

Ask the experts...

The answers to your digital dilemmas



“How do I know if my child is spending too much time gaming?”

Dr Mark Griffiths says: “I devised the following checklist to help you to check if your child’s video game playing is getting out of hand. Does your child...

- Play video games every day – and for long periods (three to six hours)?
- Play as a way of forgetting about other things in their life?
- Get restless, irritable, and moody if they can’t play – or you make them stop?
- Sacrifice social and sporting activities to play?
- Play instead of doing their homework?
- Struggle to cut down their amount of video game playing?

If the answer is ‘yes’ to more than four of these questions, your child may be playing too much. If their schoolwork, physical education, peer development and interaction are not affected, there is little to worry about. Excessive gaming doesn’t always have negative consequences, the content and context of the game are more important than the amount of time spent gaming.”



Our experts:



Dr Mark Griffiths is a Chartered Psychologist, Distinguished Professor of Behaviour Addiction and Director of the International Gaming Research Unit.



Dr Victoria Baines is an author on cybersecurity and child online protection.



Dr Asha Patel is CEO of Innovating Minds, a social enterprise fostering emotional and mental health in young people.

IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT GAMING...

- Give your child a specified time for play.
- Give them reasonable countdowns for turning off.
- Remove devices from their bedrooms overnight.

“I heard that one in five 14-year-old girls has self-harmed in the past year. Is this linked to peer pressure on social media?”

Dr Asha Patel says: “Self-harm is generally in response to feeling emotionally distressed. Social media can be a go-to, to seek content that is often distorted or far away from reality. As a result, children compare themselves to filtered images and seemingly perfect lives – contributing to children spiraling further.

The internet has a long memory and once you click on an advert or a website, it will identify sister sites, reinforcing and increasing vulnerability to accessing unhelpful content. To prevent this, you can try deleting their browsing history.

Also, beware online communities that are very seductive for those who self-harm. Those they meet in chat rooms can understand and share their feelings and consequently they may feel that they belong. In fact, their negative thoughts are being reinforced.”

“My kids want to get a virtual reality headset. Are there any risks?”

Dr Victoria Baines says: “Until recently, VR was largely a solo activity, but all this changed with the advent of Social VR – combining the immersive world of VR with the functions we’re used to on social media.

In Social VR, you feel like you have a body in your virtual environment. If someone walks up to you and touches you, it feels – to some extent – like you’re actually being touched. With the kinds of unwanted experiences children can have online – bullying, approaches from strangers, inappropriate chat – we need to prepare ourselves for the possibility these experiences in VR could have a physical aspect.”

Visit vodafone.co.uk/digitalparenting for more.



IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT SELF-HARM...

- Ask if any sites or apps are upsetting and worrying your child.
- Discuss and support them in how to best address this.
- Don’t pressurise your child and give them an outlet to talk.

If your child doesn’t want to talk to you or wants any additional support, they can contact The Mix www.themix.org.uk | 0808 808 4994

IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT VIRTUAL REALITY...

- Discuss the risks of shared virtual experiences with your child.
- Remind them there is a ‘realness’ to VR when involving other people.
- Encourage them to tell you if something doesn’t feel right.

