Impact of Online Gaming on Teens

Kids love and are drawn to playing online games because it's fun. Games can also be used to teach and promote teamwork and creativity.

Online games are **developed by companies for financial gain**. Their mission is to make money. The more players and the longer they stay there, the more money they make.

Enormous amounts of research and development go into creating online environments that are stimulating and compelling. Left unchecked, your teen can easily lose track of how long they spend in this online world. They also feel they 'know' the people they 'play' with. More adults play online than children.

Like all things, there are pros and cons of online gaming.

Potential Negative Consequences	Potential Positive Consequences
Bullying Confusion Concern Fear Aggression Pressure to participate Anger Loss of focus in the physical world Develop delusional beliefs and mindsets Lack of empathy Excessive cost Normalises inappropriate behaviour	Relaxes Promotes creativity Promotes teamwork Cheap form of entertainment Feelings of happiness Feeling of being able to achieve or complete something Acceptance of peers inside game Recognition of successes (numbers/rank or peer comments)

Positive or negative consequences will always depend on a number of factors:
- The nature of the game
- Your child's personality
- The amount of time spent gaming
- The type of people your child is interacting with online

> "It was reported to me by a **primary school principal** that the students engaging in the 15+ online game Need for Speed were the students frequently being disciplined at school for aggressive and inappropriate language. The parents had been informed and acknowledged it wasn't healthy for their children; however, a number of the parents still continued to allow their

> children to play this game because they felt it would be too hard to remove their children now."

So what are your teenagers exposed to, and how is it impacting their behaviour and attitudes?

WHAT IS ONLINE GAMING

- Online games can be played on computers, laptops, tablets, smart phones, iPods, gaming consoles, and handheld gaming consoles that have Internet capabilities.

- Most online games involve your child connecting with other users/people and interacting with them either as part of the game or to communicate.

- Communication can be done via text or voice.

- Profiles can be related that may contain personal information.

> Parents and carers can reduce the possibilities of negative issues by remaining involved and encouraging structures and beliefs around gaming.

THE POTENTIAL ISSUES

- Revealing personal information that can be used by other users or companies for their own purposes

- Health, behaviour, and social/family issues – Hygiene, nutrition, and connection with the people in the house can be ignored in order to stay in the game.

- Addiction or obsession (see fact sheet 'Is your child showing warning signs')

- Interacting online with those that may groom or expose your child/teen to disturbing conversation or material—including extremist ideals

- Exposure to topics that are not in line with your moral or ethical code

- Ignoring other elements of their life, like homework, chores, sport, and physical exercise

- Cyberbullying (See factsheets in the Communication module)

INDICATORS OF A PROBLEM

Gaming may not be the cause, but these should be explored:

- Aggression when told to stop playing

- Use of inappropriate language

- Discussing topics that are not consistent with a child of their age

- Behaviour – nightmares, lack of sleep, diet, or trouble engaging with others

CONSIDERATIONS FOR PARENTS

- **The average age of an online gamer is between 30–35 years of age.**

    o Does your child really 'know' who they are playing with?

    o Most people that set out to groom do **not** lie about their age.

- The rating of the game

    o This can relate to theme, visual content. and violence.

- Games that may be unhealthy for someone under the age of 18

    o Need for Speed

- Online games are a 'chatroom' and should be treated as such.

    o Online games connect your child with others, including strangers, where communication and the sharing of information can take place.

    o Parents must therefore treat these games and regulate the games the same as social networking and chat programs and accounts.

- Can my child create a profile and communicate with others?

    o Check before you agree to access.

    o Protect your child's and family's privacy through appropriate choices and settings, where available.

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- Does the game have a function that allows you or your kids to report inappropriate behaviour online?

ACTIONS BY PARENTS

- Set firm time limits (use factsheets 'Calendar' and 'Teen Technology Rules').

- Know which games your children are playing.

- Do not allow online games in rooms with closed doors (public places only; no bedrooms).

- Communicate with your children about the game. Get them to tell you about the game. Let them know they are to talk to you if they have a problem.

- Read the terms and conditions.

- Check chat histories (if applicable).

- Periodically play with or sit down and watch them play online.

- Put rules and restrictions in place regarding which games are allowable, how much money is to be spent, who they can interact with and language that is allowable

- Never let your children add contacts they meet in a game to other communication or social networking accounts. (Sign up with 'Facebook', 'Google account', etc., is a very poor idea.)

- Personal information is to be protected and not shared with other users.

- Assist your child to get off the game ('Mum/Dad says I have to get off.' Give them a way to save face with the other gamers.)

- If your child appears overly engrossed or has been online for a long time, encourage them to take a break, or have a conversation with them. Find something to do together, preferably outside.

WHAT TO DO IF THERE IS A PROBLEM

- Talk to our child about the problem, and put it into perspective or context for them.
- Remove our child from that gaming environment.
    - NOT as a punishment
    - Encourage them to come to this decision themselves. If that doesn't happen, step in and make a decision to stop, and explain your intention is to protect them.
- Report the issue or user to the game operators.
- Report to police (if you feel the issue warrants it).
- Contact the safety commission (esafety.gov.au).
- Steer your child to a different or more appropriate game. (There are so many great games out there.)
    - Encourage them to find out what other games their school friends are playing. Connect online with people they know in the physical world.