Why Parents Should Play Video Games with their Kids

Many parents wonder whether they should play video games with their kids. They may have heard that video games are bad for their kids, that they are a waste of time, or that they don't learn anything from them. While there are legitimate concerns that some children excessively play video games to the exclusion of other activities or spend too much time in front of a screen, leading to obesity, there is no reason for parents not to play video games with their kids. Given that play is the most important way that children learn and that a good portion of kid's play today is with technology, playing video games with your kids may be one of the best ways to help them learn.

For many parents a lack of familiarity with video games, apps, and other digital media is an impediment for them getting involved. The reality is that many kids are likely to be better than their parents at playing video games. Fortunately, that's not a reason to play with your children; if anything, it becomes the rationale for using the games as a tool for teaching. One of my favorite adages is that "there is no better way to learn than to teach," so having your child teach you about her favorite video game is a chance for her to practice important communication and thinking skills. When you give your child the opportunity to teach you about playing her favorite video game, you provide her with a chance for organizing her thoughts, taking perspective, using vocabulary and explanations, and developing patience and understanding.

Playing video games with your children can also be beneficial

in improving relationships and social skills. A 2011 study at Brigham Young University found that girls who played video games with their parents behaved better and felt more connected to their families than those who did not. The Joan Ganz Cooney Center, an active voice in the production of Sesame Street and other children's media, suggests that parents participate in"[joint media engagement](#)" with their children, watching television together or being involved in other digital technologies.

Hundreds of other recent studies have described the positive aspects of video-game play, including [improving reading skills](#), increasing [fluid intelligence](#), and improving [executive-functioning skills](#). On a more practical level, game and app play, along with involvement with digital media such as the Internet and other screen-based technologies, is a prerequisite for many of the twenty-first century skills that will be needed for jobs in the future. As a result, responsible parents not only need to engage in bowling, basketball, baking, ballet, and board games with their kids, but they also need to become involved with "digital play," using games, apps, and technology in their daily interactions with their children.

Here are a few suggestions about how to play video games with your kids:

1. Find games that are fun and provide an opportunity to learn skills through play. Websites such as [LearningWorks for Kids](#) can help you to find the best games for fun and learning.

2. Ask your child to suggest games she thinks you might like and that might be fun for her to play with you.

3. Start off simply. Using casual, short games that you can find on an iPad or other Tablet might get you engaged (and less frustrated) if you are not already a game player. This could help you to sustain this type of play with your child.

4. Practice a bit without your child so that you have some basic skills. There are videos on YouTube that can be instructional for popular games.