

VIDEO GAMES, YOUR CHILD AND ADDICTION: PROACTIVE INTERVENTION

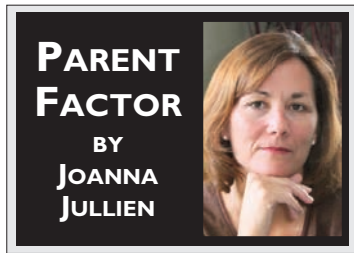
Five years ago, after learning the “Grand Theft Auto” video game rewarded such activities as rape, robbery and killing cops, I took a more active interest in the nature of the video games my child was playing.

Whether or not we owned this game, he would eventually gain access to it through friends. It was sensational, beckoning curious young minds and this was the reality of his world.

Today, video games are increasingly sophisticated and realistic with many channels for access including Internet-based games with multiple players.

Understanding the ratings of the video games (www.esrb.org) is a concern because graphic sexual and violent content notwithstanding, video games can become an addictive activity.

The folks selling video games say the intensity and realistic portrayal of violence, profanity and explicit sex is increasing with each technological



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advance, which makes it a very seductive medium with the potential for addiction.

According to Ryan Stevens, a video game sales clerk in Granite Bay, “Parents need to understand that what sells is sex, drugs and violence – and this is what kids are getting in many of the popular video games.”

Stevens also explained how one of his friends lost his girlfriend and his car because all he cared about was achieving the next level in his game of “World War Craft.”

Kim Fredrickson, marriage and family therapist in Roseville urges parents to consider that one of the big reasons to oversee video game play is to circumvent any potential tendency

toward addiction.

The guidance she offers parents first centers around helping the child deal with uncomfortable emotions and/or emptiness, and then some practical tips including: setting time limits and making sure they have other hobbies.

Fredrickson explains that children also need to understand that their brain is “developing nerve pathways that they will live with forever and if they engage in any activities in an addictive way it is hardwiring their brain.” She urges parents to help children work through their feelings so they don’t attempt to cover them over with addictive habits.

Retail video game sales clerks interviewed in Granite Bay, Rome, New York and Mansfield, Ohio all concur that the role of the parent is critical for healthy use of video games.

They witness the pressure parents feel, when the popular games with sex, violence, profanity and drug use are involved. Stevens recommends that when in doubt, rent it first and play it with your child.

Granite Bay resident Teri Crisanty agrees.

“We usually try and rent a game prior to purchase... I do remember we were once asked about purchasing a game that involved earning the option to be with a hooker, or something stupid like that (and) we opted to rent the game; that way, nothing was saved, and it had to be returned before he ever got to that point,” says Crisanty.

For Keith York, also of Granite Bay, the level of oversight changes as his children mature.

“I give (my teenage son) a lot of flexibility mixed in with a lot

of grace,” says York.

He adds that his younger children have more strict guidelines and oversight.

Corporate retailers at GameStop, Best Buy and Amazon each consider themselves advisors to parents by enforcing the Entertainment Software Review Board (www.esrb.org).

In some cases they said that parents would come in knowing what they were purchasing and in many cases they explained the content and the rating to the parent.

With the support of the retailers, and good conversations with your children about what video games can be played, why and for how long, parents can maintain a level of oversight that is appropriate and supportive.

– Joanna Jullien is a freelance contributor and the editor of “Banana Moments: Help For Parenting in the 21st Century” at www.bananamoments.com.



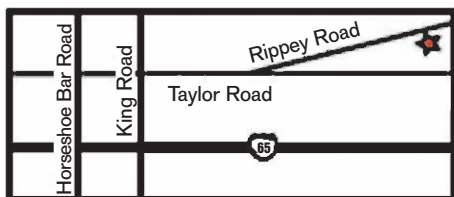
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