

## Can Kids Become Addicted to Videogames?

Videogame use by children and adolescents has risen dramatically in recent years, to the point where people are beginning to worry about the possibility of addiction to these electronic gadgets. Now Douglas Gentile, a psychologist at Iowa State University, has conducted the largest survey yet of gaming habits of 8 to 18 year olds (1,178 kids) in the United States. The results are interesting.

88% of those surveyed play videogames at least occasionally, with an average of 3 to 4 times per week.

The average amount of playing time is 13.2 hours per week, with boys playing more than girls (16.4 hours per week compared to 9.2 hours per week).

12 to 14 year olds engage in videogame playing more than 8 to 11 year olds and 15 to 18 year olds.

Dr. Gentile also created a scale of Pathological Game Playing based upon criteria he borrowed from Gambling Addiction. He decided 6 out of 10 of these “symptoms” would meet criteria for pathological game playing. Below are the criteria:

- 1) Spending more and more time playing and thinking about videogames
- 2) Needing more game time to feel the same level of excitement about the game
- 3) Unsuccessful attempts to cut back or stop videogame playing
- 4) Feeling restless or irritable when having to stop the game
- 5) Using videogames as a way to escape from problems or bad feelings
- 6) Lying to family or friends about how much time is spent gaming
- 7) Stealing videogames from stores or friends
- 8) Skipping responsibilities (chores, homework) in order to play videogames
- 9) Doing poorly in school because of time spent on videogames
- 10) Looking for extra sources of money (e.g. asking others for cash) to buy more videogames

### Results:

About 8.5% of those surveyed met the criteria for pathological gaming.

Those who scored high on pathological gaming did not as a group score higher on amount of time spent playing videogames.

Twice as many pathological gamers were diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder as non-pathological gamers.

These criteria may be used to determine if someone has a videogame addiction.

Gentile, D. 2009. Pathological videogame use among youth ages 8 to 18: A national study. *Psychological Science*, Vol. 20, Pages 594-602.