

Addiction -- a term that means compulsive physiological need for and use of a habit-forming substance. Are our youth 'addicted' to screens and video gaming? Dr. Tim Elmore, CEO and Founder of Growing Leaders, is a best-selling author, international speaker and a world-renowned expert on Generation Y and Generation Z.

According to the American Heart Association, kids and teens age 8 to 18 spend an average of more than seven hours a day looking at screens. The AHA recommends parents limit screen time for kids to a maximum of just two hours per day, with children age 2 to 5 recommended limit time of one hour per day and children under the age of two should not be exposed to any screen time.

Research has linked screen times with an increased amount of sedentary behavior in children and teens leading to an association with obesity.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends developing a family media plan that will take into account health, education and entertainment needs for each child that will provide enough time during the day to play, study, talk or sleep.

A current study's findings indicated that, regardless of the developmental stage of the youth, higher levels of youth screen time were associated with more sleep disturbances, which in turn were linked to higher levels of youth behavioral health problems.

Dr. John Hutton, a pediatrician and clinical researcher at Cincinnati Children's Hospital comments that screen time use by infants, toddlers and preschoolers has exploded over the last decade with concerns about those critical years of rapid brain development. This new study scanned the brains of children three to five years old and found those who used screens more than the recommended one hour a day had lower levels of development in the brain's white matter – an area key to the development of language, literacy and cognitive skills.

And the list goes on and on. Much of this screen time is related to some type of gaming. After visiting with parents about the gaming 'addiction' of their four sons who spent five to seven hours a day on gaming, Dr. Elmore knew he needed to search for more insight on this issue. The parents shared that it was difficult to pry their fingers away from the controllers to go to bed. They were trying to arrive at a balance for house rules. The parents feared harming their relationship with their boys if they took all video games away in an attempt to free their sons from their addictive behavior.

Dr. Elmore interviewed a video game producer for Gear Box in an attempt to understand why video games had taken over the lives of so many young people. Gear Box is a company that creates "mature" rated games, including a popular series called "Borderlands". Depending on the game, it can possess both pros and cons. Video games have provided entertainment as well as building skills that can be utilized in a variety of ways.

A recommendation for parents and teachers regarding video games is the importance of getting educated about the games, especially the current most popular, "Fortnite" and "Destiny". Just as parents and adults are familiar with their youth's friends, they should be familiar with their youth's activities.

Dr. Elmore asked the Gear Box producer the question of the future direction of video games. Video games will not be going away anytime soon. A couple of trivia facts: "Grand Theft Auto", the top-selling game, has sold 105 million copies worldwide. There are more people that either watch or participate in "League of Legends" than the World Series.

Reflecting on the future of video games, Elmore sees effects on cultural issues such as racial, social justice, equality, gender, etc. He is encouraged that video games may be widening ethnic diversity with different gender groups represented, but is curious about the agenda of gaming companies, especially for younger children. Elmore sees the vision of gaming as cooperative, competitive and social in nature pushing on-line and community interactions. Game makers want to make their games a social experience by streaming them.

Video games are now providing a micro-community with on-line cliques. These video games both reflect and direct our culture. Kids can find a niche, watch or participate in the streamed experience and when

others see you do something they like, they can join a chorus of people shouting your name in affirmation. A simple screen can affect the mood of a teen either positively or negatively.

There are some positives to video games. They offer a global community by helping users connect with others. They provide a platform to learn problem solving and creativity and help widen acceptance of outside ethnicities and different genders. Video games furnish the satisfaction of accomplishment and progress and can help users learn to read and search for answers.

Video games also have some negatives. Dr. Elmore states that while joining a community is positive, social gaming can be toxic. Being anonymous allows users to ignore any appropriate ethics they would use to someone's face by replacing it with criticism and the escalation of bullying. Current video games allow users to make choices without seeing the downside or consequences of those choices. Violence to a gamer is simply entertainment. There is no authority or guardrails in fulfilling fantasy. Anything you do to others begins to seem normal. Gaming is addictive! Parents sued "Fortnite" this past year for its addictive elements on their son. These video games build addiction mechanics into gaming similar to Las Vegas slot machines.

Game makers often have an agenda. Caring adults need to be involved in the choices of their youth to help them interpret what is going on with the landscape and narrative of the game. For instance, looped boxes are random packages you open in a game that encourage gambling.

Consider creating a healthy learning and social environment for your youth. Twin Creeks Extension District offers an opportunity to be a part of the largest national youth organization, the 4-H program. Sample some hands-on, fun, educational activities to momentarily get your youth away from a screen. Check out the #TCDProjectChallenges available to ALL youth by 'liking' our Facebook pages at K-State Research and Extension Twin Creeks District, Norton County 4-H, Decatur County 4-H, Sheridan County 4-H and Graham County 4-H or our website at [www.twincreeks.ksu.edu](http://www.twincreeks.ksu.edu). Information can also be picked up at any of the Twin Creeks Extension District offices in Norton, Oberlin, Hoxie or Hill City.

These challenges can provide a family cooking activity, nature adventure, creative visual arts projects and activities that youth can participate in with family or friends. Please contact Patsy Maddy, 4-H Youth Development Agent at [pmaddy@ksu.edu](mailto:pmaddy@ksu.edu) or call 785-877-5755.

Part of this article is adapted from Dr. Tim Elmore, CEO and founder of Growing Leaders, an international non-profit organization created to develop leadership and life skills in the emerging generations.

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**Article Header**

**“The Positives and Negatives of Screen Time and Video Games”**

**“Chasing Clovers”**

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