

Gaming Disorder? In March, the World Health Organization solidified the suspicions of many parents: prioritizing a digital life over a real one can lead to a clinical disorder.

Gaming disorder is characterized by impaired control over gaming to the point that it takes precedence over other interests and daily activities, and continuation or escalation of gaming despite the negative consequences, according to health officials.

For gaming disorder to be diagnosed, a pattern of behavior with significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational or occupational activities is usually evident for at least 12 months, the World Health Organization says.

Studies show the disorder affects only a small portion of gamers, but other factors such as the age when a person is exposed to gaming and the frequency of use can result in higher risk of problems if guidelines are not set at home, says Dr. Joanna Lindell, a child, adolescent and general psychiatrist at Advocate Children's Hospital.

"Anything that rapidly stimulates our brain's pleasure centers and produces a cycle of instant gratification has the potential to become habit-forming," Dr. Lindell says. "Children are particularly vulnerable due to their naturally lower maturity levels, which undergoes significant developmental changes, typically into their late 20s."

Dr. Lindell offers the following "VIDEO" tips and advice for parenting children who are playing video games.

V: Vigilance

Be aware of what games kids are playing, where, with whom, the game's rating and how often. It may not be obvious at first glance, which is why keeping a curious attitude is key and can help parents identify subtle changes at school, home or during playtime.

I: Introducing other activities and hobbies

The more a parent can teach or show with demonstrated enthusiasm, the more likely kids will be to take on other interests outside gaming. This helps develop a sense of confidence and higher self-esteem, which excessive gaming can have a reverse effect on.

D: Demonstrate appropriate behavior

No matter what kids say, they look at what parents do and how they do it. Parents should be aware of acting in a way that counteracts what they are trying to teach. For example, if a parent is modeling behavior by staying on their phone or tablet, it can be a stronger influence than telling kids to stay off their devices.

E: Establish expectations

It's never too late to start setting expectations, but the important part is to be persistent.

O: Offer fun and exciting real-life opportunities

The more parents can incorporate positive, real-life experiences, the less appeal to escape into a fantasy world.

Excerpted from Advocate Health News, Jacob Dirr 8/16/18.

Wishing you joy and good health,
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