



Psyche Matters

The Newsletter of the Sullivan Center for Children

Access to Video Games: Who's Responsible

by Treon Hinmon, Psy.D.

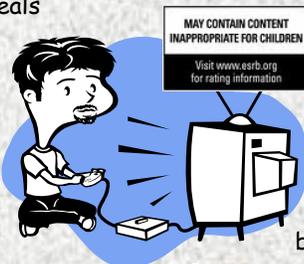
On November 2, 2010, the Supreme Court began their review of a federal court decision to throw out a law prohibiting the sale or rental of violent video games to anyone under the age of 18 in California. The law - passed in 2005 - would fine stores up to \$1000 for each violation. A federal appeals court blocked the law before it went into effect, deeming it unconstitutional. Proponents of the law say that it is meant to protect children from "deviant, violent video games." Opponents of the law say that it threatens to censor free speech. The

Court has until June 2011 to make its decision.

There are many issues to consider in this debate. What constitutes objectionable violence in a game? Is video game violence harmful to children? If so, then how harmful? Does the state have the right to restrict the sale of games to children? Dozens of experts have argued both sides of these issues, with no conclusive determinations made. An internet search on "effects of video game

violence on children" yields hundreds of results. It is far beyond the expertise of this writer to choose the "right" side.

A greater issue raised by this debate - one that I will speak to in the following article - is how a parent decides what entertainments are appropriate for a given child. It is important to do some critical thinking here, as the content of entertainment has changed considerably in the past few decades. Although video game entertainment has traditionally been considered kid-friendly, companies now offer many titles that are decidedly for mature audiences, with strong language, graphic violence, and even nudity.



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Current video game ratings as established by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (www.esrb.org) are as follows:

EARLY CHILDHOOD

 Titles rated **EC** have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.

EVERYONE

 Titles rated **E** have content that may be suitable for ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.

EVERYONE 10+

 Titles rated **E10+** have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes.

TEEN

 Titles rated **T** have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language.

MATURE

Titles rated **M** have content that may be suitable for



persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.

ADULTS ONLY



Titles rated **AO** have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity.

RATING PENDING



Titles listed as **RP** have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating. (This symbol appears only in advertising prior to a game's release.)

Screening Video Games for Their "Fit" to Your Children

by Treon Hinmon, Ph.D.

There are many issues a parent might consider when screening video games for kids.

What are your child's interests?

Does the material in question appeal to your child's preferences? If not, then you may have little to consider as the child is not likely to be drawn to that particular entertainment. You can be guided in your investigations of entertainment by your child's interests. It is helpful to give attention to your child's activities - whether social activities like sports or dance or music, or solitary activities like cartoons, movies and video games. Your monitoring and feedback are excellent methods of staying informed and discretely passing on your values.

What is the content of the game in question? There are many resources a parent may use for research. The Internet and game magazines often include reviews of games that explain content and game play dynamics. Personnel at video games stores can also clue you in to what a game is about. Does the game consist of driving a race car or shooting enemy soldiers in a war zone?

Regulatory boards offer ratings for these entertainments that not only suggest the appropriate age bracket, but also give information on specific content that parents might find objectionable. Some video games may have mature content at a level equivalent to an R-rated movie.

Consider your own values. How strongly do you feel about the content or play activities in question? Is it something you would personally find offensive? Is it something you would be ok with exposing your child to? Like any story, video games can communicate morals and valuable life

