

Why video games make healthy stocking stuffers

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Don't feel guilty for stuffing Sonic in the Santa sack - video games can be good for your children's mental health.

In fact, according to the director of QUT's Games Research and Interaction Design Lab, Dr Daniel Johnson, playing video games as a family can help you build stronger relationships with your children.

Dr Johnson and his gaming research group at the Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) combed through 200 papers and reports from around the world to find out when and how video games can have a positive effect on the wellbeing of young players.

They discovered that the types of video games a young person plays is less important for their wellbeing than how they play video games - and who they play them with.

Their research challenges the belief that video games breed socially isolated, aggressive and lazy teenagers.

"Our research showed that playing video games can improve a young person's mood, help them reduce their stress levels, and promote feelings of competence and autonomy," said Dr Johnson, from QUT's Science and Engineering Faculty.

"Playing video games with others in particular increases a person's brain activity, improves their social wellbeing and helps them feel more

connected with others.

"If you're trying to reach out to the teenager in your house, spending time with them playing a cooperative video game you both enjoy could be the bridge you're looking for - and you'll likely feel the same positive impacts on your wellbeing, too."

Dr Johnson cautioned that excessive or obsessive [video game](#) play and technology use was not good for [mental health](#) as this could lead to negative outcomes such as anxiety and insomnia.

But overall, his team's research found:

- moderate (non-excessive) levels of playing are associated with positive emotions and improved mood, improved emotion regulation and emotional stability and the reduction of emotional disturbances
- playing video games can be a healthy means of relaxation, stress reduction and socialising
- people who play video games in moderation have been shown to have significantly less depressed mood and higher self-esteem compared to those who don't play or who play excessively.

More than 95 per cent of Australian homes with children aged under 18 have one or more devices for playing video games.

"One of the most important things you can do as a parent is to ensure you and your child engage thoughtfully with what you are playing," Dr Johnson said.

"Look for games that encourage creativity and cooperation and that are age appropriate."

Dr Johnson will present the results of a range of studies conducted by the QUT Games Research Lab as well as the Young and Well CRC's findings at a Videogames and Wellbeing lecture at the University of Sydney on Tuesday 19 November.

His presentation will also explore: the genres, modes of play and experiences during play that influence wellbeing; the predictors of obsessive and harmonious passion for play; and the differences in [brain activity](#) associated with playing with humans versus Artificial intelligence (AI) controlled teammates.

"People talk a lot about technologies being good or bad for us - phones, social media, video games - but it's never that simplistic," said Associate Professor Rafael Calvo from the University of Sydney's School of Electrical and Information Engineering and host of the talk.

"Technologies impact our wellbeing in positive and negative ways, depending in part on how they're designed.

"The fact is, we need to start measuring and understanding this impact better so we can design future technology that actively promotes wellbeing and human potential."

Dr Johnson said his team's future research will in part focus on what constitutes a healthy or moderate amount of play for people at different ages and how best to leverage the wellbeing benefits of video games in a therapeutic setting.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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