3 Steps to evaluating Video Games - A guide for Parents

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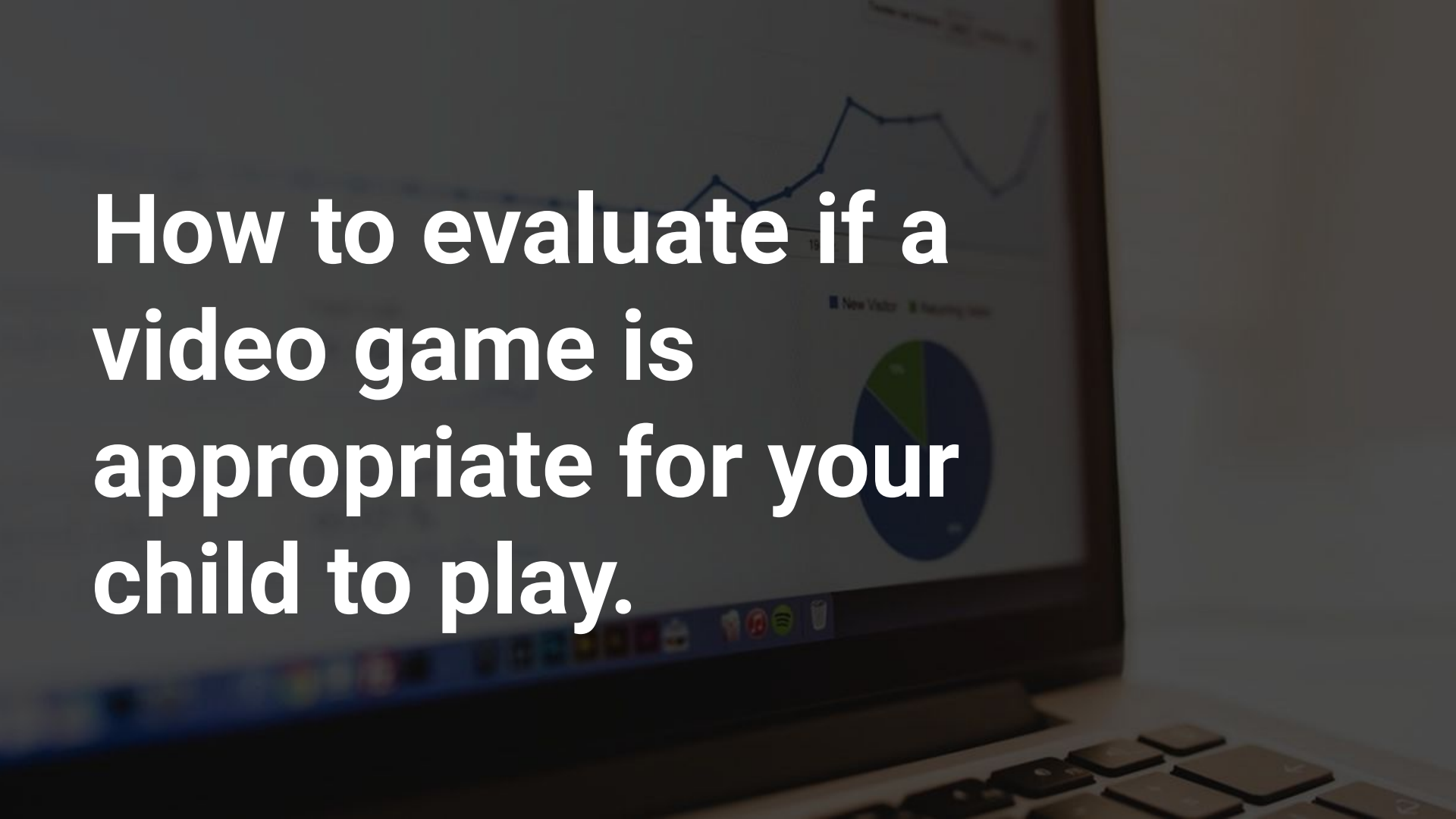


