Do ADHD and Video Games Mix?

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ADHD and Video Games

Video games have been a part of culture for more than 30 years and show no signs of going away any time soon. Video games are more accessible than ever thanks to the increased availability of high-speed internet and smartphones. Video games are a fantastic way to relax due to the distraction they provide; they allow you to escape the stresses of the day as you are transported to another place and time. Unfortunately, the distraction and escape can become negative qualities for some players.

People with ADHD have a tendency to play video games for longer durations and higher intensities. This makes sense when you consider what the mind of someone with ADHD wants above all else: stimulation. Without stimulation, people with ADHD become bored, distracted and restless. Video games provide a nearly constant stream of stimulation.

Not only is the stimulation constant, but it also stimulates multiple senses – the visuals from the screen, the sounds from the speakers and the touch of controller engross the player. Whether as a child or an adult, the stimulation paired with the sense of control is an addictive combination. This is why a child that cannot seem to pay attention for more than five minutes at school can play a video game for six hours without breaking a sweat.

Breaking up With Video Games

For many, video games are not a problem. For others, video games interfere with school, work and relationships. These people need to give video games some space. Here's how:

- **Limit duration –** The more time spent playing video games, the stronger the negative influence becomes. Beware and be cautious when adjusting time limits for your child, as he or she will likely see any shift as a punishment and resist. The process will be uncomfortable so going "cold turkey" is not recommended. This will only trigger anger and irritability.

- **Limit when –** By limiting when the game is played, you control the perception. Is it a reward or a right? If your child with ADHD loves games, have an honest conversation to establish a compromise based on your expectations. If you are the gamer, establish boundaries for yourself of days and times to play. The more time spent gaming means less time for other areas of your life.
- **Limit content –** Games are like TV shows; they are not created equally. Check out the rating found on each game and research what each one means. Permitting an eight year-old to play a game rated "M" is not advisable, since those games are targeted at players over 17. Watch the game play to understand the values displayed in the game.
- **Substitute –** Simply saying "You can't do that" to a child is never a great strategy. Instead, find substitutions that are stimulating as well as active, educational or build relationships. Trying a team or individual sport will get your child with ADHD off the couch, burning energy and being social.
- **Know when moderation is not possible –** Some people with ADHD will never be able to play video

games in moderation. If you or your child fit into this category, consider banning video games from the home altogether. The short-term frustration may be worth the long-term gain.

Conclusion

Video games and ADHD can be a problematic pairing. Analyze the impact of gaming on your life or the life of your child to see if boundaries are needed. If so, take action. The damage associated with gaming will only intensify with time.