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Video Game Suggestions from Dr. Craig A. Anderson

When considering whether to allow your child to play a particular video game, you must consider more than the age-based rating. The rating is not always an accurate indicator of the content. Some games rated by the video game industry as appropriate for "Everyone" contain potentially harmful content. Many "Teen" games are very violent. Although playing a violent video game on an occasional basis is unlikely to produce any long-term harmful consequences, repeated exposure to violent entertainment media of any type is an important risk factor for later aggressiveness. Parents need to carefully examine the content of video games before allowing their children to use them.

There are hundreds of video games available that are both fun and educational. My own children have grown up with video games, but my wife and I have been very careful in screening all of their games, and in limiting the amount of time our children spend on them. Below are sources of games that we've found useful. But please be sure to check the content of *every* game allowed into your child's life, because even some educational games have content that you might find objectionable, particularly violent content.

At the Broderbund web site (www.broderbund.com) you can find several good educational video games for children of various ages, such as the following titles and series by *The Learning Company* (* indicates that my children have used these games):

Arthur	Carmen Sandiego *	ClueFinders *
Dr. Seuss	Learn To Speak	Little Bear
Mavis Beacon *	Oregon Trail *	PBS Kids
Reader Rabbit	The Princeton Review *	Zoombinis

However, some games at this web site contain violent themes even though they carry an "Everyone" rating. The video game rating is not always an accurate indicator of the content, as has been demonstrated by several recent studies. As always, parents need to carefully examine the content of video games before allowing their children to use them. A couple of "descriptions" to watch out for are "Action" and "Comic mischief." Most "Action" games contain at least some violence. "Comic mischief" is often used by the industry to describe violent actions performed by cartoon-like characters.

An excellent series of video games that my children have used is the *JumpStart* series, which can be found at: www.education.com/jumpstart/. *JumpStart* games often can be found at general retail outlets.

Edmark is another company with a history of making good educational games. Their products can be found at: <http://www.riverdeep.net/edmark/>. We have used *Millie's Math House* and *Sammy's Science House* when our children were young. There are many additional games at this web site that look very good.

A source of inexpensive, good, educational games is a company called Ohio Distinctive Software (www.ohiodistinctivesoftware.com/). Our children have enjoyed and learned from many of their games.

Here are some web sites with additional information about entertainment media and parenting issues:

<http://www.mediafamily.org/index.shtml>

<http://www.lionlamb.org/>

<http://www.youngmedia.org.au/>

<http://www.sosparents.org>

I have posted my scientific articles on aggression and violence on my web site. The easiest way to get to my recent research is to go to my home page (<http://www.psychology.iastate.edu/faculty/caa/index.html>), then click on the "Recent Publications" link. You can then download recent articles.

In response to numerous requests, I've developed the following guidelines to examining the content of a video game to see whether repeated exposure might create some harmful aggression-related effects. Note that the same type of guidelines also are useful for creating healthier TV and movie environments.

How can you tell if a video game is potentially harmful?

1. Play the game, or have someone else demonstrate it for you.
2. Ask yourself the following 6 questions:
 - * Does the game involve some characters trying to harm others?
 - * Does this happen frequently, more than once or twice in 30 minutes?
 - * Is the harm rewarded in any way?
 - * Is the harm portrayed as humorous?
 - * Are nonviolent solutions absent or less "fun" than the violent ones?
 - * Are realistic consequences of violence absent from the game?
3. If two or more answers are "yes," think very carefully about the lessons being taught before allowing your child access to the game.

What else can you do?

- *Be a wise consumer:
 - Buy video games that are helpful to your children
 - Don't buy potentially harmful products
- *Be a wise parent/grandparent:
 - Know what your children are playing
 - Don't allow access to violent video games
 - Restrict time spent on video games
 - Explain to your children why such games are harmful
 - Teach nonviolent problem solving at every opportunity
- *Be an involved citizen/consumer
 - If you learn that a retailer is selling violent games to children, complain to the owner/manager.
 - If you learn that a retailer is doing a good job of screening sales or rentals of violent material to children, thank the owner/manager and support the business, perhaps by purchasing nonviolent educational video games.
 - Help educate others in your community (parents, youth, public officials)
- *Let your public officials know that you are concerned.

I hope you find these suggestions useful. Parenting isn't easy, but it is often fun and always important.

Sincerely,
Craig A. Anderson
Professor & Chair

P.S. Several people have asked how they can support aggression research by my students and me. I have set up a university account for this purpose, and have initially funded it with my own donations, research article awards from the Center for Successful Parenting, and my occasional speaking fees. The account is used to purchase equipment and to pay other research related expenses. If you would like to donate to this account, send a check made out to: "Department of Psychology—Iowa State University." In the "memo" portion of the check or in an attached note indicate that you would like it to go into the "Craig A. Anderson Aggression Research Account." Mail the check to me at the department address above.