

So your kid is a

# GAMER



Videogames are shaping the way your child thinks.

**So what can you do about it?**

A guide from [Gamechurch.com](http://Gamechurch.com)

**183** million Americans play videogames for at least an hour a day and the younger you are, the more likely you are to play videogames. **99% of boys and 94% of girls under the age of 18 report to playing videogames regularly.** Ours is a nation of gamers. If you spend much time watching the news, you are probably on the fence as to whether or not that is a good thing. Many of the most popular games are deeply violent and a number of perpetrators of school shootings have been young men who regularly play violent videogames. Add to this the enormous amount of hours many young people are playing videogames each week and we can't help but ask the question: is our videogame obsession healthy?

## THE KING OF THE HOME

Despite the horror stories you hear of kids playing videogames in 24 hour binges, **the truth is that Television still rules the home.** According to Always Connected, a recent report by The Joan Ganz Cooney Center, kids of all ages spend three hours a day watching television during the week and four hours on weekends. Children who spend more than four hours per day watching TV are more likely to be overweight, a correlation that does not translate to videogames. And yet, most researchers agree that television in moderation can be a healthy way for children to learn.

*Given the fact that videogames are interactive in contrast to television which is passive, why aren't more researchers encouraging parents to allow their children to play videogames in moderation?*

The truth is that they are but these studies don't garner the same attention as alarmist stories about the dangers of videogames. Many studies have been conducted that show a wealth of positive effects of playing videogames in moderation. Videogames have been shown to improve brain functionality, hand-eye coordination, and manual dexterity. When kids play games, they are forced to process information and actively respond to stimuli. Games are inherently educational—every time



we play them we are challenged to master their rules and overcome the obstacles they present us with. Videogames are also creative—they take us to new worlds and challenge us to make difficult decisions. We are only just beginning to tap into the potential of videogames.

## A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

A recent study by the Barna Group on the family and technology found that parents spend almost as much time with content-driven media on a daily basis as their teen/tween children. Much of this time is “Fam-

# A NEW GENERATION OF GAMERS



## HABITUAL GAMING

Percentage of boys and girls under the age of 18 that play videogames regularly



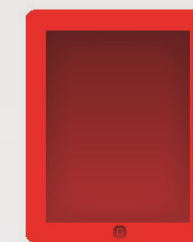
- 1** Average number of gaming consoles in the home
- 73** Percentage of **teens** who play a gaming console in the home
- 43** Percentage of **parents** who play a gaming console in the home

183,000,000

Gamers in the U.S.

## MEDIA WITH OUR KIDS

**8 Minutes** spent playing video games  
**49 Minutes** spent watching television



- 51** Percentage of **teens** who regularly use a mobile device for gaming
- 20** Percentage of **parents** who regularly use a mobile device for gaming

ily and \_\_\_\_\_” time—family and TV or family and movies etc. The one area of content-driven media that parents and teens are unlikely to share is videogames. **The parents surveyed reported to spend 49 minutes a day watching television with their children and only 8 minutes a day playing videogames with them.**

*We are only just beginning to tap into the potential of videogames.*

While the benefits of playing games with our children are obvious (they teach us teamwork, decision making, and

how to compete gracefully), playing videogames together isn't something most parents prioritize in the home. **Of the teens/tweens surveyed, 73% claimed to play videogames regularly compared to only 43% of the parents.** So how can we help our children enjoy and benefit from videogames without becoming addicted? How can we be sure that the games our children are playing are appropriate? How can we encourage healthy gaming habits?

# NAVIGATING THE WORLD OF VIDEOGAMES

Video games and technology can be intimidating for many parents. Fortunately, you don't need to be a hardcore gamer to connect with your kids about video games.



## PLAY GAMES WITH YOUR KIDS

If you are worried about what your child is playing, the best thing to do is play with them. This is also a great way to bond with your child.



## WATCH YOUR CHILDREN PLAY

If you think you aren't "good" enough to play, then watch your children play videogames. Doing so makes their gaming experience more social and expresses interest in your children. This also allows you to observe your child's attitude when they play.



## SET LIMITS

Set limits on the amount of time your child can play videogames by themselves and be consistent. Don't fall to the temptation to use videogames and television as a babysitter while you do other things.



## SET A GOOD EXAMPLE

If you set strict limits on the amount of time your children can play video-games but don't set limits on your own television viewing, your children will notice. If we want our children to exercise self control with media, we must set a good example for them.



## ASK QUESTIONS

Ask your children questions about the games they play and why they like them. This helps you better understand what they are up to and also expresses love for them by showing an active interest in the things they care about.



