

Wellbeing Hub Newsletter

Article of the Term



Tackling Compulsive Gaming In Boys – Generation Next Blog posted on March 11, 2016 by Shridevi

I recently conducted a parenting night at Trinity Grammar School in Kew, Melbourne about Boys and Gaming. More than 450 parents turned up to find answers to the challenge of getting their boys off their devices. A parent shared with me the following:

“My son is actually scaring me. I can’t even talk to him about his gaming, or his school work or friends or anything, without him yelling. He’s so reactive and aggressive. I don’t know how to handle him.”

Rhyan had become angry, even violent, towards his parents whenever they suggested he switch off his computer games. He had begun playing Minecraft and, as he and his friends matured, he had progressed to WOW, and on to COD and GTAV. His parents did not approve but they gave in to his pleading and purchased each new game based on his promises that he would “keep the rules”. The promises were always short-lived. Conflict ensued. Rhyan would storm out of the house and go to his friends’ homes where he would play more games. His parents grounded him, so he lied about who he was with and where he was going. They tried to take his screens out of his room and he erupted.

Over the past decade our families have been swept up by a screen tsunami. Children and adults are walking around with screens in our bags and backpacks, our pockets, and our palms. We are always turned on, and neuroscientists are discovering that it is rewiring our brains – and the new neural connections are not functioning as well as the old ones.

One group that is particularly affected by the internet invasion is our sons. Games are overtaking many boys’ lives, impacting their health, their relationships, their academic

experiences, their sleep, and more.

Games are designed to create a compulsive habit. That’s the intent. Developers and marketers have known how compelling their games can be for a very long time.

Is my son addicted?

Internet and gaming addiction is not a recognised psychological problem in the bible for psychologists – the DSM 5. It is on the list of things to watch for in the future, but I am concerned that the body responsible for this book is behind the curve. Nonetheless, if a person were to be “addicted”, this is their criteria for consideration:



Repetitive use of Internet-based games, often with other players, that leads to significant issues with functioning. Five of the following criteria must be met within one year:

Preoccupation or obsession with Internet games.

Withdrawal symptoms when not playing Internet games.

A build-up of tolerance—more time needs to be spent playing the games.

The person has tried to stop or curb playing Internet games, but has failed to do so.

The person has had a loss of interest in other life activities, such as hobbies.

A person has had continued overuse of Internet games even with the knowledge of how much they impact a person's life.

The person lied to others about his or her Internet game usage.

The person uses Internet games to relieve anxiety or guilt – it's a way to escape.

The person has lost or put at risk an opportunity or relationship because of Internet games.

Based on the expert criteria, true addiction, whether to gaming, social media, or just the Internet more generally, is much less common than we think. It requires tolerance, and withdrawal. And there will also be significant social consequences, or impacts in other areas of life.

However, absence of a clinical addiction diagnosis does not mean things are not serious. The behaviour is compulsive. It draws our children in. It hangs onto them. But it's rarely an addiction.

Why are they so compelled to play?

It can be hard to think like a tween or teen boy. But imagine, if you can, what it is like for them. Why are they so compelled to play their games? Here are six reasons:

It's fun – In fact, it's great fun! Game-playing produces huge amounts of dopamine. This is a chemical in the brain that is usually produced to make us feel great. It is associated with a variety of addictions. Some researchers suggest that dopamine production as a result of game playing is beyond anything that the real world can produce.

It's rewarding – Not only is playing a game a lot more fun than writing an essay or reading a book (or even kicking a footy with a mate), but the reward schedule of games is designed to provide ultimate positive reinforcement on a cleverly designed schedule. Just when you think you'll run out of fuel the checkpoint appears in the distance. Just when you're about to lose your coins or your ammo, another opportunity to keep the game going pops up – just in time.

Playing games is an escape – When our boys are distressed, switching on the game allows them to forget all about what is troubling them. Unfortunately this is a poor coping strategy (similar to turning to alcohol or other drugs), but it does provide temporary relief. Some boys even acknowledge that they don't even enjoy the game, but flicking it on has become a habit.

Social inclusion – Peer support is a critical factor in the wellbeing of adolescents. Being the only one who doesn't play can lead to ostracism.

Game ethics – Some games won't let you play in a mission until they've accumulated sufficient status.

Nature abhors a vacuum – Like adults checking their email, their facebook/Instagram, or playing a quick game of Candy Crush while waiting in the doctor's surgery (or sitting at traffic lights!), boys play games when they have "nothing else to do".

Should we get rid of games?

