

# Patient Information

# Children

# And

# Video Games



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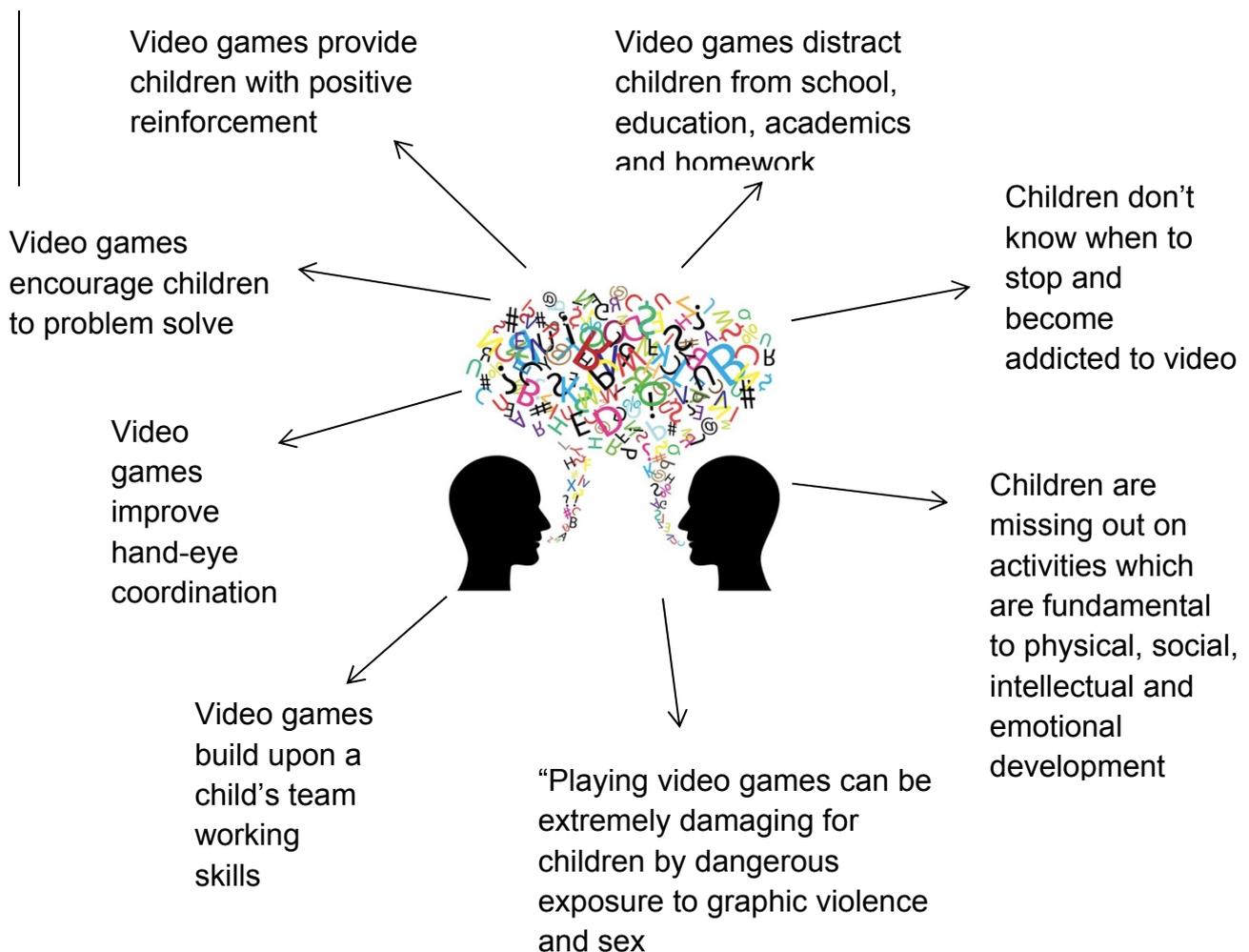
## What is this leaflet about?

This leaflet has been written to give you more information about children playing video games and the impact this can have on their psychological health.

While it may not have all the answers, it will:

- Give you information for and against children playing video games
- Provide a list of video games which are good for children's development
- Share when it may not be appropriate for your child to play video games
- Inform you about some of the biological and psychological changes children may experience when playing video games
- Help you make informed and safe decisions about your children playing video games

## What do other parents say?



## Research tells us the following:

**FOR**



**AGAINST**



**Video gaming is exciting and fun for children.**

**BUT** When children play video games they feel stress-like symptoms in their bodies.

**Some games can help children's development in:**

**BUT** other games negatively affect children's skills in:

- **Fine Motor,**
  - **Visual Attention,**
  - **Reaction Speed,**
  - **Spatial Perception and**
  - **Strategic Thinking Skills.**
- **Language,**
  - **Social Development,**
  - **Emotional Regulation**
  - **Impulse Control.**

**Lots of children 'meet up' with their friends through online games to socialise and can learn useful communication skills like taking turns.**

**BUT** not all games are teaching children appropriate social skills. There is a risk of interacting with strangers online. Also too much screen time will mean children are not socialising as much in the real world.

