

DESIGNING A BETTER REALITY TO FIGHT GAME ADDICTION

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Synopsis:

Game addiction has always been a complex challenge for both parents and educators to tackle. The commonly suggested actions to address such issues often revolve around confiscating the hand phones, locking the gaming devices, meting out punishment etc. Unfortunately, these actions do not address the root of the problems. Thus, during this engagement session, we will focus on...

- Understanding the root cause of game addiction, which is how games are designed to “hook” players
- Learning from game design ideas to make the real world as ‘addictive’ as the gaming world.

Three Main Principles to Fight Game Addiction:

1. Appreciate that Gaming is ‘Fun’
2. (Game) Addiction Happens When All Else Are No Longer ‘Fun’
3. Learn from Game to Instill ‘Fun’ into the Real World

Introduction:

- To tackle game addiction issues for your children, it is not enough to use ‘out-of-sight, out-of-mind’ approach by locking away/confiscating/throwing away their gaming devices and hope that they will not think about playing the games after sometimes. This is one method but it cannot be the only method as it does not solve the root of the problem.

Popular & Trending Games Teenagers Play Today:

- Genshin Impact (Released Sept 2020)
- Among Us (Released Jun 2018)
- **Players Unknown BattleGround** (Released Jul 2016)
- Animal Crossing (Released Mar 2020)

Note: Do consider playing these games to understand why your children enjoy playing them.

Principle 1: Appreciate that Gaming is ‘Fun’

- The trending games mentioned above have similarities that make them fun for gamers.

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- Ability to choose and customize the characters (gender, clothes, colour etc.)
 - Allow for multiple ways to win or excel in the games.
 - Involve collaborating with others to achieve a goal or to win the game
- Games are so fun that children, whom we think they are not doing well in their studies, are able to excel in the most complex games (that are probably much harder than studies).
- **Elements of 'Fun':**
 - *Gamers Feel Competent & Have a Sense of Achievement:* Well-designed games allow gamers to choose the level of difficulties that they want to manage. Gamers, like anyone else, do not like their games to be too easy (as they will get bored really fast) and do not like their games to be too complicated (as they will give up very fast as well). Thus, usually, by having a choice to pick the level of difficulty, gamers will enjoy the challenge of trying to win. And when they do, they feel a sense of accomplishment.
 - *Gamers Feel A Sense of Affirmation:* Gamers are regularly affirmed for their effort and skills. And when they fail or die in the games, they are not scolded. Thus, gamers are always continuously seeking improvement.
 - *Gamers Feel Useful When They Support their Co-Gamers:* The best games are the games where you can collaborate with a team of others to fulfill a task or to win the game. For instance, in some games, you may choose to be a healer where you feel needed and useful when you are able to revive/heal your teammates.

Principle 2: (Game) Addiction Happens When All Else Are No Longer 'Fun

- Jane McGonigal, the author of "Reality is Broken", claims that gamers are rejecting reality in favor of playing games that offer superior experiences and rewards. She argues that the 'reality is broken' and we need to inject 'fun' into the real world – the physical world that your children interacts with.
- The real world is harsh especially when mistakes are made. Children are being judged and 'sentenced' to punishment too quickly. On the contrary, gamers are not judged for their mistakes. As a result, they see mistakes as opportunities to learn and improve.
- As typical Asian adults, we tend to be rather reserved in giving praises when children deserve them. Sometimes, parents often defended themselves by saying "I criticize because I care" (see [link](#)).

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- Some parents might be overly focusing on tightening the rules and regulations there is on their children until they are micro managing them. However, if we follow how games are designed, they are definitely rules of the game to follow and yet there are autonomy for gamers to use their creativity to achieve the same winning objectives.
- Finally, when the adult figures are absent in the children's lives, there is an absence of opportunities to complete tasks together – a winning trait that makes some games sell like hot cakes.
- The above mentioned reasons are the primary ones that led to a broken 'reality'.

Principle 3: Learn from Game to Instill 'Fun' into the Real World

- Parents are recommended to instill more quality fun with your children e.g. to make exercising fun by taking part in buddy run (e.g. father / mother can run a slightly longer distance to cover for your son/daughter and vice-versa and to reward everyone with a good meal upon completion). Ensure also that the challenge is tough yet achievable so that the completion creates a sense of achievement. Example of such an activity at a school level is SRJC's WILL run (see [link](#)).
- Do not overuse the carrot-and-stick approach. Extrinsic rewards and punishments often remove the intrinsic motivation within human beings. For instance, when a child gets to do well in his/her tests, (s)he will be intrinsically happy with or without your reward. However, if you over-indulge him/her with gifts, the reverse will happen. The child might start thinking that not doing well is ok as (s)he will just have not receive any gifts from you. The example of the childcare center that was shared can be found in this [link](#).
- If you want to give rewards, do it as a surprise. This is how people get addicted to lottery machines in casinos. Do you remember the happiness you felt when you get surprise gifts from others? This kind of moments is definitely more memorable and enjoyable than receiving presents during your predictable birthdays. In psychological term, it is known as random variable rewards. (See [link](#))