

insights

Dealing with video game crazes: Fortnite and fanaticism

by Martine Oglethorpe



Working with kids in schools these past weeks, and indeed having five children of my own, has alerted me to the seemingly unprecedented obsession with the new online game Fortnite. Not since Pokémon Go has something seemed to take the world by storm, leaving parents wondering when it will ever stop.

The answer to that last question is probably that it will stop when the next big thing comes along. These fads may well be a modern day version of the Rubik's Cube, elastics or swap cards, though of course the effects of the obsession can be much more pervasive than with my childhood obsession with PacMan.

If Fortnite is the latest craze to hit your household, or you are being nagged and cajoled to let them have the game “that everyone else is playing”, then here are a few things you should know:

- It is violent. The aim of the game is to be the last person standing, and in order to do that you must kill all the other players.
- However the violence is portrayed as less real and almost cartoonish. There is no blood and gore as such, and so the violence is not comparable to that portrayed in other games such as Call of Duty or Grand Theft Auto.
- You can work in a team or on your own; working in a team can develop some effective teamwork skills.
- You can chat to team members but also random strangers who make up the remainder of the 100 players who are playing at the time.
- You can turn the chat function off by going to the settings and clicking on Audio options. This limits chatting to a player's friends or team members.
- Kids will be very loud playing this game so there is little chance of them playing it behind your back!
- Each game goes for about 20 minutes so it is an easy one to put time limits on by stipulating the number of games.
- It is frequently described as addictive so it is unlikely they will leave a game midway through.

As with any new game, social network or fad, it is crucial that we familiarise ourselves with it. Have a game with them, play around with the app or read about what the possible dangers may be so that you can have the right conversations and put the right boundaries in place.

Whilst there are certainly many areas of video gaming to be concerned about, it is also important to recognise that most video games can build skills and can also have social, emotional and cognitive benefits.

Now of course in order to enjoy these benefits parents need to ensure that gaming remains under control and that the games being played are at an appropriate level for their child.



Five things to keep in mind

1. Discuss any themes or concepts you are concerned about to see if your child has a grasp on the reality (or lack thereof) when it comes to certain games.
2. Monitor how your individual child is coping with a game and the amount of time they are playing. If their mood is changing, they are having a fight to come to the dinner table or they are staying up all night and neglecting other areas of their lives, then you will need to step in and make some changes.
3. Remember it is your house and your rules. But making these rules and boundaries from a place of knowledge and understanding makes them a lot easier to enforce.
4. If a child is struggling with time limits, warnings may help and you may wish to slowly reduce the time being played (rather than go cold turkey). However, some parents have had success with giving their kids a total break from games when things were getting out of hand.
5. Always go to the settings area of any game or network as there you will find ways to make the experience as safe and positive as possible. Minimising the number of people they have the ability to connect with and who can make contact with them is a good place to start.



Remember that every child is different and so the effects that gaming has on each child will be different. The key to enjoying a positive experience with whatever game or craze comes your way is to ensure your child maintains control over their play, that they are playing safely and that they are still leaving plenty of time to do all of the many other things they need to experience on any given day.



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