**FOR**



**AGAINST**



**Taking risks is an important part of a child's development. Other generations worried about the impact of rock and roll on young people.**

**BUT** Some games could teach children that there are no severe consequences to their actions.

The graphics and storytelling in modern video games are roughly equivalent to film and television and the adult content in some of them is totally inappropriate for young children.

**Studies exploring the impact of gaming on children have only been completed in a laboratory and the results only focus on the short term.**

More than 1000 studies agree that watching heavy doses of violence increases short term aggression. Also when playing multi-player games children can be exposed to very aggressive threats and abuse from peers.

## **Is it safe for my child to play video games?**

There are 3 main factors which determine whether a video game is beneficial or harmful for a child;

1. The child's own individual strengths, vulnerabilities and personality
2. The child's age
3. The video game they are playing

## What video games can help my child's development?

Video Game	Area of development
Leapfrog Leapster (ages 3-8)	Math, Reading, Language
Magic school bus (ages 6-10)	Educational
Minecraft (8+)	Imagination
Scribblenaughts (ages 8+)	Creativity
Civilization (ages 10+)	Decision making, Planning, Exploration
Quandary (12+)	Decision-making
Gone Home (15+)	Teen identity issues

The above table is not an exhaustive list of video games which help children's development. You can find more video games suitable for children aged 4-12 by visiting <https://www.idtech.com/blog/best-video-games-for-kids>.

## When are games not suitable for children?

Identifying and managing risks when playing video games will be different depending on the child's stage of development. It's important to consider the age rating of a game because:

- Younger children cannot tell the difference between reality and fantasy, especially if it is scary.
- Young children are less able to regulate their emotions if they feel scared or angry.
- Children up to the age of 12 learn through 'doing' and use stories to develop their values so the interactive nature of video games will have a big effect on them.
- Children are not as good at reasoning or critically evaluating things (e.g. knowing 'this is only a game' or 'I know X is 'OK' in the game but I must not do X in real life')

## What are the age categories of video games?

Some parents are unaware of the content of some games their children are playing and would like clearer and more specific guidance explaining the reason for the age ratings.

In the UK and the rest of Europe, Pan European Game Information (PEGI) provides a reliable indication of the age suitability of the game. The PEGI rating does not consider the games level of difficulty.

	Considered suitable for all ages. Any violence will be cartoon-like e.g. Tom and Jerry. There will be no sounds or pictures which could frighten young children. No bad language. <b>Example: Fifa 18; Mario Kart 8 Deluxe</b>
	Some possibly frightening scenes or sounds. <b>Example: Lego worlds; Crash Bandicoot</b>
	Violence is slightly more graphic towards a fantasy character or non-graphic violence towards human or animal like characters. Nudity. Mild bad language. <b>Example: Fortnite; The Sims 4</b>
	Real life images of violence, crime, tobacco, drugs or sexual activity. More extreme bad language. <b>Example: Need for Speed; Battlefield, Apex Legends</b>
	Gross violence, which is defined as violence that would make the viewer feel a sense of revulsion. <b>Example: Call of Duty series; Grand Theft Auto series</b>

For American games, different symbols are used but the idea is the same.

## What changes might my child experience when playing video games?

Children that visit the CDC often have a diagnosis of or are suspected of having some kind of neurodevelopmental delay, like Autism or ADHD. Some children also have learning difficulties and/or physical difficulties.

Children with these diagnoses often experience frustration, anxiety, sensory processing and problems regulating their emotions.

Research tells us that playing video games often increases stress like symptoms and increases short term feelings of aggression. If we add these factors together (along with everyday life stress most children experience, like school and making friends) it is likely that children will become overwhelmed and unable to manage everyday tasks such as concentrating.

Child + life stress + developmental delay + video games =



When children play video games, especially those which mimic real life violence and aggression, they experience different biological changes which overstimulate their bodies- just like they would if they encountered danger in real life. Their heart rate, blood pressure and stress hormones increase even though the danger is not 'real'. These changes can increase sugar cravings, aggression and make it hard for the child to relax.

The child's fight or flight response kicks in as a result of the perceived threat or danger and makes them overexcited. When this response happens too intensely or too often, it is difficult to return to a calm state. This is why your child may seem agitated or struggle to concentrate during and after screen time. A child may communicate this through 'behaviour that is challenging' e.g. shouting, screaming, punching, kicking etc.

Limiting games is a (relatively) easy starting point if your child is experiencing frustration, anxiety, behavioural problems etc.

