



REPORT to PARENTS

RP 26:4

Video and Computer Games

Video and computer games top the wish lists of many children. While they do have their advantages, electronic games can lure children away from activities such as outdoor play, reading, arts and crafts, and socializing with their friends and family. Here are some tips to help parents maintain the balance between video and computer game use and other activities:

- **Take advantage:** Electronic games do have their advantages. Playing these games can help children feel comfortable with technology; give them the chance to compete against themselves, rather than another child; and can help children learn to pay close attention, follow directions, and solve problems. Despite these advantages, computer and video games should never replace other types of play.

- **Demand active play:** Too many children today are overweight and out of shape. Electronic games and television don't help the situation. Require your children to spend at least as much time engaged in physical activities, such as sports or active outdoor games, as they do in front of a screen.

- **Provide an education:** If your children must play electronic games, buy ones that teach as well as entertain.

- **Check the ratings:** Before you let your children buy, rent, or play a game, look on the front of the box for its rating. Games rated "E" (everyone) are usually the best for school-age children. "T" (teen) games include questionable language, scenes, and themes, and are intended for those 13 and over. There's a good reason "M" (mature) and "AO" (adults only) games are not recommended for those under 17—they're usually loaded with violence, foul language, and sex.

- **Read the content descriptors:** In addition to the rating, every video and computer game contains a black and white content descriptor box on the back of the game's box. These descriptors give more details about the product in terms of violence, sexual themes, and language. For more information on ratings and content descriptors, visit the Entertainment Software Rating Board's (ESRB) Web site at www.esrb.org or call them at 800-771-3772.

- **Set limits:** The desire to play "just one more" game can be overwhelming and can entice children (and adults) into spending too much time in front of the screen. Set firm limits on when and how long your child can play video or computer games.

- **Keep an eye on grades:** Too many children's grades slip because they're spending too much time with the latest game. Use game time as a privilege, not a daily activity, and insist that schoolwork always comes first.

- **Keep violence out of your home:** There's a strong link between watching/playing violent programs and acting aggressively. Keep violent games off limits, both at home and at friends' houses.

- **Avoid online games:** In the online environment, you never really know who's on the other end. If you allow your children to play online games, make sure their screen names don't reveal their age, grade, or other personal information. Check ESRB's Web site for the content and rating information for the online game sites your children frequent. Never allow your children to chat in online game rooms.

- **Play together:** Playing computer and video games together is a way to connect with your child while monitoring what he or she is playing. Just remember to spend time together away from the electronic games and television, too.

