# Video Games and Their Potential for Addiction

Video games are quickly becoming an epidemic in this generation. Young children are being introduced to it from the moment they learn to push buttons. Kids and teens are constantly targeted for gaming advertisements everywhere they go. Worse yet, adults are sacrificing their lives for a fabricated reality, to escape the real world where making choices can be overwhelming and demanding. Millions are choosing this life, and are suffering the dire consequences.

First, I want to answer the question: why do people become addicted to video games?

## 1. Boredom

This is a huge factor. If you do not have a plan to keep your kids active during their free time, video games can easily consume countless hours of their attention. It is almost human nature to default to the least challenging functions in life. For example, reading a book requires focus, and patience- it forces you outside of your perspective and way of thinking and introduces new possibilities. Playing video games does little, if any, of this. It is quite feasible to spend entire days and nights playing without experiencing a single thought- provoking process.

## 2. Escape

Living in a synthetic cyber world allows oneself to ignore the worries and responsibilities of real life. It encourages you to be content with whatever state your current affairs might be in. While I agree that stress-relieving activities can be helpful, especially after a long day at school or work, there is an extreme danger in spending too much time on them. For myself, this meant feeling okay about my lack of direction, my loss of desire for a career, my single status, etc. Arriving at this point in life is a very treacherous position to be in, and it becomes more and more difficult to reverse the process the longer it is allowed to continue.

## 3. Entertainment

This is especially common in today's youth. Kids are raised to believe they deserve constant entertainment. Young children sit in front of movies and are given noise-making toys from an early age. Even schools are becoming more and more entertainment based, with lessons being given via videos and computers. Students are encouraged to watch movies for "research" purposes, instead of the "old fashioned" methods (reading!). Those same students come home, and what do they do? Turn on the television until dinner time- only to eat their meal in the same place because a large number of families have accepted eating meals in front of the television as normal. It's no wonder so many people turn to video games.

## 4. Self-Esteem

This can be especially enticing for the online gamer. When I played my online game, I had my character built up to the point where other players thought very highly of me. I was constantly complimented for my accomplishments, and not a day went by when I wasn't asked, even begged, to play with another player on his team (the competitive side of the game). I became known as an extremely good gamer, which really fed my ego and made me feel like a "somebody". The problem is, it was never enough; I would sit around for hours waiting for less-accomplished players to take notice of me. When thinking about trying for a specific achievement, my motivation was almost always: "People would really think I'm an incredible player if I succeed at this." Usually, I was right- they did think that, but I still couldn't escape the sinking feeling that none of this is real. Instead of feeling confident in myself because of my uniqueness and different strengths and abilities as a human being, I was deriving a poor imitation from people I would never meet or even know their real name for that matter.

5. "Social" Interaction

In my 3 years of online gaming, I came across many people who admitted to me their fear of real social interaction. The amazing thing was, they appeared to be very outgoing and accessible to other players. This seems to be a common scenario for those who feel they are unattractive and awkward in person, but believe they can gain the attention and approval of others by portraying a false image of themselves through their online world. After all, having "friends" online is better than having none, right? Don't get the wrong impression, there is nothing inherently harmful about interacting with people through the internet. The real danger comes when an individual begins to accept and even prefer it over in-person relationships, even to the extent of excluding them altogether.

6. Romance

Believe it or not, a large number of online players are looking for love- in all the wrong places. Now, I am not against meeting someone online if the end goal is to be with that person in real life, but this is not the case with the majority of gamers. Many are content to simply interact with their "special someone" over the internet, all while keeping them at a safe distance and retaining their anonymity. What is worse is the fact that people already in relationships (even marriages with families) are falling prey to this form of e-romance, and the results are almost always devastating.

The 6 reasons I just mentioned pertain mostly to online computer gaming, but what about console games like Xbox™ and Playstation™?

I believe a lot can be learned through looking at the type of games a person chooses to play. Most games have a goal, a way to overcome challenging scenarios and "win". Determining what these objectives are can provide great insight into why a person prefers some games over others.

1. Is it an aggressive game? Becoming more and more popular today are violence games. Players are encouraged to use any weapon and any means possible to inflict pain and death on their victims. It is entirely possible to use games like this to release bottled-up feelings of anger and resentment. Of course, it is far from healthy and it should be guarded against from an early age. Your child may not go to the lengths of real life violence, but the long term effects on their relationship skills can still be detrimental.

2. Is the game teamwork oriented? Many games involve players working together with each other to achieve a common goal. Sounds good, right? It can be, but again, the common concept throughout this book is balance. Are your children also participating in real life activities where teamwork is encouraged? Commonplace in this genre are sports games and "capture the flag" scenario games. Both can be very enjoyable, but should never be a full-time replacement for the real thing.

3. Is the game highly competitive? Like myself, many people have a tendency to be extremely competitive, and a large number of games target those tendencies. Tied in with this is usually the desire for distinction, to be noticed and recognized by other players. Again, while competition can be a very healthy and rewarding experience, seeking it through video games should be never become exclusive.

Jordan Mummert, a former gaming addict, authored "Get Your Kids off Video Games" and runs the site http://www.GetYourKidsoffVideoGames.com Parents can come to the site to share their ideas and suggestions for other parents on helping their kids avoid video game addictions. He can be reached for questions at Jordan@getyourkidsoffvideogames.com

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