



## More Evidence Fortnite Is Bad for Your Child's Health

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The world's most popular online video game costs nothing to play, is available on seven different platforms, has more than 200 million registered players worldwide, and its CEO is now worth over \$7 billion. Launched in the summer of 2017, Fortnite has blown away the competition to become the go-to video game for any serious or would-be gamer. Fortnite may also be responsible for a serious decline in your child's health as evidence mounts about the effects on kids obsessed with playing.

While the World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes gaming disorder (compulsive and obsessive playing of video games) as a diagnosable condition, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) says there is currently insufficient evidence to support [gaming disorder](#) as a unique mental disorder, calling for further research.

To gain valuable insight on the potential harm that obsessive video gaming can cause in young people, I spoke with [Dr. Anita Gadhia-Smith](#), a psychotherapist in Washington, D.C. who specializes in addictions, recovery and relationship issues.

## **How Electronic Gaming Addiction Affects Families**

Dr. Gadhia-Smith acknowledges that electronic gaming addiction is on the rise. She says she has worked with numerous families who are experiencing the phenomenon of their sons and daughters being addicted to online video games, particularly Fortnite. Parents are understandably frustrated over what to do. “It is especially difficult when one parent feels more strongly about setting limits than the other,” Dr. Gadhia-Smith says. “This can cause tremendous conflict between the parents, which then affects the entire family emotionally. “Children can split the parents and then form a stronger alliance with one, making it even more difficult for the parents to set boundaries together in a unified way.”

## **What Repeated Electronic Device Use Does to the Brain**

Continuous daily use of electronics is more than merely annoying. It’s also more concerning than taking children’s attention away from healthier activities, such as playing sports, interacting with friends on a face-to-face basis and more. According to Gadhia-Smith, this non-stop use of electronics is changing the human brain. “It is causing changes in the prefrontal cortex, especially affecting young developing brains.”

What about the addictive aspect of such use? “Part of the addictive component involves a continuous release of dopamine,” she says. “Every time someone gets a notification on their phone, or attends to their electronic game, there is another release of dopamine, thereby increasing very addictive behaviors and natural endo-chemicals produced by our own biochemistry.”

Gadhia-Smith calls this the inner drugstore, and says our own endo-chemicals can be just as addictive as taking drugs externally. “It is similar to cocaine addiction, or a gambler’s addiction to a slot machine. The dopamine drip is a powerful force, and our brains are wired to seek this pleasure hormone.” Therein lies the heart of the problem, she continues. “When we are continually flooded with dopamine, normal amounts no longer satisfy us. So then we need more and more dopamine to even feel normal. This is part of the reason that it is so hard to pry people away from their electronics. They are literally addicted to them.”

## **How Video Game and Electronics Attachment Specifically Harms Kids**

What happens when young people remain glued to their video game screens and dismiss or avoid other activities in order to continue playing? What are the social, psychological and physical effects of such an obsession? Gadhia-Smith offers the following assessment.

“Adolescents and children need to learn how to be with other human beings, how to interact face-to-face, how to read and respond to verbal and social cues, and how to communicate effectively. There is no substitute for face to face personal interaction.

“If children are continuously attached to machines, then they lack normal human development and the capacity to integrate the full range of human interaction. We see reduced vocabularies, a lessening capacity for healthy social interaction, communication, and reduced social skills and capacity to form and sustain healthy relationships.”

## **Warning About Violent Video Games**

Gadhia-Smith has a special warning concerning the effects of violent video games on young minds. “With video gaming that includes violence, violence becomes normalized and acceptable,” she says. “People become desensitized to violence, and lose the capacity to understand what it really means. As evidenced by gang violence and rampant use of guns by mass shooters, we are witnessing a change in the value of human life. To the extent that violent games contribute to this, as well as movies and other media, we need to closely examine what we are feeding the minds of our young people. Whatever they are feeding their minds is likely to come out in their lives.”

### **How to Counter the Argument that Everyone’s Doing It**

Every parent has heard the excuse that everybody’s playing Fortnite. “Just because someone’s friends are doing something doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s OK for your children to do it,” Gadhia-Smith says. “Parents have a responsibility to be involved and aware about what their children are feeding their minds. Just like you need to be aware what you’re feeding your body, you also need to be aware what you are feeding your mind.”

Gadhia-Smith offers the following advice for parents on how to combat their child’s Fortnite obsession:

- Limiting children’s’ time with electronics is especially important.
- Facilitating face-to-face human interaction, including sports, will help children to achieve more balance.
- Sports provide your children with a healthy outlet for competitive energy, teamwork, and learning how to get along with other people.
- Sports also is a way for your kids to release aggression in a healthy manner.

“I recommend that parents work on both being aligned on the same policies, and then implement reasonable boundaries with their children. Allowing them to check out from life and reality, will deprive them of developing the skills that they need to survive in this world. This requires more work and perseverance from parents, perhaps more than ever before, as we are living in a world that is ever far-reaching and more complex in every way.”

### **What Parents Can Do**

If you are still unsure whether anything you do will have an effect, Gadhia-Smith has some specific recommendations on what parents can do in coping with their child’s (or their own) [video game addiction](#). “The best case scenario for changing the focus of your children’s attention is to find something healthy that will attract them even more than the video games. Help them to find fun and healthy activities that surpasses the pleasure that they get from the game.”

But if you find yourself running into obstacles or your child refuses to cooperate, you have to step in. Gadhia-Smith says that all you can do is to set limits on how much time they play. She says there are basically two ways to detox your children from video games.

- The first is cold turkey, which is the most painful. “I recommend this in very extreme cases where everything else has been tried and failed.”

- The second method is to gradually taper down their time. “If you can slowly reduce the time that they spend each day, perhaps without them even knowing it, you may be able to bring the monster down to a manageable size if they are going to continue playing at all.”

Gadhia-Smith notes that the capacity to learn to tolerate frustration and to learn to self-soothe in healthy ways is a critical part of human development. She says that parents need to model these behaviors for their children whenever possible. “If children are so defiant and angry that under no circumstances will they respond to any limits, turn off the Internet or take away the computer. There are apps available to turn off Internet service.”

Trying to ensure your child is never hurt or unhappy may be part of parental DNA, but Gadhia-Smith urges caution. “It is a fantasy to believe that we must never hurt or be unhappy. Parents also need to examine if they have a larger pattern of over indulging their children in other ways and enabling them to develop entitled, unhealthy attitudes and behaviors due to overindulgence. There are some things that parents need to solve for their children, but there are others that children need to learn to solve for themselves. And the capacity to self-soothe can only be learned by oneself.”

What about angry outbursts from your child over these new limitations? “If your children become angry or enraged about your setting limits, let them be angry. It is OK for kids to not like the limits that are set for their own good. That is often the way it is supposed to be.” Gadhia-Smith adds that eventually, the children can use their anger creatively and pursue new activities. She says that many new creative pursuits have been born out of anger and discomfort. “Parents need to live with their own discomfort when their children are upset. That means that you do not have to feel guilty when you have done the right thing. It actually causes harm to your children not to set proper limits, and in the long run you are limiting their lives and enabling them in a very unhealthy way.

“Parents need to remember that they are the ones in control, and not hand over the steering wheel to the children out of fear, laziness, or unwillingness to step up and do what needs to be done. It may take several repetitions of setting limits before your children understand that the limits are real, but if you keep doing it, it will set a new standard and a new normal.”

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