playing video games.
- My child continues to play in spite of negative consequences.
- My child has arguments with me about how much time she spends playing.
- My child's games turn up as a top priority when he/she takes the MediaWise "I'd Rather" Assessment.

The more boxes you checked, the more likely video game play may be a cause for concern. See other resources in this guide to help you make a change.

MediaWise

“I’d Rather” Assessment™

Have your child fill out this survey.

Check the box next to each statement you agree with.

- I’d rather play video games than hang out with my friends.
- I’d rather play video games than play any sports.
- I’d rather play video games than spend time with my family.
- I’d rather play video games than eat.
- I’d rather play video games than sleep.
- I’d rather play video games than talk on the phone.
- I’d rather play video games than go to school or work.
- I’d rather play video games than go to a movie.
- I’d rather play video games than watch TV.
- I’d rather play video games than use the Internet.
- I’d rather play video games than listen to music.
- I’d rather play video games than exercise.
- List the things you’d rather do than play video games:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

“ Computer games are ruining my life. If I’m not playing, I’m thinking about playing. I have, like, no real friends.”

—High School student addicted to Everquest

If your child has trouble thinking of things she’d rather do than play video games, they may have become the most important priority in her life. See other resources in this guide to help you make a change.

What Can I Do to Prevent Addiction?

Parent-child arguments about video and computer games are part of 21st-century parenting. So don't panic if you have your share of these arguments. On the other hand, don't ignore signs of a real problem with pathological game-playing. Here are some tips to make sure computer and video game playing remains a positive part of your children's lives.

- Set clear rules about when, where, how much, and what kind of game playing is allowed as soon as your child starts to play games.
- Limit video game playing time.
- Have clear consequences if time limits are not observed.
- Enforce consequences consistently.
- Make sure your child is not playing in the middle of the night.
- Require that homework and other chores be completed before game play.
- Keep video and computer games out of your child's bedroom.
- If your child refuses to cooperate, restrict access to video games for a period of time.
- Be clear with your child that constant arguments about game playing will result in loss of game playing privileges.
- Open lines of communication with your child. Is game play a result of insecurities in other areas? Are there underlying issues?
- Encourage other activities. Have younger children help make a list of "Fun Things to Do" and try a new thing every day.
- Use existing tools and resources to help you establish healthy media habits.

Thinking about Making a Change?

Deciding to Make a Change

Discussing pathological gaming habits with your child is not easy. No doubt, you have already had difficult conversations and arguments with your child about his game play. Addressing pathological gaming takes commitment on your part and the part of your child. Weighing the pros and cons may help you make a firm, committed, parenting decision.

Pros: What are some reasons you may want to make a change?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> To improve my child's school performance. | <input type="checkbox"/> To improve my child's health. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To improve my relationship with my child. | <input type="checkbox"/> To reduce arguments with my child over game play. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To ensure that my child gets the experiences she needs "offline." | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> To avoid more serious problems. | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

Cons: What are some reasons you may not want to change?

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

Compare your pros and cons. Do you think that you see adequate reasons to initiate change related to your child's game play?

Are You Ready?

Are you ready to help your child change his gaming habits? See the Family Change Plan in this guide.

If you aren't sure whether you're ready to help change your child's gaming habits, consider these suggestions:

- Keep track of how often your child is gaming.
- Notice how playing video games affects her life, relationships, and mood.
- Ask for support from your doctor, mental health provider, a close friend, or someone else you trust.

Don't wait for your child or family to be in crisis before addressing addiction. When someone is gaming too much, making changes earlier is likely to be more successful than waiting until you are in crisis mode.

Family Change Plan

Make a Plan for Change

Here is an example of a family change plan you can work through together with your child.

Tracker: Right now I play video _____ hours a day and about _____ hours a week.

New goal:

- I will play no more than _____ hours on any given day and no more than _____ hours a week.
- I will stop playing video games.

When? I will start on this date: _____

Reasons My most important reasons to make these changes are:

Alternatives Instead of playing video games this week, I will try these activities:

People The friends and adults who can help me are (list names and how they can help you achieve your goals):

Possible Challenges Some things that might make it difficult for me to cut back on game play and how I will handle them:

Celebrating My Achievements If I achieve my goal for the week, I will:

Parent signature(s)

Child signature