

# Could playing Fortnite lead to video game addiction? The World Health Organisation says yes, but others disagree

19 June 2018, by Joanne Orlando



Fortnite is a web based multi player survival game developed by Epic Games. Credit: Shutterstock

Could your child be addicted to playing video games? Maybe. If you're a parent looking for tips on moderating your child's gaming habits, read on.

The World Health Organisation ([WHO](#)) has, for the first time, recognised "[gaming disorder](#)" – compulsive and obsessive playing of video games – as a diagnosable condition.

The new condition will be included in the 11th edition of the WHO's [International Classification of Diseases](#), which is due out this month. The disorder is [described as](#): "...impaired control over (video) gaming, increasing priority given to gaming over other activities to the extent that gaming takes precedence over other interests and daily activities, and continuation or escalation of gaming despite the occurrence of negative consequences."

For a positive diagnosis, these symptoms should last for at least 12 months.

The benefit of its inclusion as a disease is that it will give [mental health professionals](#) a basis for

setting up treatment and identifying risks for the addictive behaviour.

## American psychiatrics and psychologists disagree

The decision by the WHO will likely come as a welcome relief to many parents who worry that their children are addicted to playing video games – particularly the new [video game Fortnite](#).

This shooter-style game is the latest online must-play, and kids around the globe are hooked. It's not uncommon to see up to two million kids playing the game [simultaneously](#). Children's intense focus on playing it has caused much concern for parents.

However, not everyone is on board with the idea that gaming addiction could be a real medical condition. The American Psychiatric Association [says](#) there is a lack of evidence to support the idea that gaming addiction is a unique mental disorder. They say that the symptoms of the condition are not clear-cut, and that further research is necessary. They currently hold a [similar stance on caffeine use disorder](#).

The Society for Media Psychology and Technology, a division of the American Psychological Association, is [equally concerned](#), interpreting the WHO's decision to be more a product of moral panic than science. They say WHO's decision is more associated with: "...social processes that tend to disparage certain elements of society including new technology, and can result in pressure on scholars and scientific bodies to confirm pre-existing social concerns about new technology."

## Video gaming is a social activity

What I've come to learn from my extensive

research on the effect of technology on the lives of children and [young people](#) is that playing video games is more than a clinical behaviour. The reason children play (and over-play) video games is often less about the technology and more about meeting their social needs.

Tweens and teens have a high affinity and desire for connecting with their peers socially, and doing new things. Especially things that are [different from what their families do](#). Parents today are often more restrictive of children [going outdoors and finding others to play with](#), so in response many kids go online and play.

I've spoken with 50 Australian families – including 118 children aged 1-18 – about technology use, and I'm currently conducting a follow-up qualitative investigation with a further 25 teens about how they use social media. The data for both studies will be published this year.

During my research, when talking with teenage boys – an age and gender often notorious for spending long hours gaming – all of them said that playing video games was about hanging out with their friends. If a group of them got together online to play a game such as Fortnite, some might play the game but others may be there just to chat and hang out, not necessarily even playing the game.

From this perspective, it's clear that video gaming is being used by young people in response to the loss of other forms of play and social connection.

The boys also described their game play as a form of escapism. They explained that they stayed online to avoid doing their homework, helping out with dinner preparation, or doing household chores. They also said that when they logged off there was usually nothing to do at home, so why not stay on?

Over time, [video](#) games have become increasingly well designed, complex and creative. They are fun and kids often achieve success playing them – especially in the case of games such as Fornite. That's why kids get hooked.

**Only a minority of people will become addicted**

Addiction is a serious health condition and only a very small minority of people would be diagnosed with "gaming disorder". While 160 million American adults play online games, a recent [study](#) found that between 0.3% and 1% of people might qualify for an acute diagnosis of internet gaming disorder. Similarly, the WHO authority expects only a very small percentage of people across the world to be affected.

For parents concerned about their child's gaming, it is important to consider lifestyle and well-being.

Gaming disorder is characterised by a person turning down the chance to spend time with friends or doing other activities that they usually enjoy, in order to game. If your child is keeping their grades up, and maintaining friendships and hobbies, then their gaming activity is likely not an addiction.

Parents may also be concerned that their child is not sleeping because night after night they are staying up all night gaming. It's important to ask yourself why a child might want to play the [game](#) for so long. Is it boredom? Escapism? Could it be a symptom that something is going wrong for the child? Rather than focusing on stopping the gaming, you should focus on asking why. Depression and anxiety are reasons worth considering.

### **What parents can do**

An important aspect of being a parent today is guiding your child in ways that support them to have healthy attitudes to technology that ensure it becomes a positive aspect of their life.

Three key strategies for this are:

1. Encourage a blend of physical activity and indoor activity from when your child is young. It's also important to model this behaviour yourself.
2. Spend time talking with your child and sometimes playing games with them online. We should not set up an "us vs them" attitude. This strategy allows you to understand your child as a technology user, and to make more informed decisions

regarding their technology use.

3. Use a range of resources to help you understand kids gaming. Beware of sensationalist media headlines that aim to shock you, and instead head for a range of trustworthy sources supported by credible experts and bodies.

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