## MONITOR GAMING HABITS

Place game consoles and computers in common places so that you can keep an eye both on what kind of content your child is consuming but also how your child behaves when he or she plays games.



## BECOME FAMILIAR WITH ESRB

Read reviews, know what kind of content is in a game before letting your daughter or son play it.

[commonsensemedia.org](http://commonsensemedia.org)  
[esrb.org](http://esrb.org)



## SET PARENTAL CONTROLS

Most game consoles and portable gaming devices have parental controls that can help keep inappropriate content out of the hands of your children. Some can even set limits on the amount of time your child may play games each day.



## FACT:

According to Barna Group, only 58% talk to their children about how to use technology without getting addicted to it.

## GREAT GAMES TO PLAY WITH YOUR KIDS

There are many choices when it comes to games for kids under 12 years old. The games below are great for encouraging participation and interaction between players.

### MINECRAFT

PC, XBOX360, IOS

Start a server and build a world with your son or daughter. Think of it as 'digital legos'.

### LEGO GAMES

MANY PLATFORMS

LEGO offers a great series of games based on popular franchises like Batman and Star Wars.

### DANCE GAMES

MANY PLATFORMS

Games like *Dance Central* and *Just Dance* offer a great way to encourage physical activity.

### SUPER MARIO BROS

NINTENDO SYSTEMS

Reminisce with your son or daughter about the 'good 'ol days of the original Nintendo.

### LITTLE BIG PLANET

PS3

A playful game that follows the adventures of *Sackboy* through his tiny world.

### TINY WINGS

IOS

Challenge your child to race as two small birds bouncing and flying through rolling hills.

### ANGRY BIRDS

IOS, ANDROID, WIN, MOBILE

Help your son or daughter figure out how to knock over those sneering, green pigs.

### ANIMAL CROSSING

NINTENDO WII, WII U

Take care of a village full of interesting animals, plants, and more.

### JOURNEY

PS3

Traverse the obstacles of a mystical land, helped only by a complete stranger.

### PAPU & YO

PS3, PC

Play as a young boy as he deals with his abusive, alcoholic father.

### TOKYO JUNGLE

PS3

Explore a deserted, futuristic Tokyo searching for clues about the disappearance of mankind.

### PORTAL SERIES

PS3, XBOX360, PC

Escape from the Aperture laboratory using your puzzling skills.

### PROTEUS

PC

A game of audio-visual exploration through a pixelated universe.

### ANTICHAMBER

PC

Unravel a cryptic web of puzzles, guided by the vaguest of directions.

### BRAID

PS3, XBOX360, PC

Classic, Mario-style gameplay that illustrates our deepest longings and regrets.

### LIMBO

PS3, XBOX360, PC

Play as a young boy searching a dangerous forest for his sister.

# THE TRUTH ABOUT VIOLENT VIDEOGAMES

Given that videogames are one of the youngest entertainment media in today's culture, we should not be surprised to find them accused of malice. But what does the research about videogames actually say about their effects on children?

There is research that says that violent videogames stimulate areas of the brain associated with aggression. These studies, however, are misleading for two reasons. First, other forms of media where violence is depicted have been shown to stimulate the same portions of the brain, which makes one wonder why videogames are often singled out. Secondly, it only makes sense that violent images would stimulate portions of the brain responsible for aggressiveness. This does not mean that children will act on those feelings and become overly aggressive.

There are sociological studies that show that students who play videogames are more likely to engage in aggressive behavior at school. These studies are not convincing due to their lack of investigation into other variables at play. These studies do not ask about the home situation of these children or

whether they had a history of aggressive behavior before beginning to play videogames. There are simply too many influences involved in the development of children to conclude that violent videogames cause aggressive behavior in children. Thus the California Supreme Court investigated much of the data about violent videogames and reported:

*The State's evidence is not compelling. California relies primarily on the research of Dr. Craig Anderson and a few other research psychologists whose studies purport to show a connection between exposure to violent video games and harmful effects on children. These*

*studies have been rejected by every court to consider them, and with good reason: They do not prove that violent video games cause minors to act aggressively (which would at least be a beginning). Instead, "[n]early all of the research is based on correlation, not evidence of causation, and most of the studies suffer from significant, admitted flaws in methodology." Video Software Dealers Assn. 556 F. 3d, at 964.*

It's important to note that the jury is still out on the effects of videogame violence on children. Consequently parents will be pleased to know that the videogame industry does an excellent job of keeping "Mature" games out of the hands of children. In fact, the Federal Trade Commission has recently reported that the videogame industry is setting the standards for other entertainment industries in terms of restricting the sale of mature content to minors.

