

Study: Impulsive kids play more video games

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Impulsive children with attention problems tend to play more video games, while kids in general who spend lots of time video gaming may also develop impulsivity and attention difficulties, according to new research published by the American Psychological Association.

"This is an important finding because most research on attention problems has focused on biological and [genetic factors](#) rather than on environmental factors," said Douglas A. Gentile, PhD, of Iowa State University and lead author of the study published this week in the debut issue of APA's journal *Psychology and Popular Media Culture*.

Although the findings indicated that playing [violent video games](#) also can be linked to impulsivity and attention problems, the overall amount of time spent playing any type of video game proved to be a greater factor, according to the article. This was the case regardless of a child's gender, race or socioeconomic status.

Researchers collected data from 3,034 children, ages 8 to 17 years old, over three years at 12 schools in Singapore. The children provided information about their video game playing habits by completing questionnaires in their classrooms at three intervals, each a year apart starting in grades three, four, seven and eight. They also completed psychological tests commonly used to measure attention and impulsiveness. Regarding attention, the children answered questions such as how often they "fail to give close attention to details or make careless mistakes" in their work or "blurt out answers before questions have been completed." For the impulsivity test, they selected points they

felt described themselves, such as "I often make things worse because I act without thinking" or "I concentrate easily."

The study described [attention problems](#) as having a difficult time engaging in or sustaining behavior to reach a goal, particularly when the subject is difficult or boring. Yet previous research has found that [playing video games](#) can improve [visual attention](#) for rapid and accurate recognition of information from the environment, the authors noted.

"It is possible that electronic media use can impair attention necessary for concentration even as it enhances the ability to notice and process visual information," Gentile said.

Understanding some of the environmental influences that video gaming may have on attention and [impulsivity](#) can help develop more effective solutions for children and parents, the authors said.

More information: "Video Game Playing, Attention Problems, and Impulsiveness: Evidence of Bidirectional Causality," Douglas A. Gentile, PhD, and Edward L. Swing, MS, Iowa State University; Choon Guan Lim, PhD, Institute of Mental Health, Singapore; and, Angeline Khoo, PhD, National Institute of Education, Singapore; *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, Vol. 1, Issue 1.

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Provided by American Psychological Association

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