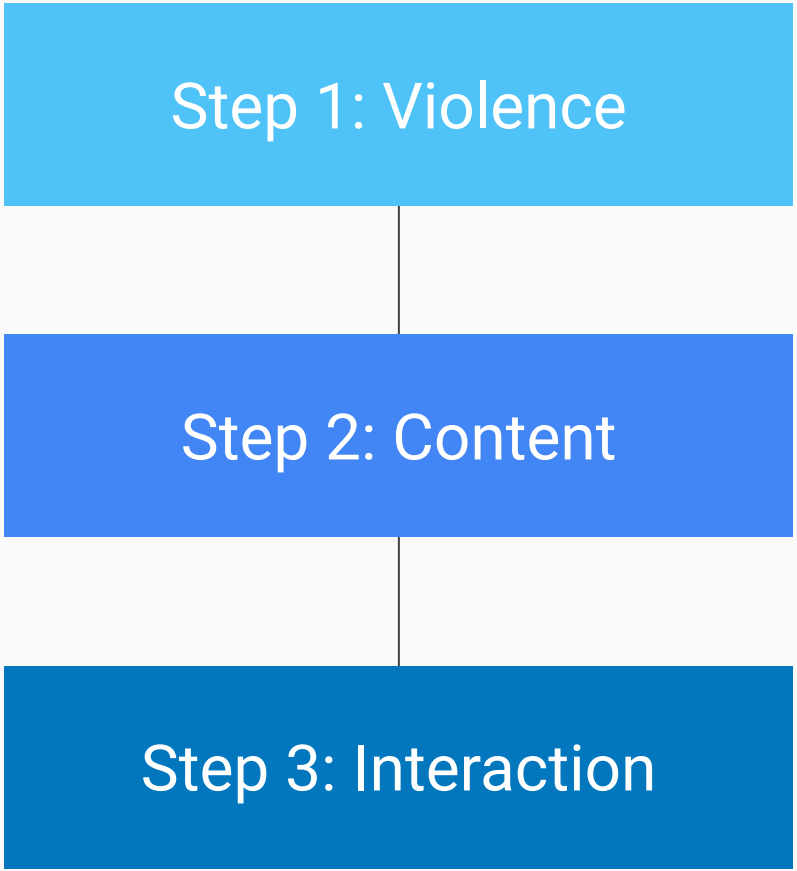
How to evaluate if a video game is appropriate for your child to play.

What we know:

1. Not all video games are created equal and not all children of the same age are developmentally ready for the same games.
2. We ALL have the ability to evaluate video game.
3. We are in charge of our households/devices.
4. Parenting in the age of the age of the internet/gaming is NOT that different than what we already know/do.

Three Step Evaluation

Remember the What, Why and Who of evaluation.



Step 1: Violence

- Usually the most serious, it is the first thing that CommonSense and the ESRB look for when giving a rating.
- Look for evidence of violence, usually as part of the main game play, occasionally as part of the games environment (this is tricky to spot).
- Ask “what is the goal of this game”? How do I win? Does this action require Violence?
- Do you see blood? Weapons? Are they central or ancillary to the plot of the game?
- Not all violence is the same, how realistic does it look to you?

Step 2: Appropriate for your child's age?

Every student is different, what is appropriate for one nine year old, may not be appropriate for another.

Every household has different criteria for evaluating this.

Always tell your children, "this looks appropriate for now," you may see something later that makes you rethink this decision. Give yourself the ability to re-evaluate this with your child.

Listen for key words, if you can enable the Closed Captioning so you don't miss anything.

Check the rating on the box for keywords, each game is different, but the key words do not change.

"Content Descriptors: Blood and Gore, Drug Reference, Intense Violence, Strong Language"

SEARCH ESRB RATINGS

ALL | MOST VIEWED | RECENTLY RATED

GAME TITLE: Fallout 76

PLATFORM: ALL PLATFORMS

RATING: ALL RATINGS

CONTENT: (•) Include: ( ) Exclude: ALL CONTENT

TIME FRAME: ALL TIME

SEARCH

Your search by title Fallout 76 returned 1 ratings.

Title	Platforms	Rating	Content Descriptors	Company
Fallout 76	Windows PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One		Blood and Gore, Drug Reference, Intense Violence, Strong Language Users Interact (PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One) In-Game Purchases (PC, PlayStation 4, Xbox One)	Bethesda Softworks

Rating Summary: This is an open-world role-playing game in which players must survive/thrive in a post-apocalyptic world. From a first- or third-person perspective, players search for supplies/food while battling other survivors and mutant creatures. Players use machetes, machine guns, rocket launchers, and ...

Step 3: Interactions with other players.

- Does it allow players to use microphones and chat with each other?
  - Is that interaction only with “friends” or is it with anyone who is playing the game?
- Is there a chat feature?
  - Does it only allow pre-canned responses such as “great shot” or “thanks,” or can players type out whatever they want?
- The big question that needs to be asked is “who will have access to interact with my child.”

