

How Do I Find the Best Video Games For Children to Play?



If you are the parent of a 5-, 10-, or 15-year old (or anywhere in between) you've probably noticed that he loves to play video games and to talk to you about them as well. Whether it is your 6 year old who asks if they can use your cell phone to play a game when driving to school, or your 12 year old who can't get enough of *Minecraft*, you need to know something about the games that they are playing. This way you can monitor his play and engage in an intelligent conversation. With the thousands of games and apps that are available, it is extremely difficult for parents to find the best video games for children to play, in terms of appropriateness and the potential for learning.

When you start looking for games for your children it becomes important to consider a number of factors. Perhaps most important is that if you choose a "learning game" for your child but it is not fun, he is likely to get bored with it very quickly and not want to play it. Secondly, you need to find games that are appropriate for your child, not only as related to his maturity level but also to his types of interests; his sensitivities to violence, whether it be real or cartoon-like; and his willingness to take on challenge and

difficulty.

Finding the best games for learning and teaching your child skill sets such as planning, organization, and flexible thinking is much easier than it was in the past. Not only are many games and apps inexpensive or free, but also websites such as *learningworksforkids.com* and *commonsensemedia* provide parents with a wealth of information to find games that are best suited to their child.

Here are a number of other strategies for finding the best games for your child to play:

1. Look for age-appropriate games. Pay attention to ESRB ratings and LearningWorks for Kids ratings.
2. Find games that match your child's interests. Either match your child's interests or have the child learn a new type of interest. For example, there are compelling data that indicate that playing sports video games increases the likelihood that children will play these sports.
3. Encourage your child to play a variety of types of genres of games. For example, if your child likes to play only fighting games, insist that the child also begin playing other types of games such as racing, sports, or active games.
4. Encourage your child games that you would enjoy playing with the child. This helps you to observe that your child is doing and has also been demonstrated to improve family relationships.
5. Help your child to select games that, while not educational, are in fact educational. For example, many of the popular games described in LearningWorks for Kids Playbooks practice important thinking and problem-solving skills but are not identified as educational games.

6. Choose games that are social. Select games for your child that have multi-player options so that the child's game play is not a solitary activity and can be done with their friends at home or online together.
7. Sprinkle in some "serious" games. Serious games refer to video games that are designed both to be fun and to expose a child to real human issues.