

Managing computer game usage at home

Dear Parents

Since Christmas we have had a number of parents contact us about their concerns over the amount of gaming their son or daughter is doing in a week. This is a challenging topic for all parents including those of us at school that are parents also. To help support you we have produced a top tips list for supporting you and your child with any potential gaming addiction. This supports the work we do at WINK and BLINK evenings, the posts we put on the school twitter account and esafety blog accessible via the school website.

Tips For Parents

1. Computer games should only be allowed after children have taken care of other responsibilities. For example, parents are strongly advised to set a rule that games can only be played after homework has been completed (and completed with *effort*).
2. To prevent computer addiction from taking hold and to regain control after it has been established, computer games should be played no more than one or two hours per day - especially during term time.
3. Children addicted to computer games will happily play for hours at a time. Although this can provide valuable free time for busy parents, you need to make sure that computer games are not your child's primary activity or form of entertainment. Decades ago, parents were warned about using television as a babysitter and the same advice now applies to computer games. It is absolutely critical to set and enforce firm daily limits. Access to computer games should be viewed as an earned privilege, not an automatic right.
4. Regardless of who "pays" for the computer game, parents should always have final approval of any game that enters the home. Sometimes parents believe that if the child has earned his or her money they should be free to spend it on whatever they like. Children addicted to computer games very often prefer the more mature games (violent first person shooters, online role playing games) that should have never entered the home in the first place. Parents should become very familiar with PEGI ratings before potential purchases are made.
5. If it is possible to do so, dedicate one computer for homework only and one for gaming (if this is still permitted in moderation according to your rules). On the work computer, there should be no games installed, social networking sites like Facebook, and Instagram should be blocked, and gaming websites cannot be accessed. Therefore, when your child is using this computer, you can be reasonably confident that he / she is working and not spending time playing computer games.
6. Keep computers and consoles out of a child's bedroom. It is much easier to limit computer gaming (and monitor online activity) if computers are in open spaces or family rooms. To help children addicted to computer games this is perhaps the very first step parents should take.
7. One helpful tool for dealing with children addicted to computer games is the "Parental Control" settings that are present on all modern game consoles. These password

protected options usually allow parents to control what their children play and how much time is allotted. On the PC side, access to specific games as well as specific time limits can be set via 3rd party software solutions. Make sure you learn how to set these options - they can be very helpful for helping children addicted to computer games.

8. Consider a ban on MMOG or MMORGP games (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games) in your home. Even if the PEGI rating is within your child's age range, these games are thought to have a much higher risk for addiction than other genres and should not be purchased if you worry about your child becoming addicted.
9. Ultimately, parents (and no one else) have to take responsibility for making sure that children practice healthy computer gaming and online habits. Teens and children addicted to computer game cannot be expected to identify this problem themselves and set reasonable limits without the help of parents. Although excessive video gaming can be difficult to stop, with the right approach computer game addiction is very treatable.
10. Consistency, consistency, consistency is a critical element for effective parenting. Parental words and promises must always match parental actions. If you set a daily limit, it must be enforced. If you have outlined punishments or consequences for ignoring your rules, you must follow through with them. Likewise, promised rewards (other than money or more computer games) for following rules should be honored.

We really hope that these tips, collated from several sources, help support you with this growing problem.

Further support on this and other safety topics can be found on these sites:

- <http://vodafoneigitalparenting.co.uk/>
- <https://wilderne-safety.blogspot.co.uk/>
- <http://www.childnet.com/parents-and-carers>
- <https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>
- <http://www.pegi.info/en/index/id/24/>

Yours Sincerely

Mr Knight