- Many games are moderated for verbal / typed abuse BUT most systems rely on other users “flagging” violators, if a user racks up a couple of flags there account is suspended. They could just use another one...
- Some games black list words, so they cannot be entered in a chat.

Educational games or played for enjoyment?

Education:

The goal might not be educational, but the steps required to “win” often are.

Just because it looks like a game, does not mean it is not educational.

Children may not be able to verbalize “what they are learning” while using a gamified learning app.

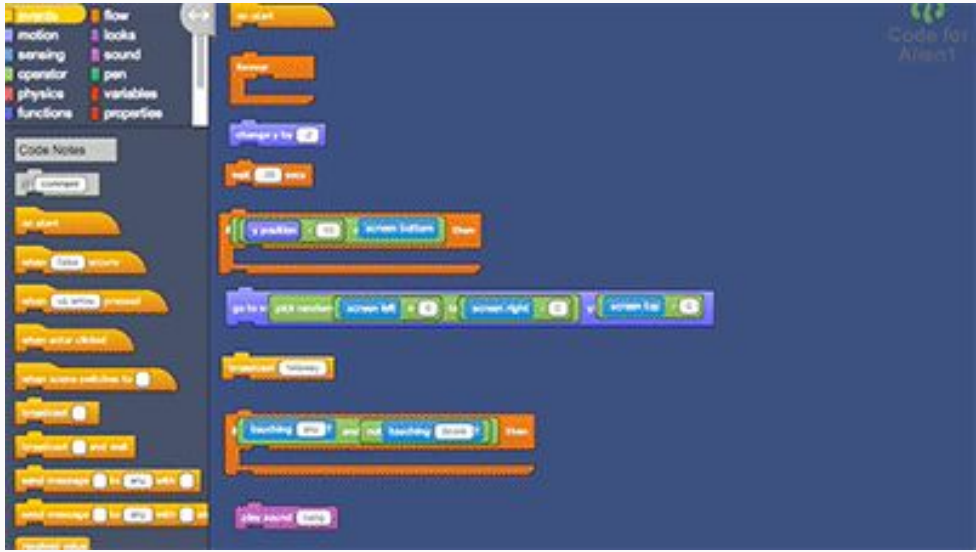
Enjoyment:

Often times games want to be considered “educational” so that you, the parent, allow children to play for longer times than you might otherwise. For example, CoolMathGames.com has nothing to do with math.

Time limits should be adjusted based on value of the learning in the app.

Many of the services we as a school or district pay for are available for home use on a personal device.

- Safe online research
- Tynker
- MackinVia
- Google (drive/docs/slides)
- Discovery Ed Streaming
- BrainPop and BrainPoP Jr.



What can/should we do?

1. Know what your kids are playing and who they are playing with
    a. Common Sense Media: www.commonsensemedia.org
    b. Play with them and EVALUATE the games
    c. Put gaming consoles/computers/laptops in common areas
2. Monitor/assess screen time
    a. iOS Screen Time Feature
    b. https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx
3. Set clear limits/expectations/consequences
    a. From the AAP: For children ages 6 and older, place consistent limits on the time spent using media, and the types of media, and make sure media does not take the place of adequate sleep, physical activity and other behaviors essential to health...
    b. ...Designate media-free times together, such as dinner or driving, as well as media-free locations at home, such as bedrooms.
    c. ...Have ongoing communication about online citizenship and safety, including treating others with respect online and offline. (AAP)

Resources

- Family Media Plan and Media Time Calculator: https://www.healthychildren.org/English/media/Pages/default.aspx
- iOS Screen Time Feature
- Common Sense Media: www.commonsensemedia.org
- 2019 BBC Article on Screen time: https://www.bbc.com/news/health-46749232
- Fortnite Article: https://www.theringer.com/2018/12/19/18147505/fortnite-epic-cultural-impact-super-mario-bros-minecraft-pokemon-go
- Play with your kids video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=li15MYnsqgk

Resources

- Common Sense Media Article on Fortnite: https://www.commonsensemedia.org/blog/as-fortnite-blows-up-parents-need-to-up-their-game
- Parental Control App https://www.qustodio.com/en/
- No Fornite February #nofortnitefebruary
- Article on Internet Gaming Disorder: https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/here-there-and-everywhere/201407/internet-gaming-disorder-in-dsm-5

ASK ME ANYTHING