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Game Fatigue

By Malia Blom, JD

Video games. Talk about a subject that can unite women in frustration when it comes to the men and boys in their lives. Whether we're talking about wives, moms, or girlfriends, it's not hard to find someone who is concerned about how much gaming goes on with their guys. There are internet message boards where girlfriends and wives lament becoming "widows" to various online games (*World of Warcraft* is a frequent offender). And there are studies showing that not only do boys spend more time playing computer games than girls, but that their time for homework and studying is likely to suffer as a result. (I know, I know—it's one of those things where you ask, "they needed a study to learn that? I could have saved them the trouble.")

I should make it clear that I am absolutely *not* anti-video game. I don't have any objection to my husband or children playing games for recreation, and I even occasionally join in, despite my truly pathetic lack of ability. It's fun, and as long as the game is age-appropriate and play is kept to a reasonable amount, it's harmless as well. The problem begins when the games start to eat into schoolwork time or replace regular social interaction and other worthwhile hobbies. Moms who are concerned that the gaming is getting excessive might want to keep some of the following tips in mind:

- 1.) Time the game play, so as to get a better idea of how much time is actually being spent playing. Some games (especially online role-playing games) make an art of keeping people immersed in the game until they've lost track of how long they've been playing. Find out how much time has been spent playing games and compare that to what you consider a reasonable amount. (For example, how much television time would you normally permit?) Once you've determined whether there is really a problem, set fair limits on how much gaming is allowed per night/week/etc. and stick to it.
- 2.) If your concern is the reclusive nature of gaming, you may need to provide the initial motivation to get out and socialize. (Some online games provide a kind of virtual social interaction that can easily crowd-out the real thing.) Just as my own mother would sometimes have to wrench a book from my hands and send me, stumbling and blinking, out into the sunlight to play, sometimes a mom just has to do what she has to do. If getting together with friends isn't an option, perhaps a regular activity (a class, sport, etc.) that interests your son would be a good way to keep him active.
- 3.) Since game time often eats into what little recreational reading boys tend to do, use his favorite games as a jumping-off point to explore larger interests. Though it's not universally the case, a boy who enjoys sports games would generally be interested in reading sports news and articles, or attending/participating in local sports events. A boy who enjoys fantasy role-playing games may find that he likes fantasy or sci-fi literature (most of these games borrow widely from the works of Tolkien), and so on.

And if all else fails, maybe you should start playing too. If enough of us parents start getting into video games, maybe our combined uncoolness can sink their popularity. Like when everyone started saying, "talk to the hand." Or maybe not.

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