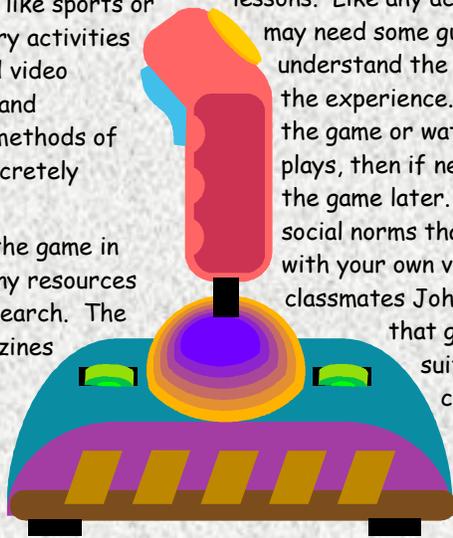
lessons. Like any activity, your child may need some guidance to understand the lessons taught by the experience. Be involved: play the game or watch as your child plays, then if necessary discuss the game later. There may be social norms that agree or conflict with your own values. If classmates Johnny or Jane play that game, is it equally suitable for your child?

Finally, consider your child's level of maturity and sophistication.

Does he or she have the maturity to distinguish the fantasy of entertainment from the demands of reality? Is he or she

easily influenced by peer pressure, role models, good examples and bad examples? Is he or she able to control impulses, regulate emotion, and direct behavior in pro-social ways? While the research is vague on how much long-term influence gaming has on behavior, game content and the demands of play can be exciting, disappointing, upsetting, or frustrating - contributing to emotional and behavioral upheavals during play time. Video games can offer an intense experience. Consider how capable your child is of experiencing and managing that intensity. Your child may need your support, guidelines, and discipline to play in a positive fashion and avoid becoming over-focused or over-stimulated.

In today's world children have greater access to information - and thus mature content - than in generations past. The content a child can handle depends on a combination of factors including age, maturity level, self-discipline, value system, and others. Every child is different, maturing and growing at his or her own pace. Take the time to consider your child in relation to the activities he or she wants to pursue. Regardless of manufacturers and regulatory boards offering guidelines on age suitability, it is ultimately a parent's responsibility to make the choices about what their children can handle.



Meet the Staff: Jamie Milotz, Licensed Psychologist

by Sandra Mansour, M.A.

Jamie Milotz, Psy.D., completed her Bachelor of Arts at California State University in Sacramento. She then went on to complete her Master of Arts in 2007 and her Doctor of Psychology in 2009 at Alliant International University. Jamie began working at the Sullivan Center in 2008 as a clinical psychology intern. Upon completion of her internship year, she was asked to stay on as a post-doctorate fellow. Most recently,

and after more than eight months of dedicated studying, Jamie has officially become a licensed psychologist in the state of California! Congratulations Jamie! Jamie was drawn to the Sullivan Center because of her passion for working with children and adolescents. She knew from her childhood that she wanted to work with children. Jamie says that what she likes most about working at the Sullivan Center is the variety of opportunities she has in both assessment and therapy. Jamie also has

many interests outside of work. For one, she enjoys spending quality time with family and friends, she likes spending time outdoors, and she loves amusement parks! Other clinicians that work with Jamie have said that she is awesome to work with, her energy is infectious, she is an excellent team member, and a skilled clinician!

Those are all amazing qualities which prove how lucky the Sullivan Center is to have Jamie as part of their team.

From the Director: Financial Stress & The Holidays

by Kathy Sullivan, Ph.D., ABPP

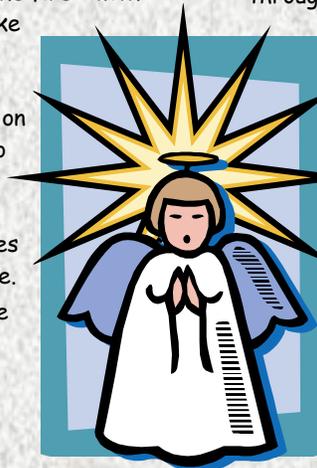
Our country is in a state of significant financial stress, and most families are affected. The financial crash that has happened in our country has shocked most of us to our core. Families are suffering from reduced income, job losses, losing their homes, credit debt that is out of control, and incredible financial uncertainty. There is much theorizing about how this has happened to us and what to do about it on a National level, but each and every one of us feels the pressure to try to get our own lives under control - and the pressure can be overwhelming. Many families have experienced much loss - loss of dreams, acquisitions, careers and for some their very way of life, resulting in depression, ongoing and persistent anxiety and at times panic. While concrete strategies are necessary and often the focus of discussion, the most important question for many is - how does one cope? And, of equal importance - how do we help our children cope. It is certainly important to calm yourself first - it will then be easier to help your child cope. For yourself try the following:

- Focus on what is really important - your life, your SELF, your health, your relationships, your family, your spirituality.
- THINGS come and go, and as losses go - THINGS should be the easiest to cope with losing.
- Realize that even though you may not be able to see it now, with every loss there is a gain - it is a rule of nature - it just has to happen and eventually if you persist you will understand the gain.
- Gain wisdom. Ignore the traps of returning to the way things were just because you recover a bit. It is ever so tempting.
- Continue to appreciate what you have.



And for your children teach them - re-teach them if you must - about what is important in life. Many of today's children are so focused on things and the next best thing, that they are out of touch with the basic fundamental important things in life. Some points to remember:

- Reassure your children that even though you are stressed and sad, and that things may change for the family in ways that are hard, you will be alright, they will be alright, and you will survive the changes, become closer as a family, stronger as individuals and always, always continue to love each other.
- It is not necessary to get your child the newest and best electronic toy out there for Christmas, or to get them TONS of presents. Agree on giving one present - or two. (Do you know that most children under the age of 10 do not remember what they got for Christmas a mere 3 weeks later.) Create new rituals for Christmas that focus less on things. Plan to watch shows, trim the tree, let them help decorate the house, walk down Christmas Tree Lane & sings songs - go Christmas caroling. Play board games together, cook cookies, bake pies, tell stories about your childhood and extended family around the fire - with popcorn or treats you make together. Have your children show off their talents - ask them to put on a play they create & video them - use your imagination and create interpersonal opportunities and activities to celebrate.
- Help them understand the fleeting nature of things, and the importance of family and relationships.
- Teach them about creativity and how to give to you and to others without much money.
- Teach them - talk to them - explain to them the dangers of relying on money and toys for happiness.
- Spend time with them - time is one of the most valuable gifts you can give them.
- Listen to their complaints - empathize



with their sadness and anger and loss over the changes - explain reality - engage them in the solutions.

- Teach them the value of money. Let them earn money - work for it - and handle money - and help them experience the true price of attaining "toys" - from an early age. Help teach them by putting large sums of money they get from relatives for birthdays or holidays in a bank account. The older they get increase their responsibility to pay for their own clothes and extras, and contribute financially to the family. Help them learn that if you don't save, you won't be able to afford essentials you really want later. Don't always rescue them when they fail, let them experience loss, and help them through it with empathy and sharing your stories.
- Stop handing them everything, and stop indulging them out of guilt. Stop raising your kids on principles enacted by their friends' parents. Check your guilt at the door and teach them the truth.
- Teach them the important things in life are not material things.
- Remember - Emotional love (and therefore energy) is transmitted through your relationship with your child.

It is so important not to fall into the trap of feeling like you are failing your child or letting them down because you don't indulge their every wish.

Children who get everything they want do not grow up to be pleasant teenagers or adults; they grow up with an obnoxious sense of entitlement and no resources to cope with hardship. Character is built in part through loss, work and sacrifice. Empathy is instilled

through intimacy and time spent with loved ones. So prepare your child for the future of uncertainty we all face in life, help them build a strong sense self-reliance, and expose them to the experience of struggle and loss so that they can cope with stress when it hits them.

Video Game Content Descriptors

by David Wolter, M.A.

