



PARENTS & CARERS GUIDE TO VIDEO GAMES

VIDEO GAMES: WHAT EVERY PARENT NEEDS TO KNOW

Haute Vallée School continually strives to put the emotional wellbeing and safety of our students first and we hope to achieve this by working closely with parents to help support and educate in all areas.

The school is becoming increasingly concerned about the growing number of students and increasingly younger age groups who are playing, or watching 18 rated video games such as; Grand Theft Auto, Call of Duty, Halo, Battlefield etc. This has included children as young as 11 and 12 years old. These games can include: extreme violence, killing, simulated sex, drug use and foul language.

Parents are not always aware of the extreme content of these games and the upsetting nature or the impact this can have on children. An 18 rated game is “considered to contain more sexual themes, intense repetitive violence, graphic killing and very strong language”. The age rating guidelines are meant to help parents make an informed decision about whether it is suitable for a child to watch/play, just as a film with an 18 rating. Children and young people are increasingly accessing You Tube videos posted by gamers who download films of themselves playing sexually explicit/violent games.

WHEN IS IT OK FOR CHILDREN TO START PLAYING VIDEO GAMES?

This is a controversial subject. Research is in its early stages, however, the academy of paediatrics consistently advises against any screen time for a child under the age of 2 years. Studies are increasingly showing that screen time under the age of 2 can have a significant effect on speech and language development and research is beginning to show a link to ADHD in children who have high exposure to screen time under the age of 3. After the age of 3 there is evidence to show that some screen time with educational games can help with numeracy and literacy.

Minecraft (if played within structured playing times) has been found to be educational in areas from architecture, Geology, Physics to Electronics!

Other age appropriate games have been found to be beneficial in strategic thinking, hand/eye coordination, puzzle solving, logical thinking, spatial awareness and teamwork.

WHAT ABOUT VIOLENT VIDEO GAMES?

The law states that all video games contain an age related guide for parents. Many studies have been carried out on the effect of a game’s violent content on teenagers and younger children. The outcomes of this research highlights short term spikes in violent and aggressive behaviour by the player, difficulty in “unwinding” resulting in sleep problems, difficulty in understanding “empathy” and children reporting exposure to “upsetting images that they are unable to let go of”.

There is also new research carried out in the United States that has shown teenagers who have been exposed to violent video games from a young age showing higher levels of aggression than their peers. Many games reward acts of violence by players moving up levels.

Most current research shows that the amount of time a child or young person spends on a screen/console can hugely alter the negative impact of the outcomes. Some evidence has shown excessive gaming has led to poor relationships with families and friends.

Experts suggest that children should not be exposed to more than 2 hours of screen time a day (this includes TV, gaming, phone, tablet etc.)

SHOULD I BE PLAYING GAMES WITH MY CHILDREN?

Yes, definitely. Playing age appropriate games with your children is a useful way of knowing the contents of what your children are playing, and also gives you a common interest to talk to your child.

Playing and sharing games together, gives you the opportunity to engage in safe, enjoyable 1:1 interaction and can often lead to being able to chat about other issues in a relaxed happy environment.

Please think really carefully about what you are exposing your children to by allowing them to access games that are way above the recommended age group. Or, allowing children to spend way past the recommended daily screen time.