

# Kids and Gaming

Children are expected to grow, be curious, explore, and by today's increasing popularity, be gamers. Current data shows more than 90% of children over 2 years play video games and children 8 to 17 years of age spend an average of 1.5 to 2 hours daily playing video games. As electronics play a larger role in our lives, children are following our example. Let's consider the positives and negatives gaming can have on children.



## Benefits of Gaming

Gaming is commonly used for entertainment, but it can also be used for cognitive development and learning socialization skills. Through gameplay, children experience challenges that can promote problem-solving, critical thinking and decision-making. It has been shown that video gamers have improved selective attention, processing speed, project planning and memory. When chatting with friends at school about their favorite games or interacting with friends directly through gaming platforms, children are learning communication skills as well as relationship building, cooperation and empathy. Children with autism spectrum disorder, social anxiety and others who avoid socializing in person may benefit from gaming to help develop these life skills.

## Cautions for Gaming

While children may play virtually with their friends on gaming devices, this presents an opportunity for cyberbullying. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), cyberbullying is the most common among middle school students followed by those in high school. Hillsborough County ranks slightly better than the national average of 15.9% versus 12.9% of high schoolers being cyber bullied. Additionally, gaming in the evenings can have negative effects on sleep including decreased sleep time, longer time to fall asleep and poor quality of sleep. There has not been a direct link established between violent behaviors from playing violent video games (without other risk factors present). However, research suggests that, like gambling, gaming may activate the brain's reward system and can lead to unhealthy gaming addiction.



Electronics and gaming devices have firmly established their presence in our lives and will likely become even more accessible in the future. It's critical that parents learn how to establish healthy boundaries with gaming to make it a safe and rewarding hobby.

**On Our Sleeves, the national movement for children's mental health, developed the acronym GAME to give parents and guardians a place to start when talking to their kids about gaming.**

## GAME

**G – Get a realistic idea** of your own screen time and how you feel it impacts your mental health.

**A – Ask questions.** This can be anything from what game are you playing to what are you trying to get out of playing this game.

**M – Monitor their gaming.** Younger children may not be aware of how much time they're spending gaming and the people who can access them through gaming. It's important to monitor these things along with their behaviors during or after playing games.

**E – Establish limits:** Which games are age-appropriate? What duties must be completed before gaming? Who can they communicate with through the game? How much game time is allowed each day? (The American Academy of Pediatrics suggests no screen time in children under 2 years old, less than 1 hour daily for children from 2 to 5 years old, and less than 2 hours daily for children older than 5 years old).

Start the conversation with your child today and work together to set rules and boundaries around gaming to keep them safe.

For more information, visit: <https://www.kidsmentalhealthfoundation.org/mental-health-resources/technology-and-social-media/gaming-and-kids-mental-health>.



[BayCareKidsOnOurSleeves.org](https://www.baycarekidsourosleeves.org)