



Public Safety Advisory | Video Games and Youth Risks

Sometimes the games are in **CONTROL.**

Video games are engineered to keep kids playing through reward loops, loot boxes, rankings, battle passes, and nonstop online interaction. Excessive gaming can interfere with sleep, school performance, emotional regulation, friendships, and family relationships. This is not a parenting failure. When companies design games to maximize screen time and spending, accountability matters.



85% of Teens

PLAY VIDEO GAMES, 41% ARE DAILY GAMERS

Pew Research Center



1 in 3 Teen Gamers

REPORT SPENDING MONEY ON RANDOMIZED IN GAME REWARDS.

APA, 2024*



41% of Teen Gamers

HAVE SAID GAMING NEGATIVELY IMPACTED THEIR SLEEP

APA, 2024*

The Problem

Designed to Attract Children

85% of teens play video games, and **41% report gaming every day**. Many modern games are intentionally designed to maximize engagement through constant rewards, loot boxes, streaks, rankings, battle passes, and gambling-style mechanics.

These systems activate dopamine-driven reward pathways similar to those involved in other addictive behaviors, encouraging compulsive play, prolonged screen time, and repeated spending. Researchers and mental health experts warn that excessive gaming can contribute to **sleep disruption, emotional dysregulation, anxiety, depression, and problematic gaming behaviors in vulnerable adolescents.**

Gaming Addiction Is More Than a Habit

Adolescent Brains Are Still Learning Self Control

The adolescent brain, **especially between ages 10 and 19**, is still developing critical systems responsible for impulse control, decision making, and emotional regulation. Video games that rely on constant rewards, loot boxes, streaks, rankings, and gambling-style mechanics can overstimulate the brain's dopamine reward pathways, reinforcing compulsive behavior and increasing the drive for instant gratification. Researchers have found that problematic gaming is associated with changes in reward processing and reduced activity in brain regions linked to self-control and decision-making. **This is not simply "kids being kids."** It is a documented neurological and mental health concern recognized by researchers and the World Health Organization.



What Parents Can Do Right Now?

01 DELAY UNRESTRICTED ONLINE GAMING

Children under 16 often lack the neurological maturity to manage addictive reward systems, gambling-style mechanics, and nonstop online interaction. Delaying unrestricted online gaming can reduce exposure to manipulative design features linked to compulsive play and emotional dysregulation.

Source: *American Academy of Pediatrics, WHO*

02 NO PHONES IN BEDROOMS OVERNIGHT

Late-night gaming is strongly associated with sleep deprivation, irritability, anxiety, depression, and impaired emotional regulation in adolescents. Keep consoles, PCs, and phones out of bedrooms overnight.

Source: *CDC, Sleep Foundation*

03 SET FIRM DAILY GAMING LIMITS

Consistent time boundaries help reduce compulsive gaming behaviors and improve balance with school, physical activity, and family interaction. Pediatric experts recommend structured screen time limits for children and teens.

Source: *American Academy of Pediatrics*

04 DISABLE LOOT BOXES AND IN-GAME PURCHASES

Many games use randomized rewards, loot boxes, and gambling-style mechanics designed to increase spending and prolong play. Disable purchases and require parental approval for transactions.

Source: *FTC, UK Gambling Commission*

05 WATCH FOR WARNING SIGNS OF GAMING ADDICTION

Red flags include anger when gaming stops, declining grades, social withdrawal, sleep disruption, secrecy, compulsive spending, and loss of interest in offline activities.

The WHO recognizes Gaming Disorder as a diagnosable mental health condition.

06 PRIORITIZE REAL WORLD ACTIVITIES AND FACE-TO-FACE CONNECTIONS

Encourage sports, hobbies, outdoor activity, sleep, and in-person friendships. Research shows that healthy offline engagement helps protect against compulsive gaming behaviors and emotional isolation.

Source: *CDC, American Psychological Association*