



## **Gaming: What You Should Know Before Hitting Start**

Noelle Elliott

On Christmas day 1984, I emerged to our living room to find, sitting on a card table, a Commodore 64. My dad had bought the family our first home computer. None of us knew what to do with it, but once I learned how to play hangman on it, I thoroughly enjoyed it.

That was my first glimpse into the world of computer games. Fast-forward 30 years and the landscape of gaming has dramatically changed. Now, games can be played anytime and anywhere. Smartphones, tablets, laptops, and computers make it easy to play not just one, but thousands of games.

Being the mother of four boys, this is something I am very familiar with. My oldest son prides himself on being a gamer.

What is a gamer exactly? According to Wikipedia, the term Gamer can be broken down into a few categories.

**Casual Gamer**- a player whose time or interest in playing games, is limited. Casual gamers tend to play games designed for ease of gameplay and don't spend much time playing more involved games.

**A Core Gamer-** is a player with a wider range of interests than a casual gamer and is more likely to enthusiastically play different types of games.

Hardcore Gamer- a player extends gaming into their lifestyle and may represent the stereotypical "game geek". They are frequent purchasers of games, prefer to spend significant time on games, and are more likely to try to "master" their games by completing as many objectives as possible.

Like it or not, video games have become a major part of society and are marketed for all ages. There are games designed for children younger than one-year-old. Where should you draw the line?

There are several apps designed for toddlers. ABC letter tracing, Alphabet Zoo, and shape games to name a few. These games intend to teach, however, most parents use them to distract their toddlers so they can quickly move through the grocery store. Are they missing a perfect opportunity to teach their children something tangible at the moment?

Marketing for gaming products targets new parents. Promising accelerated learning for children who use these devices. At some point, your toddler will grow bored and need a more advanced gaming system. Once they grow tired of that, they will want an even more advanced gaming system. And the pattern will continue. Their need for instant gratification and visual stimulation will only manifest and the gaming industry is banking on it.

Something that is not disputable is that the time spent sitting and staring at a screen is taking away from a child being physically active. Spending time face-to-face with friends. Dealing with conflict and resolution. Showing empathy for another human. None of this can be achieved while sitting in front of a computer screen.

There are several articles, sources, and studies of conflicted findings on video games. Some studies say that they cause violent behavior and aggression while other studies suggest that kids with violent tendencies should express them through video games rather than in real life.

The issue has been investigated even more closely with the increase in gun violence and mass shootings in our country. Could exposure to violent games result in horrific violent behavior in reality? Are the images and violence displayed on video games any more detrimental than the images seen on television?

It is a tough call. But thankfully, as a parent, it is your call. It would be impossible for a child to purchase a gaming system without the knowledge of his or her parent. However, the top-selling holiday toys for the past decade have all included some kind of gaming console. It is hard to shelter your child from it, they will learn about different games at school from a friend or on television.

I can speak from personal experience that having a gaming system in our home has caused more harm than good. Our son grows tired of age-appropriate games and desires more complex games. Almost all the games that he wants, we disapprove. It is the source of a lot of disagreements in our house.

If you are going to purchase a gaming system or tablet for your child be sure to follow 10 simple guidelines.

- Implement rules that are not negotiable.
- Make sure both parents are on the same page.
- Balance screen time with outside playtime.
- Make it a privilege and not a given right.
- Monitor everything your child is doing online.
- Follow the age guidelines listed by the manufacturer.
- Set the parental codes high on all devices that your children will be using.
- Research any game online before purchasing it. A fantastic website that I use is Common Sense Media <http://www.commonsensemedia.org>  
This website gives a parental review and offers suggestions on age-appropriate games and apps.
- Before going to a friend's house call the parents and discuss gaming guidelines for your child.
- Remind kids to never give out personal information such as age and location to anyone on the Internet.

Like all parents, I want my children to have fun with games but not at the expense of their safety. It is crucial to do your research. Keep games fun. The world we live in is filled with enough violence. Children do not need to be desensitized to it by thinking it is a game that can be turned off.