

# Parents influence children's play of violent video games, according to new study

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Credit: Bob Elbert/Iowa State University

Parents who are more anxious and emotional can impact the amount of violent video games their children play, according to new consumer research from Iowa State University. The study is published in the

*Journal of Consumer Affairs.*

Russell Laczniak, a professor of marketing and the John and Connie Stafford Professor in Business, says given the harmful effects of [violent video games](#), he and his colleagues wanted to better understand how [parents](#) influence children's behavior. They found that parents who were more warm and restrictive were successful in limiting children's play of [violent video](#) games. However, highly emotional and [anxious parents](#) had the opposite effect - their children played more.

"It's not surprising that warmer and more restrictive parents, or what we call authoritative, are most effective at reducing the amount of violent video games played by their children," Laczniak said. "If parents are more anxious, their message is not as well received by their children and it inhibits what they're trying to do. It's pretty clear from our study that's what's happening with kids playing violent video games."

Researchers identified the effect in all children, but it was stronger for boys and first-born. This was not entirely surprising considering parents tend to be more anxious with their first child, Laczniak said. For the study, they specifically surveyed 8- to 12-year-old children, because this is an impressionable time in their lives and an age when many children start playing video games.

"At this age, kids become more vulnerable to outside influences and their peers. As a result, people sometimes question whether parents can still have an impact," Laczniak said. "Our results pretty strongly suggest that they can, even among this group in which peer influences are starting to take over and have a stronger impact."

The final sample for the study included 237 sets of caregivers and children who completed the online survey. Researchers asked parents (or guardians) and children to answer the questions separately. The majority

of adult respondents, nearly 48 percent, identified themselves as mothers; 38 percent were fathers and the remainder was grandparents or other guardians.

## Parental dimensions

Three dimensions of parental styles - warm, restrictive and anxious-emotional - were examined for the study. In the paper, researchers explained that warm parents tend to refrain from physical discipline and show approval through affection. Restrictive parents set and enforce firm rules for the household. Anxious-emotional parents are often overprotective and show elevated emotions when interacting with their children.

Laczniak says the research team expected children with warm or restrictive parents would spend less time playing violent video games. However, they were surprised to see the impact of anxious-emotional parents. He and his colleagues included this dimension based on past studies, which found that children of anxious-emotional parents tend to have more problems. The biggest takeaway for parents is to set limits and be more calmly detached in the relations with their [children](#).

"If parents want to reduce the amount of violent video games that their kids play, be warm when dealing with them, but somewhat restrictive at the same time, and set rules and those rules will work," Laczniak said. "For parents, who are more anxious, the rules become less effective and those kids are going to play more."

The Entertainment Rating Software Board rating system is one tool that may help parents set restrictions for [video game](#) play, Laczniak added. Researchers are currently testing the effectiveness of the rating system.

Provided by Iowa State University

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