



Turn that thing off!

Computer games and time

INFORMATION ABOUT COMPUTER GAMES
FOR PARENTS OF 12 TO 16-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN

**GAME
LIFE**



A TYPICAL SITUATION IN FAMILIES

Enraged, a father runs into his son's room. His son doesn't even look at him – instead, he is focused on the scene, headset on his head. The son reacts dismissively to the request to come to dinner (which the father has already made several times) and says he should leave him alone.

WHAT DO MANY PARENTS THINK ABOUT THIS?

Parents are annoyed, when it feels like their children spent every second at the computer or on their cellphones. It can be worrisome, when they enter the virtual world more and more, especially during adolescents, when they become more independent and mostly don't want to listen to their parents anymore. It seems as if the teenagers are neglecting other activities and hobbies. A change in behavior during puberty is also frequently associated with computer games. Parents' objections and requests are often responded to aggressively.

WHAT DO MANY TEENAGERS THINK ABOUT THIS?

Engrossed in the game, chatting with friends or about to finish an important task in the game – that's the moment, when parents, who apparently have never heard of the word privacy before, have to disturb you. Their announcements are seen as an intrusion into one's own self-determination. Young people want to decide for themselves when and how much they want to play. Other hobbies such as reading or soccer are not only tolerated but encouraged. Their favorite activity, gaming on the other hand, is always portrayed in a negative light.

WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?

Why do teenagers like to play so much? There are several factors that explain why children and teenagers can't (or won't) just quickly turn off a computer or video game:



Game design and game structure: sometimes a game session can take longer (e.g. 1-2 hours), or more specifically, there may not be as many points in the game at which the score can be saved. When ending the game abruptly the current progress in the game is lost. Furthermore, in online games the sudden termination of a game can lead to penalties (e.g. being excluded from a team or game suspensions).



Social aspects: Nowadays, computer games often take place online and with other people, often with friends. If a game is terminated early it annoys fellow players. It can also be extremely embarrassing for the teenagers, when they are scolded in front of others. As others may be listening in (via microphone or camera) their reputation might be on the line if they give in.



Immersing yourself in virtual worlds: A difficult developmental phase, stressful situations in everyday life (e.g. at school, with friends or family) can let the gaming world appear much more attractive.

Can Computer games be addictive? This question is currently the subject of controversial debate among experts. Since 2018 a “gaming disorder” diagnosis exists. This only affects a small minority of gamers, often in connection with other social or psychological problems. Following symptoms indicate a gaming disorder: Loss of control over the time spent playing the game, almost complete suppression of other everyday activities, interests or hobbies, and continued playing despite persistent negative consequences due to playing. Parents should be cautious in their assessment: frequent playing alone is not an indication of a mental illness. If you are worried, you can get help at educational or addiction counselling centers.



Additional information about computer games and „right to play“ can be found at www.games.jff.de.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Often the dispute over games is due to the time spent playing. This is where the different ideas of parents and teenagers collide. The dispute is perceived as a burden by both sides. Everyone's nerves are on edge after failed attempts to agree on binding rules and frequently the parents just give up.

Respect teenagers' interests: Computer games are part of the current youth culture. Think about your own youth: You too had areas you didn't want to share with your parents. Nowadays, this is the case with virtual world (see brochure Right to Play).

Setting limits and learning to set limits: However, young people often find it difficult to set limits. This is where parents must step up! The aim is not just to find a good balance between gaming and other activities, but to help young people to set limits on their own.

Agreeing and adhering to rules: Unfortunately, there are no „simple“ solutions when negotiating “playing time”. Based on the experience of many families, however, time budgets and joint negotiations on clear rules and possible consequences in the event of a rule violation have emerged as the best option for this age phase (see link tips). This way, a weekly playing time can be agreed upon together. These rules can of course be made more concrete by additional agreements and specifications of the parents (e.g. no games during homework time or fixed times for dinner). Of course, there are exceptions to every rule, but these should remain exceptions.

It is helpful if the agreed upon times can be easily integrated into the everyday life of teenagers and families. This also makes it easier for young people to structure their everyday lives reasonably. A joint negotiation increases the chances that the rules will be respected by the teenagers and that they are suitable for all those involved. Nevertheless, it is the parents' task to ensure that the agreed upon rules are adhered to. This is often viewed to be tedious, especially during puberty, but do not be discouraged here.

Be a role model and offer incentives for other leisure

activities: Families or friends should provide incentives for other leisure activities. Parents with a passion for computer games or smartphones should be role models. Be aware of this!

Pay attention: If young people withdraw into gaming worlds frequently and over a longer period, this can have different reasons (e.g. a new game, a particularly exciting point in the game, but also short-term problems such as heartache and stress in the family). In many such cases, the behavior becomes normal again after some time. If this is not the case, however, you should seek professional help. Therefore, in order to intervene as early as possible, parents should pay attention and be open to talk in general - not only in regard to computer games.

Find support: The exchange with other parents of playing teenagers can be helpful. They have also had good and bad experiences and can give valuable tips. However, it is important to find suitable rules for your own children and families. If agreements are not kept at all and you are seriously worried, you can turn to educational counselling centers or pediatricians. Here you can get individual advice and discuss possible other steps.

LINKTIPS

Child guidance office in Bavaria:

The child guidance office in Bavaria offers a variety of information and contact points.

www.stmas.bayern.de/erziehungsberatung

klicksafe.de

The EU-Initiative for more internet security offers suggestions for “game time” and rules.

www.klicksafe.de/eltern/kinder-von-10-bis-16-jahren/nutzungszeiten-und-regeln/

Furthermore, you will find background information about computer addiction and an overview of counselling centers.

www.klicksafe.de/themen/digitale-spiele/digitale-spiele/computerspielsucht

ELTERNTALK

The project of „Aktion Jugendschutz – Landesarbeitsstelle Bayern e.V.“ helps parents discuss parenting topics (especially media, consumption, addiction prevention and healthy development) in moderated discussion groups.

www.elterntalk.net

BROCHURES ON OTHER TOPICS

Tell me your nickname and I'll tell you who you are!

Computer games and data protection

Money Money Money!

Computer games and money

Gamegirls and Gameboys

Computer games and gender

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Computer games and violence

Loser!

Computer games and contact risks

Stars from the generation games

Computer games and media culture

Let's Play!

Computer games and the right to play

Turn that thing off!

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free of charge at games.jff.de.

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