The lack of causation with reference to violent videogames and aggressive behavior in children does not mean that they do not present a danger, particularly to young children. The best thing you can do as a parent, is be informed about the games your child wants to play and may already be playing at friends' houses. Don't purchase games for your child without having informed yourself of their rating and content. Take an active interest in what your child is doing; ask questions, watch them when they play, and offer to play games with them.

## WHAT ABOUT MY TEENAGER?

Keeping your children away from violent games may

be easy when they're young, but as they grow, it becomes increasingly difficult to regulate their exposure. Inevitably, they will be playing violent

games with friends and neighbors, and seeking out these experiences on their own. As it becomes more and more difficult to monitor and curb your teen's gaming habits, what should you do?

The answer is simple: talk to them. Continue sharing game-centered experiences with them. You may be surprised at the depth of meaning that some violent videogames are now seeking to explore. Games, like any other artistic medium, can employ violence in any number of ways. Violence can be used effectively, like in Saving Private Ryan, where it is shown as dark and destructive, rather than fun and exciting. Even though your teenager might think that they are only running around blowing things up for fun, they might also be right in the middle of a morality tale about the futility of seeking redemption through violence in a game like Red Dead Redemption. Or a game could be inspired by classic literature, like Spec Ops: The Line, which is heavily derived from Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness.

Of course, none of this means that these games get a "free pass". All it means is that there is more to them than meets the eye, and that their added dimensions make them worth discussing.

Many parents have thrown their hands up in exasperation and resigned themselves to the sidelines of their teenagers' lives. But we believe that this doesn't have to be the case. You could stand by and hope that your teenager discovers some of these connections on their own, or you could intentionally engage them. If you've never tried this, it may feel uncomfortable or awkward at first; but it's never too late to **begin**.

CHART: As videogame revenues have increased, the number of gun-related homicides has actually decreased over the same timeframe.

## DECIPHERING & DISCUSSING VIDEOGAME VIOLENCE

The truth is, your child is likely playing games that might make even you uncomfortable. They aren't going to stop playing, even if you tell them to. But that doesn't doom them to a future of violence and addiction, especially not if you choose to enter their world and wrestle with these difficult issues. **Here are some things worth considering for yourself and discussing with your child:**

### "WHAT IS THE MOTIVATION FOR VIOLENCE?"

Does the game cast you as the hero fighting for the common good, or does it glorify violence for violence's sake?

### "WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE VIOLENCE?"

In life, violence has consequences, for both the victim and perpetrator. Does the game attempt to show this?

### "ARE THERE OTHER EDIFYING ELEMENTS?"

Even violent games can still place a premium on things like community, teamwork, and bravery.

### "IS VIOLENCE THE ONLY WAY TO BEAT THE GAME?"

Or is it possible to play non-violently? In the context of the game, is one really better than the other?

## EXAMPLES OF MEANINGFUL VIOLENCE IN GAMES

### THE WALKING DEAD

An apocalyptic adventure game that makes you choose between life and death for the people that you care most about.

### SPEC-OPS: THE LINE

A first-person shooter that will leave you wondering whether you are the hero or villain. The game challenges the idea that violence (in videogames) is a means to an end.



