

Does Playing Computer Games Negatively Affect Children?

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In 1966, engineer Ralph Baer invented the "Brown Box" prototype that enabled companies to create home video-gaming systems. The introduction of home computers has taken video gaming to a new dimension. Children now have a huge array of choices regarding when and how they play their computer games. Playing some types of computer games may have some minor advantages for children, according to studies reported by Palo Alto Medical Foundation. Too much time spent playing computer games, however, also has the potential for negative impacts on emotional, physical and social development.

Violent Content

Teens who spend too much time playing computer games -- particularly those games with violent content -- risk having problems with violent and aggressive behavior, according to studies reported by the Palo Alto Medical Foundation. Teenagers learn to identify with game characters, and repeated use of games that promote violence and aggression make it difficult for some adolescents to separate real life from the imaginary "first-person" gaming experience. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents guide children to select high-quality games appropriate for the age of the child, and also advises that parents restrict the child's daily exposure to all media to a maximum of two hours.

Health Risks

While studies reported by the Health Physics Society show that there are no proven radiation-related health risks linked to computers and monitors, the level of screen brightness and the length of time that children spend focusing on the computer monitor sometimes leads to eye strain. Optometrist Gary Heiting warns parents that prolonged gaming play in front of a monitor can also lead to computer vision syndrome, a condition that may cause progressive nearsightedness. Sitting in front of a computer for prolonged periods may create ergonomic problems from poor body positioning, or from the position of the computer and screen. Children also risk developing carpal tunnel syndrome in wrists from repetitive play.

Personal Development

Children from birth through age five need practice to develop manual dexterity and fine-movement skills, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Advocates of computerized gaming claim that play promotes this physical development through practiced movement, and also that it has the advantage of introducing basic computer skills. Computer games can enhance fine-motor skills and offer important cognitive practice, but not all games incorporate features that introduce and enhance these skills. When seeking out the most helpful games for your child, look for those with endorsements from non-profit educational associations, as they typically offer features that enhance development.

Social Skills

Too much time in front of the computer playing games reduces the time kids spend engaging in outside activities, participating in hobbies, playing with friends and using their imaginations. Computer games, even interactive gaming, fail to give children the experience of social interaction with others. Gaming fills a need for activity, but play that involves personal interaction with other children and adults helps children develop physically and mentally, and also allows kids to evolve and use appropriate social skills in different real-life situations.