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Internet and Gaming 101 for Parents

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What is the Internet and gaming all about? I mean, why are teenagers so obsessed with these sites? What is the appeal of video games? Should parents be worried? What are teenagers actually doing when they are on-line and why are they doing it? Is Facebook a friend or a foe?

I have to say that I have, as a parent, been very reluctant to allow my children to play video games and go on even appropriate social networking sites. In fact I even wrote a blog on what I did when my Mum offered to buy a Wii. I

have been very anti the whole thing. I think for two main reasons.

One, I deal with so many problems that parents have with their teenager regarding these things and two, because I had not quite figured the whole thing out. As an ex-police officer I cannot help but have a paedophile alert that is higher than most. So I had quite skillfully avoided the subject.

What I knew I needed was the inside scope on these things. If I could understand a little more then perhaps I could come up with a plan. So I went in search of some experts and I found them.

One, a 22-year-old who I adore and the other, a gaming Granny who use to be an ex-teacher and believes video games are educational. I listened to both the Radio Shows I did with these two with fascination from a coach and a parent's point of view and I have to say, the information they gave was truly awesome and has really shifted my perspective on the whole concept. After each show I found myself plotting the strategy in my head, using the great information they had given to come up with a plan for my own life and also, for yours. What I drew from is the mistakes I see parents making and the expert knowledge I gleaned from these two experts.

Here are the themes that came up:

1. You will not stop your children from doing these things — they will either get around controls and parent's spy software, or simply do it at a friend's house.

2. They can learn very important social and cognitive tools from their involvement in games and the Internet.

3. They can be fun for the whole family.

4. Why would they not do these things when they are fun, easy and so convenient; I mean, why would you email when you can chat instantly or on video cam?

Saying that though, there are also some big warnings here tooParents must show due diligence here. There must be parental involvement and the boundaries must be clear from the start.

From what I have learnt in all my many years and coaching hours is that PARENTS MAKE SOME FATAL ERRORS.

1. They do not acknowledge or even consider sometimes the age limits (I mean, do you even know the age limits?)

2. They have no idea what their child is doing and as long as they are quiet, then that is fineand all the experts warn that we cannot and must not use these items as baby sitters.

3. They do not talk to their children before giving these items and set very clear boundaries.

4. There is no family involvement and most often, teenagers are doing these things alone in their bedroom.

5. They do not train their children what to do — in fact, the parents often don't know how to use what their child has mastered.

So here are some tips on Gaming and Internet use:

1. Read the age limits on games and do not buy a game that is not age-appropriate. Also, ensure you know the age limits of the social network sites, etc. that your child is using.

2. Keep the computer or gaming console in a family area and do not allow your child to use it in their bedroom if at all possible.

3. You must set clear boundaries with your child before you allow the use of these items. You must be honest and open with them .

4. Make these things a family event and get involved. Have your child/teenager show you what they are doing and train you. Take an interest with the games and ask them to show you how to play. Get games where you can play as a team and form your own family clan . . . get involved and ensure you know what your child is doing.

5. You must be familiar with these things yourself . . . if they want to join Facebook, ensure you know how to use it first. Take a look at some of the excellent resources around about keeping yourself safe on the net and talk with your child about what to do if, for example, they are being followed from chat room to chat room and the things to look out for. Talk with them about sharing personal information over the net, etc: And if you have already made all the mistakes, no fear, you can pull it back.

When your child is on the computer or playing a game, ask if it is OK if you can sit with them and learn. Ask them how to teach you what they are doing. Be interested in the game, say that you would love to understand and ask that, when they are at an appropriate place, they stop and show you how it works. Don't judge what you are seeing, just sit by them and be curious. If you are concerned about the amount of time they are playing be honest and open about your fears and have a conversation. Ask them how they keep themselves safe, I mean what sort of behaviours would make them suspicious — you will be surprised at how managed they have got this. Just be open and curious and don't do anything radical. Suddenly removing a game console that has been in your child's bedroom for years is not going to be a good move, for example.

I do think the biggest problem that parents have is that they don't see these things as good or worthwhile . . . well, here is some information for you that may help you change your mind.

About 70 percent of Gen Y has their own business of some description, so allowing your child to get Internet savvy could help them make money. They learn some very good social skills by interacting on social network sites and role playing video games. It is not stopping communication; it is just a different type of communication. They learn how to keep themselves safe by talking with others and seeing suspicious behaviour for themselves — they learn by doing.

Age-appropriate video games enable children to develop cognitively and use critical thinking skills, particularly strategy type games. Involvement in these things as a family can be fun. In most video games, children get rewarded for good memory and many of them increase memory retention.

So, some really interesting thoughts there and like anything, they must be taken in moderation. However, what struck me in researching and finding out this information was that the missing piece in many households is The Adult component and to be a success in this area you MUST have that, so as the Parent you must put your thoughts, judgement and fears to one side and just get involved.

Source: <http://genyguide.com/gaming-Internet-children-teenagers/>