PARENTS GUIDE TO GAMING

Adapted from an article in 'Digital Parenting – Issue 5'

Can't beat 'em? Then why not join 'em? Andy Robertson from FamilyGamerTV explains why your child loves video games and how you can share their passion

Mention video games and many parents roll their eyes at what is often a point of conflict and concern in the home. While games are second nature to children, parents worry about addiction, the negative impact gaming may have on their child's concentration and fitness and, where in-app purchases are concerned, the amount of money it may cost. But, although research into gaming is still in its infancy, studies show that there are actually lots of positive lessons to be learnt from gaming. As well as helping to develop social skills, such as taking turns and collaborating, games can also nurture strategic and conceptual thinking. You just have to set some ground rules.

Screen time is a recurring concern. General advice is that up to an hour a day is acceptable, but a better measure for parents is how varied a child's screen time and interactions are. Ensuring children engage in a variety of activities on their screens instigates regular breaks between sessions and can also create a context for families to play games together.

Lack of exercise is another perceived danger for gaming children. Certainly, youngsters need to engage in a range of activities that aren't all sedentary or take place indoors. While some games with motion controls build in movement, it's essential that games form part of a healthy lifestyle.

Perhaps the biggest difficulty for parents is being an outsider in this crucial part of their children's leisure time. Even for those who haven't developed an enjoyment of games growing up, it's important to find titles they can play with their child. By researching online or watching family gaming guides, parents have the chance to take an active role both in choosing the games their children play and in enjoying them together.

FAMILY GAMING TIPS:

1 Play together
Keep games consoles in communal rooms and play games together. There are a number of active and sports titles available for consoles that the whole family can join in with.

2 Check PEGI ratings
These statutory age ratings help parents identify appropriate games based on their content.

3 Set up parental controls
Ensure you have specified what content children can access with secure passwords and user settings.

4 Regular breaks
Screen time studies vary but all agree that regular breaks are essential. Take one every 45-60 minutes.

5 Check play history
See what your child plays, and for how long, by checking the user history on their profile. For example, on the 3DS this is in the Activity Log app.

Please note that this has been adapted from an article in a publication, so it has not been written by Oliver House but it includes useful information for parents.