

DIGITAL WELLNESS



Video games are fun, often educational and, increasingly, therapeutic. More and more people report that video games provide stress relief while creating positive mental stimulation. Medical professionals and health experts now recognize the benefits of gameplay by employing games to achieve positive health outcomes for patients of all ages. The benefits of gameplay have been particularly apparent during the pandemic, when video games helped keep people of all ages home, safe and connected. The ability of players, students, patients and numerous others around the world to continue to benefit from groundbreaking, life-enhancing technologies depends upon policies that foster and celebrate gameplay for the billions of players who enjoy video games as part of a healthy, well-balanced lifestyle.

At the same time, the video game industry recognizes the importance of providing information and tools to encourage digital wellness among its audiences. For more than a quarter-century, the industry, through the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), has been a leader in providing resources that help consumers, especially parents and caregivers, manage gameplay in their homes. The industry is also committed to working with all stakeholders, including public health officials and advocates worldwide, to promote player health and well-being.

Video Games Have Positive Health and Educational Effects on the People Who Play Them

There is a growing body of medical and academic literature outlining the positive physical and mental health benefits of gameplay in everyday life. For example, video games are used to educate child cancer patients in understanding their conditions better as well as to help correct the visual impairment known as amblyopia, or “lazy eye.” Brain training video games are being used to improve memory, help older patients manage daily tasks and assist in the treatment of Alzheimer’s disease. And, for the first time, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved the use of a video game to serve as a treatment option for children with ADHD.

Video games are also recognized for their power to create new learning opportunities and promote the pipeline for high-tech careers. For example, video games like Skyrim and Minecraft are used to help enhance literacy by enabling children with dyslexia and other learning challenges to develop critical skills. At a more advanced level, over 450 colleges and universities across the country offer programs in video game-related topics, recognizing the value these games play in preparing students for productive careers in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). Indeed, studies show that girls who play video games are three times as likely to pursue a STEM degree than girls who do not play video games. Parents also recognize the value of video games. In fact, 73% of U.S. parents whose children play games agree that video games provide beneficial educational experiences for their children.

Better Research is Needed to Avoid Stigmatizing Healthy Gameplay

Like any form of entertainment, video games should be enjoyed as part of a balanced lifestyle. Some researchers have raised concerns regarding the potential impact on health and development as the result of increased time spent on digital media, including with respect to video games. However, a number of academics have highlighted the inadequacies of existing

research on video games, particularly related to overuse. To the contrary, several studies have shown a minimal impact from the use of digital technology by adolescents. Robust, independent and unbiased research is needed to avoid unjustified policy intervention, the risks of misdiagnoses or the stigmatization of gameplay.

Equipping Parents with Information and Tools to Promote Healthy Gameplay by Their Children

Since 1994, the video game industry's self-regulatory body, the ESRB, has provided parents with age and content ratings for video games and apps to help them make informed decisions about which products are appropriate for their family. These tools have a high level of awareness and use among parents. The U.S. Federal Trade Commission has lauded industry efforts to responsibly market its products and has noted that the video game industry "outpaces" other entertainment sectors in having the "strongest self-regulatory code" and "high compliance" with that code.

In addition, parental controls, offered on virtually all video game devices, offer parents the ability to efficiently set preferences that are appropriate for their household. These controls enable parents to: (i) block video games by age rating category; (ii) manage the amount of money their kids can spend playing video games; and (iii) limit the amount of time their kids can spend playing video games. In addition to being able to set parental controls directly on the console, parents can download easy-to-use smartphone apps for each console to manage what, when and with whom their children can play. The ESRB provides a centralized place for parents to obtain step-by-step parental control guides for all the game consoles, Windows computers and other platforms at ParentalTools.org.

The industry also provides in-game tools to enable players to mute or block other players online and to report unwanted interactions.

These safety and wellness features continue to evolve as consumer needs evolve. The video game industry regularly updates parental controls and other product features and tools to help consumers navigate the ever-changing world of video games.