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) @ www.esrb.org is the governing body responsible for keeping consumers apprised of the content in computer and video games so parents can make informed decisions when purchasing for their children. The following is a list of the content descriptors you may find on the back of game packages:



- Alcohol Reference** - Reference to and/or images of alcoholic beverages
- Animated Blood** - Discolored and/or unrealistic depictions of blood
- Blood** - Depictions of blood
- Blood and Gore** - Depictions of blood or the mutilation of body parts
- Cartoon Violence** - Violent actions involving cartoon-like situations and characters. May include violence where a character is unharmed after the action has been inflicted
- Comic Mischief** - Depictions or dialogue involving slapstick or suggestive humor
- Crude Humor** - Depictions or dialogue involving vulgar antics, including "bathroom" humor
- Drug Reference** - Reference to and/or images of illegal drugs
- Fantasy Violence** - Violent actions of a fantasy nature, involving human or non-human characters in situations easily distinguishable from real life
- Intense Violence** - Graphic and realistic-looking depictions of physical conflict. May involve extreme and/or realistic blood, gore, weapons and depictions of human injury and death
- Language** - Mild to moderate use of profanity
- Lyrics** - Mild references to profanity, sexuality, violence, alcohol or drug use in music
- Mature Humor** - Depictions or dialogue involving "adult" humor, including sexual references
- Nudity** - Graphic or prolonged depictions of nudity
- Partial Nudity** - Brief and/or mild depictions of nudity
- Real Gambling** - Player can gamble, including betting or wagering real cash or currency
- Sexual Content** - Non-explicit depictions of sexual behavior, possibly including partial nudity
- Sexual Themes** - References to sex or sexuality
- Sexual Violence** - Depictions of rape or other violent sexual acts
- Simulated Gambling** - Player can gamble without betting or wagering real cash or currency
- Strong Language** - Explicit and/or frequent use of profanity
- Strong Lyrics** - Explicit and/or frequent references to profanity, sex, violence, alcohol or drug use in music
- Strong Sexual Content** - Explicit and/or frequent depictions of sexual behavior, possibly including nudity
- Suggestive Themes** - Mild provocative references or materials
- Tobacco Reference** - Reference to and/or images of tobacco products
- Use of Drugs** - The consumption or use of illegal drugs
- Use of Alcohol** - The consumption of alcoholic beverages
- Use of Tobacco** - The consumption of tobacco products
- Violence** - Scenes involving aggressive conflict. May contain bloodless dismemberment
- Violent References** - References to violent acts



Special Announcements:

CALENDAR: The Sullivan Center will be closed for Thanksgiving (Thur. 11/25 & Sat. 11/27) and Christmas (Sat. 12/25) and New Years (Sat. 1/1). Groups will be cancelled on these holiday Saturdays: 11/27, 12/25 and 1/1. Please check with your therapist to verify appointments for the holidays and to let us know of upcoming vacation dates.

GROUPS: We currently offer 9 different groups:
Tuesday nights—high schoolers
Tuesday nights—Parental Guidance (see below)
Wednesday afternoons—10-12 yr. olds
Wednesday nights—6th-7th boys social skills
Friday afternoons—young teen boys
Friday afternoons - young adults
Saturday mornings 9am - 4-7 yr. olds
Saturday mornings 10am - 10-14 yr. olds
Saturday mornings 11am - 7-10 yr. olds

PARENTING SEMINARS: The Sullivan Center is proud to offer two seminars this Winter/Spring to help parents succeed. Both are based on the popular books by Elaine Mazlish and Adele Faber and will be led by David Wolter, M.A.:

Siblings Without Rivalry

(six 2-hour sessions; cost \$25 each session; begins January 19th, 2011)

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen

(six 2-hour sessions; cost \$25 each session; begins March 16th, 2011)

Watch for flyers in our lobbies (and on our newsletter page of our website) for more details on these important group seminars. You can also sign up now by calling our office at 271-1186.

PARENTAL GUIDANCE: The Sullivan Center offers a parenting class for those interested in adding to their skills and those court-mandated to attend. Skills for co-parenting are taught by Dr. Hinmon on Tuesday nights at 7pm. He can be contacted at 271-1186 x124 for more information.

The Sullivan Center for Children



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"Understanding the World
Through a Child's Eyes."

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