Why 3 hours is too much

April 17, 2018

What

happens when you have an active, involved kid with good grades, who wants to play video games for three straight hours a day, every day? A father came to me with this dilemma. He explained, "My son is in 7th grade, plays on two sports teams and is an overall good kid, but I still think three hours is too much time. When he asks me why, I struggled to come up with a good reason."

What are some good reasons? There are many, and I thought this would be a great time to share this dad's question with colleagues who I recently spoke with on a panel at the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Each of them works with families around curbing excessive video game use.

Psychiatrist and Gaming Addiction Specialist, Dr. Clifford Sussman makes this point, "The more time one spends online, especially in one sitting, the more a process called downregulation causes a drop in the number of dopamine receptors in the reward processing area of the brain. This causes a decrease in our ability to feel pleasure, resulting in a need to seek more stimulation."

Dr. David Greenfield, Founder of The Center for Internet and Technology Addiction says "Although performing well in major life-spheres is often a key contraindication of Internet or video game addiction there are other issues and neurobiological consequences that may be more subtle, but nevertheless impactful." He adds,"Heavy use seems to have several negative impacts (including getting less sleep) perhaps the largest imbalance in our use of time which we all have limited amount of."

Clinical Psychologist Edward Spector, says "Almost any problem in your life can be overcome with 3 hours per day of effort. Likewise, almost any hope or dream can be accomplished in 3 hours a day. That gaming habit turns out to be very expensive. It costs you the gold medal you would have won, the musical instrument you would have mastered, the problems you would have overcome, and the dreams you would have realized."

Let me give two of my top personal responses to this question. One is that there are so many things I want this child to have in his life-skills' toolbox: Is he learning how to be a helper in a community by helping with house activities? Does he have a couple of dishes he can cook and feed others? Is he gaining emotional resilience by practicing talking about personal things with trusted adults... and the list of tools goes on and on.

My next response is that his son is playing "THEIR" GAME—not his own. While there can be some creativity in games, it is limited and set within the developer's boundaries. This youth has a brain, and a brain is the best creation machine imaginable. I want to ensure he has lots of chances to use his creativity in all sorts of ways.

For the Tech Talk Tuesday let's talk about the importance of setting realistic time limits. Even when your child has a busy schedule full of school, sports and other interests, three hours is still too long to spend on a screen. Engage your children in a conversation about how long is too long. Here are some questions to help get the conversation going:

- What do you love the most about your favorite game or your favorite app?

- How do you feel when you spend a lot of time playing it or being on the internet?

- How many hours per week would you like to spend doing fun things on the internet?

- Do you agree or disagree with what the experts said?

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