## How much screen-time should I allow my child?

There are no official UK guidelines on screen time. However, there are some evidence-based guidelines which suggest the following:

- Children shouldn't be exposed to more than 2 hours of leisure screen time a day (including watching TV). However this is not a hard and fast limit – you need to take into consideration the impact its having on the child's wider life and this is different for everyone
- Avoid games with an objective to kill people
- Children under the age of 2 may be at risk of delays in language development, impulsivity and inattention when exposed to screen entertainment.

## How can I end screen-time with fewer tears?

Children will be children. They push boundaries and take risks. How we help them manage these risks depends on their age, ability and changing vulnerabilities. This is the same as how you would help a child cross the road, first hold their hand, teach them to think and look both ways, get them to cross beside you rather than holding hand, let them do it alone.

There are a number of things you can do before, during and after screen-time to help encourage a smooth transition when screen-time is over.

Strategies **BEFORE** screen-time:

1. **Set clear rules:** A good way to introduce rules is by making them together. Allow your child to come up with at least one rule. It is helpful for your child to be able to see these rules during screen-time.
2. **Plan a desirable activity for after screen-time:** The transition will be easier if your child knows that they are moving onto something else which is enjoyable, like reading their favourite book or eating a dessert. This will also help develop your child's skills in transitioning from one task to another.

Strategies **DURING** screen-time:

3. **Use a countdown timer:** Enable your child to keep track of how much screen-time they have left. A clear, visual timer works well for children who don't respond to verbal reminders. A timer gives your child some responsibility and control over ending their screen-time. Keeping track of time is a skill which children can also develop using this strategy. Be aware that coming off a game half-way through a challenge is likely to be more difficult.
4. **Stay nearby- (when possible!):** Staying nearby your child during screen-time provides an opportunity to help with their time-management skills and can provide time for relationship building. Some educational games may be tricky and your child may need your help. Your child may also need guidance on which games are too long for their time-limit or when is a good time to save their progress.

Strategies **AFTER** screen-time:

5. **Acknowledge your child's difficulties:** Helping your child recognise their own emotions, such as by saying "I can see that you feel sad because screen-time is over", shows your child that you care about how they are feeling. You should also acknowledge a successful screen-time transition.
6. **Turn off your own screen:** By turning off your own screens you are engaging in the rules with your child. This is really important because you and your child made the rules together, so it may make it easier for your child to transition with you.

### **How can I begin to reduce the amount of time my child spends on screens?**

A good place to start is to create a weekly diary so you know exactly how much screen time is already happening each day/week. From here, you can begin to put screen-time boundaries into place gradually and appropriately.

You can download and print an A4 screen-time log by visiting:  
<https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/downloads/screen-time-log.pdf>.

## **Brief reminder of online safety:**

It is really important to keep children and young people safe online. We recommend you look at the following resources:

- The following website has many superb resources to help your child understand e-safety in a fun, interactive way and there is also a section with advice for parents:  
<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/>.
- Many excellent tips and guidance can be found on the NSPCC's website: [www.nspcc.org](http://www.nspcc.org).
- <http://www.saferinternet.org.uk/>
- Jessie and Friends: Online safety education for 4-7 year olds. Three animated videos aimed at different age groups with corresponding story books.  
<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/jessie-and-friends/>

## Evidence for this leaflet was taken from the following resources:

- [www.common sense media.org](http://www.common sense media.org).
- [www.askaboutgames.com](http://www.askaboutgames.com). - Where families make sense of video games
- Families and screen time: current advice and emerging research 2016 report by Alicia Blum-Ross and Sonia Livingstone.
- Mumsnet tips on reducing screen time <http://www.mumsnet.com/pre-teens/screen-time-and-children>.
- Mumsnet video gaming and safety <http://www.mumsnet.com/internet-safety/video-games>.
- 'PEGI Quick Guides For Families' YouTube videos made by FamilyGamerTV.
- Vodafone Digital Parenting magazine
- YoungMinds website <http://www.youngminds.org.uk/digitalresilience>.
- The online Guardian article titled 'What every parents needs to know about video games: a crash course' - [www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jun/02/parents-guide-video-games-playstation-xbox-wii-apps-children](http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/jun/02/parents-guide-video-games-playstation-xbox-wii-apps-children).
- NSPCC advice on gaming: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/online-gaming-stay-safe-avoid-risks/>.
- Psychology Today- This is your child's brain on video games <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/mental-wealth/201609/is-your-childs-brain-video-games>.
- The Guardian- children and video games: a parents guide <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/11/children-video-games-parents-guide-screentime-violence>.
- We can! Screen time chart <https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/wecan/downloads/screen-time-log.pdf>.
- The Guardian- Why can't people stop playing Fortnite? <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2018/aug/29/why-cant-people-stop-playing-fortnite>.
- How to end screen-time without tears- <http://www.alexandrasamuel.com/parenting/how-to-end-screen-time-without-tears>.
- Finding more about 'Guided Access' on iPad settings.



**This leaflet is available in large print and other formats and languages.  
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Tel: 01752 435231**

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