

# Are video games on your child's Christmas list?

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## PARENTING POINTS

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Take a peek at your child's Christmas list. Most likely there is at least one video game on that list. Because these electronic games have become so popular in our society, it is easy to feel pressured into buying the most popular gaming systems and the accompanying games.

What should you do when your child insists he has to have the hottest new video game? As with any activity, you are responsible for assessing the value of your child's activity and the amount of time your child spends on that pastime. It is your job as the parent to limit and monitor your child's use of electronics.

A developing child needs a lot of time to explore and learn about the world. Television and video games are not the best way to do this. It is important to look at how your child uses his time overall before deciding how much TV and video game time is too much. Ask yourself, "If my child is playing a video game, what else isn't he doing? If your child is spending a lot of time playing video games, he or she may not be doing more worthwhile activities like reading, playing sports, pursuing a hobby, helping around the house or playing outside.

Don't children need time to relax and unwind? What is the harm of enjoying a video game? Unlike adults, a child's play or leisure time is actually learning time. Parents often forget that their own childhood was full of experiences that helped them explore, understand, and master the world around them. Children learn new skills, learn about their world, and practice new roles when they play.

The manufacturers of video games would like parents to believe that playing video games teach children useful skills that are valuable for school and later life. Research shows that children may get better at using specific skills to play a game, but the child cannot transfer these same skills into the real world. For example, she might become quite

## *Parents must set boundaries for the use of electronic games*

successful playing a math themed video game, but not be able to use the same skills to count or categorize objects in day to day activities. Children learn best when they explore real objects and engage in real experiences.

Some games, like television and movies, have objectionable content for children. Many games show excessive violence, some quite graphic. They may also be filled with racist or sexist images or language. It is important to pay attention to the rating system on each video game.

The National Institute on Media and the Family ([mediafamily.org](http://mediafamily.org)) offers many tips for parents who would like to take a more active role in their children's involvement with video games. This site offers a Parent's Guide to Video Games, with the best games to buy as well as those to avoid. This site offers the following advice:

- Limit game time just as you would TV time.
- Check the age game ratings on the box. Become familiar with the game before you buy it.
- Use either content

sources or reviews to help you choose a game.

- Rent a game before buying.

- Avoid the "first person shooter", killing machine games. Many video games are based on violent themes that involve shooting, stabbing or beating an enemy. In some games, female characters wear very revealing clothing or are treated in a disrespectful way.

- Do not put video game consoles or computers in children's bedrooms where they can shut the door and isolate themselves.

- Play and enjoy the game with your child; check in as your child moves into deeper levels in the game. With some games the level of violence goes up as the player gets deeper into the game.

- Talk about the content of the game. Ask your child what's going on in the game.

- Explain to your child why you object to certain games.

- Look for games that involve multiple players to encourage group play.

- Pick non-violent games that require the player to come up with strategies, and make decisions in a game environment that is more

complex than punch, run, and kill. These games should require creativity and critical thinking skills.

- Finally, encourage your child to play with friends away from the video game console.

There needs to be balance in your child's life. It is your job as the parent to limit and monitor your child's use of

electronics. It is also important that you make sure they are getting enough physical activity and not spending large amounts of time alone with a video game.

Instead of banning video games for entertainment, parents may need to explore the pros and cons of gaming because of their increasing popularity and wide acceptance. Informed parents are better prepared to guide their children into the best choices for growth and development.