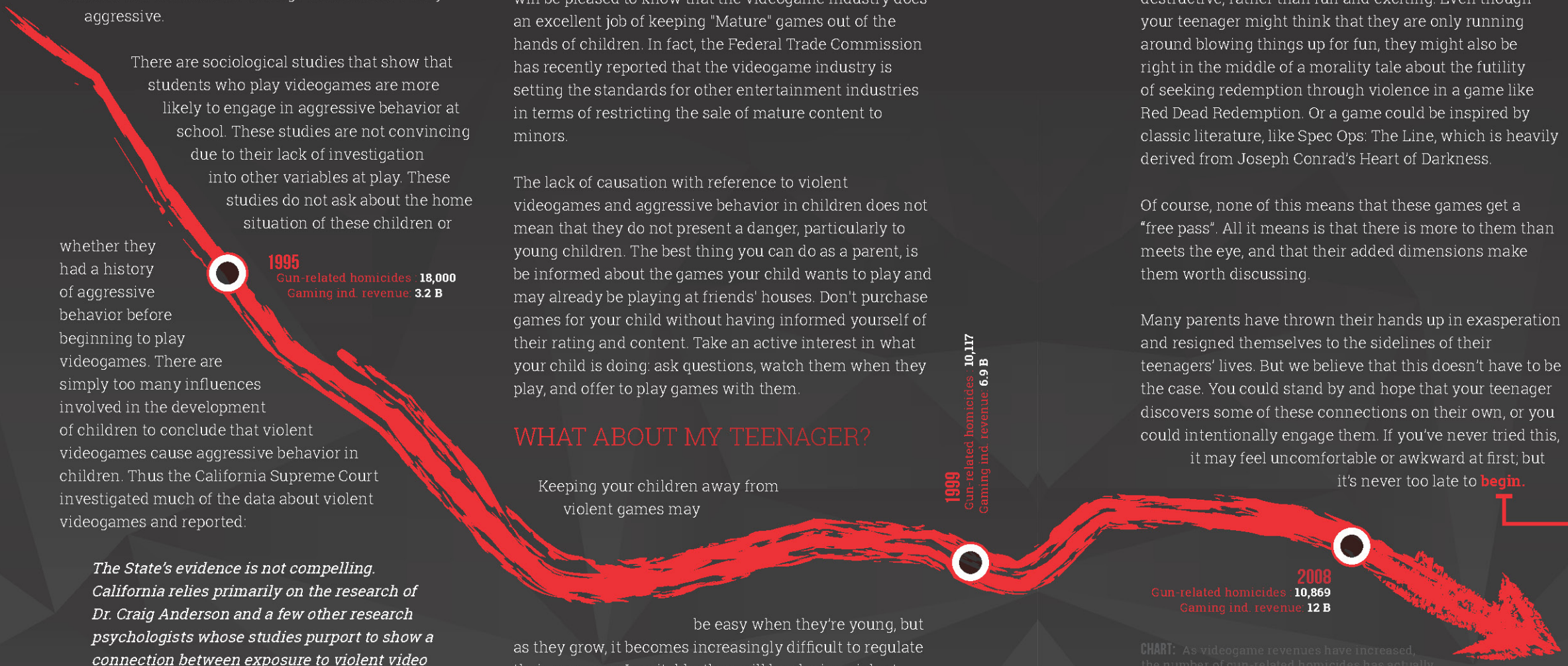
1995  
Gun-related homicides: 18,000  
Gaming ind. revenue: 3.2 B



1999  
Gun-related homicides: 10,117  
Gaming ind. revenue: 6.9 B



2008  
Gun-related homicides: 10,869  
Gaming ind. revenue: 12 B



## NEXT STEPS

We hope that the information provided has helped you better understand the world of videogames and given you some practical ways to work towards healthy communication with your son or daughter about their passion for gaming. To get more information and connect with other parents, feel free to join our Facebook group:

[FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/MYKIDISAGAMER](https://www.facebook.com/groups/mykidisagamer)

## ABOUT US

Gamechurch is a non-profit organization dedicated to bringing a message of love, hope and acceptance into the culture of videogames. We've immersed ourselves in gaming culture by participating in dozens of videogame and nerd-culture conventions across the United States. Additionally, we own and operate a local gaming center called **The Armory** in our hometown of Ventura, CA where, seven days a week, we have the privilege of interacting with gamers in all walks of life. We have seen both the best and the worst of what videogames have to offer, and because of this, we want to help better equip parents to effectively deal with the issues that surround gaming. To learn more about Gamechurch visit us at:

[GAMECHURCH.COM](http://gamechurch.com)

## EDUCATION & TRAINING

Gamechurch is dedicated to helping churches, pastors, and parents understand how to better address the medium and culture of videogames. If you would like to receive hands-on training from the Gamechurch staff, please email us at:

[education@gamechurch.com](mailto:education@gamechurch.com)

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Drew Dixon** is the editor-in-chief of GameChurch.com. A former pastor and church planter, Drew now works as a content editor for LifeWay Christian Resources. Drew also edits for Christ and Pop Culture, and writes about videogames for Paste Magazine and Think Christian.

For a list of article sources, please visit [gamechurch.com/info/sources](http://gamechurch.com/info/sources)

**GAMECHURCH.com**

1496 Tower Square | Ventura, CA 93003

[twitter.com/gamechurch](https://twitter.com/gamechurch)

[facebook.com/gamechurch](https://facebook.com/gamechurch)

**THE ARMORY**

1496 Tower Square | Ventura, CA 93003

[twitter.com/armoryventura](https://twitter.com/armoryventura)

[facebook.com/armoryventura](https://facebook.com/armoryventura)