

Parenting Teens Just Got Easier! is a free monthly eZine
for parents of pre-teens and teens from Saso Seminars
by Patt and Steve Saso

May 2008 - Excessive electronic gaming – teen addiction or lax parenting?

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May 2008 Featured Article
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Excessive electronic gaming – teen addiction or lax parenting?

By Patt Saso

www.SasoSeminars.com

Parents know that familiar glossy-eyed look on a teen's face after playing an intense game on the computer.

How many times have you tried to drag him away, simply to dine with the family, and what erupts is chaos and confusion?

Maria, a *Parenting Teens Just Got Easier* subscriber, is fed up with the amount of time her son and friends are wasting playing computer and Xbox games.

"Most of the popular games contain violent and degrading material which is easily accessible to them and I worry it is having a negative impact on our future generations. It seems to be taking over the lives of most teens today."

We hear this complaint from an alarming number of parents.

Pros and cons of gaming

I believe there are some good aspects of playing games, as well as negatives ones. These games help kids set and reach goals. They flex their mental muscle by

memorizing complex maps, sequences and characters. Speed reading becomes a necessity for survival, along with planning and problem-solving skills. They develop research methods using Google to investigate dilemmas and solutions. Eye-hand coordination improves.

The negatives include obsession with games, frustration and exhaustion trying to master new levels, moodiness, out-of-control emotions and social isolation.

When is it a problem?

If gaming is an obsession that interferes with sleep, eating, grades, school work, sports and family, as well as socializing with friends, then it is a problem.

The findings of a research study conducted at Hammersmith Hospital in London in 2005 found that dopamine levels in players' brains doubled while playing computer games. Dopamine is a mood-regulating hormone linked with feelings of pleasure.

The conclusion of this study indicates that gaming might be chemically addictive.

Who is more at risk?

Most at risk are youth who: struggle in relationships with family members, feel like outcasts at school, experience social isolation, are easily bored or tend toward sensation-seeking. These adolescents are more readily drawn into obsession because it fills a void and satisfies needs that aren't met elsewhere.

How parents can protect their children

Kids need to spend time in the real world with real people dealing with real-life problems. Social skills cannot develop in the virtual world. There is plenty parents can do.

1. Limit the time. A study conducted by Harris Interactive® January 2007 found a direct relationship between time on the computer and poor school performance, getting into fights, and being physically heavier.

2. Make the bedroom a work free zone. Remove the computer, printer, TV, and all gaming systems. Collect the cell phone at a reasonable hour and relinquish it in the morning. Help teens settle into a less busy energy.

3. Encourage other activities. Be proactive in arranging other social events: sports, gatherings at home, outdoor activities and personal interactions with your child.

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4. Be prepared for resistance when making changes around computer usage. Stay calm and firm - expect relentless opposition. Ideally, establish limited usage before the teen years.

5. If your teen becomes unreasonable, take the computer away. Reinstate privileges after a period of time - with limits.

6. If you determine your child is addicted and all else fails, bring out the sledgehammer. Then call me.

If video and internet gaming has transformed your teen from an outgoing, academically motivated student into a recluse, whose grades are dropping while spending several hours daily and nightly gaming...there may be a more serious problem.

A study conducted by researcher Dr. Sang Kyu Lee, professor of psychiatry, found that the teens most addicted to the Internet score higher for depression.

Your teen may not look depressed but increased time online, lack of sleep, isolation, and falling behind in school are red flags. It may be time for a professional.

It doesn't matter what comes first, the depression or the Internet addiction. What is clear is excessive electronic gaming without parental supervision or intervention is a situation that is begging for attention.

Obsession with gaming is a significant challenge facing parents and teens today. Parents do make a difference.

Patt Saso is a Parent Coach and Marriage & Family therapist with a private practice in Milpitas, CA. Patt & Steve Saso are national speakers and authors of the award-winning books, **10 Best Gifts for Your Teen** and **Parenting Your Teen with TLC**. Sign up for their free eNewsletter, **Parenting Teens Just Got Easier** at www.SasoSeminars.com

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Patt & Steve Saso
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