While research shows that a moderate amount of gaming is positively correlated with wellbeing, games do not make our boys "happy", help them achieve anything worthwhile, or live well-balanced lives. So it's up to parents to actively monitor their boys' game usage and, where necessary, restrict it.

This means that after reading this article we should not be demanding that our children turn off their games and walk away. It will only create conflict. Instead, the following tips may be helpful:

First, talk it through. Be calm – and don't have the conversation while they're halfway through a level or a mission. It will end badly.

Second, problem-solve together.

Third, minimise control.

You will find that this is harder than it seems. But getting the conversation right will aid you enormously. Even so, your son (or student) will still struggle to regulate his behaviour. The following ideas may be helpful:

Agree ahead of time how long is suitable on games

Agree ahead of time what time games will go off at night

Agree ahead of time on a strategy for getting him to switch off when asked

Agree ahead of time to keep games out of bedrooms and in public areas

Agree ahead of time that text messages, a tap on the door, or the oven timer will be used for a 15 minute warning

Agree ahead of time that he must respond to those warnings

Agree ahead of time what the consequences of refusal to get off the game will be

Agree ahead of time that schoolwork and other priorities will be completed ahead of gaming

You will note that this approach requires pro-activity, and active parenting.

The architecture of these games leads to "time slippage". The games are designed to be as compelling as possible. They are literally designed to trap and compel our children to play and play.

Consistent, calm, kind conversations with our boys (at the right time and in the right place – not in the heat of battle) are how we eventually beat the game – and take our parenting and our relationships with our boys to the "next level".



Community Event – Guest Speaker: Joy Anasta

Golden Grove High school was again the host school for the **Golden Way Partnership** Community parenting forums. Representatives from this Partnership, through conversations with parents and teachers, have identified our children's social and emotional wellbeing as the topic of priority. With this in mind, our speaker for the 16th November was **Joy Anasta**.

Joy spoke to an audience of over 50 community members, including parents and teachers on the topic of: “**Building Resilience: Helping our Children Manage Disappointment and Failure**”.

Joy is a Psychotherapist, Clinical Supervisor, Counsellor, Mediator (Family Business & Law) and Parent Coach.

Throughout the evening, Joy was able to offer insight into the ‘role’ of being a parent in today's world. Her ‘words of wisdom’ along with lots of humour, based on her experiences with working with families, resonated with most of us present. Joy spoke on topics such as

- The need to be a parent *just* one day at a time.
- That parenting is not having a set of skills and behaviours, but above all a *relationship*.
- Being mindfully present with our children.
- Developing assertive, clear, well defined boundaries so they (our children) feel safe with us
- Giving ourselves and our children permission to make mistakes and in this, an opportunity to learn.
- The ‘work’ of the teenager is to push against everything we've taught them so they can find out who they are...and in this process not to take it personally.

Joy ended the evening with a *rich* Q & A's session, enabling some parents to seek clarity around their own challenging situations especially around the topics of punishment vs discipline, emergent play vs social play (for healthy development) and a ‘time’ and a ‘season’ for digital social connection.

Following our last Community Event presentation with Mark Le Messurier, many community members attended the arranged re-engagement groups that ran throughout the **Golden Way Partnership** sites. People attending these groups were able to spend time together, in a ‘safe place’ exploring challenging parenting issues, wrapped up with lots of humour.

Next year it is proposed that the Golden Way Partnership will continue to host these successful Community Events. Details regarding dates and speakers will be released in Term 1 2017.

If you would like to be on the email list for further presentations or parent group involvement please contact Sandy Rawlings – Family Youth Counsellor (GGHS) on 82826400.





Online Parent Support Modules – The Brave Program

Created by Beyond Blue, this is an interactive program to receive information and skills to help cope with worries and anxieties. Go to www.brave4you.psy.uq.edu.au – click on Child or Teen Program then watch the parent program demo and register.

Cyber-safety Tip of the Term



NEVER allow explicit photos of yourself to be taken in ANY circumstance

Wellbeing App of the Term – Smiling Mind

Free Guided Meditation App

Smiling Mind is modern meditation. This simple tool helps put a smile on your mind, anytime, anywhere and every day.

FREE from the App Store or Google Play



Useful Websites for Parents and Teens

- www.reachout.com.au
- www.kidshelpline.com.au
- www.esafety.gov.au
- www.headspace.org.au
- www.bullyingnoway.gov.au

Golden Grove High School

Adey Place
 Golden Grove 5125
 Phone: 82826400
 Fax: 8282 6499
 Email: dl.1834.info@schools.sa.edu.au