

# Researchers find parents of children with autism embrace video game use

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

A common frustration among many parents is wondering how to get their kids to 'disconnect' from devices—computers, phones, and gaming consoles—in order to maintain healthy lifestyles and develop meaningful relationships.

In the case of [parents](#) of children with [autism spectrum disorder](#) (ASD), however, Penn State researchers have found that parents actually embrace their child's use of video games.

The finding is significant because [video game](#) use among children with ASD could potentially aid them in building relationships with children who do not have ASD, according to researchers Erinn Finke, assistant professor of communications sciences and disorders, and Benjamin Hickerson, assistant professor of recreation, park and tourism management.

"What we found is that parents are supportive," Finke said. "Parents indicated video games were a good use of their child's time and felt video games were contributing to their child's development."

Ultimately, Finke and Hickerson want to create intervention programs that help children with and without ASD develop meaningful relationships through a shared interest in mainstream video games. To get there, the first step was to determine whether parents of children with ASD support the use of video games.

Researchers used an online survey to gather information from 152 parents who have children with ASD between ages 8 and 12. The study's results were published in the April 2015 issue of *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*.

Specifically, the study found that parents intended to continue support of their child/children's video game use and felt video gaming contributed to their child's quality of life. The parents in this sample also reported positive feelings about the social and other developmental benefits of video gaming, particularly fine motor and critical thinking abilities.

Going into the study, Hickerson admits he hypothesized parents would

not view video games as a productive way for their children to spend time.

"It was exciting to hear parents support their kids playing video games and they understand their [children](#) care about video games," Hickerson said. "Parents realize that motivation and dedication could have positive outcomes. They see it as being more than a leisure activity and that it could potentially lead to meaningful activity, such as a career down the road."

"We're looking forward to determining how we can use video games for intervention and to bring kids together," Finke said.

**More information:** "Parental Intention to Support Video Game Play by Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder: An Application of the Theory of Planned Behavior."

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