Are Mario Games Good For Your Kids?

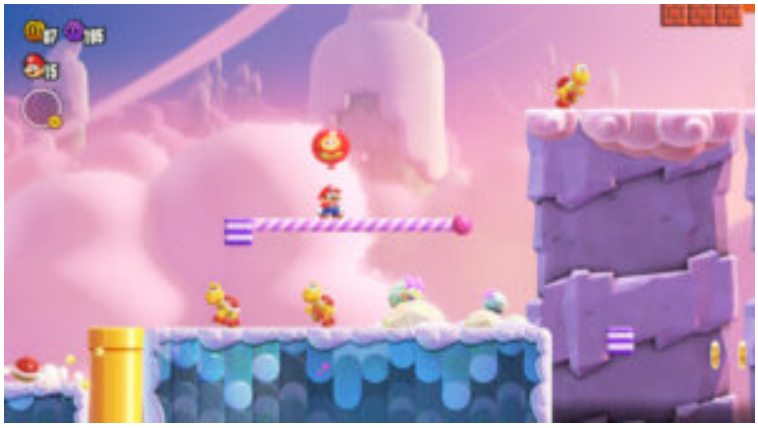
When parents think about video games, concerns often come to mind first—but not all games are created equal. In fact, some of the most accessible, balanced, and developmentally supportive games for children come from Nintendo. The Mario series, in particular, has long stood out as one of the most kid-friendly and least problematic franchises in gaming. It's a series that many parents have enjoyed playing with their kids. These games tend to emphasize creativity, exploration, and skill-building rather than violence or overstimulation, making them a comfortable entry point for many families navigating screen time.



Beyond being fun and visually engaging, Mario games also offer something more meaningful: opportunities for kids to practice important thinking skills. Our perspective at South County Child and Family Consultants is that game play is often a great way for kids to practice and develop a number of skills. Of course, too much gaming relative to other activities is not always healthy.

In well made games, players constantly engage executive functioning skills in a natural, low pressure way by maintaining focus, managing frustration, and adapting to new challenges. With the release of *New Super Mario Bros. Wonder*, Nintendo continues this tradition, offering a modern, flexible gameplay experience that can meet children at different skill levels while quietly supporting their cognitive development.

New Super Mario Bros Wonder is a recent installment in Nintendo's Mario Franchise, released October 20th, 2023. Fans of the series have been waiting for something new from these games since (debatably) the release of the Wii version back in November, 2009. The game breathes life into the platformer genre with vibrant animations and custom gameplay mechanics to suit any play style.

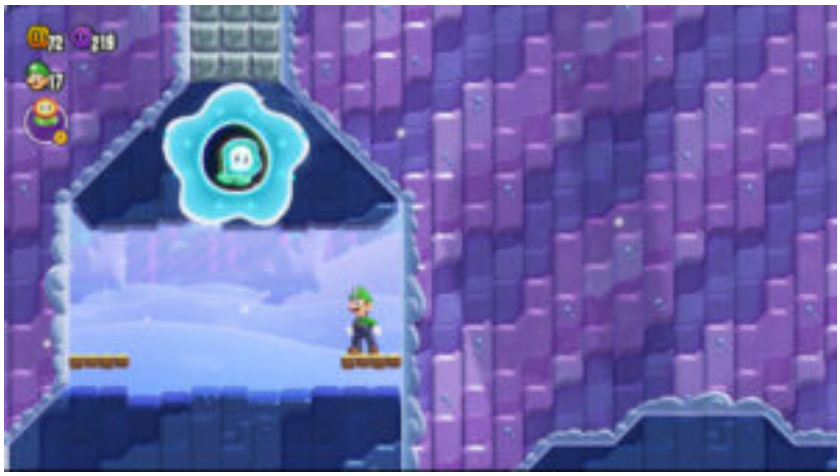


Super Mario Wonder takes place in the Flower kingdom, where Mario and friends must collect wonder seeds to challenge Bowser. The new character roster doubles players' choices compared to previous games, with new additions such as Yoshi, Princess Daisy, and Toadette. Players can customize their gaming experience through character selection and the new badge mechanic, providing unique abilities and bonuses for players to choose from when completing levels.

Mario games are the pioneer of the platforming genre, and despite the new release being tailored mostly towards newer audiences in difficulty it remains beneficial when building certain executive functioning skills. Players particularly call upon their ability to focus, their ability to direct effort and attention at a single task, to complete levels as well as understand the controls and utilities of power ups. Players also call upon their planning skills when deciding which playstyle and badges to use, choosing which levels to actually complete, and which paths to take during certain levels.

There are many different elements that make up the gameplay experience of Super Mario Wonder, these are predictions as to how they can support executive functioning skills.

Power Ups



Power ups are the staple of any Mario game, and Super Mario Wonder is no exception with three brand new abilities for players to use: The Elephant fruit, Bubble flower, Drill mushroom and wonder flower. This feature helps support the development of **working memory**, to remember not only the ability the power up provides but how to use it properly in the given situation. This level headed thinking required to effectively use these items without losing them also helps to develop one's **self control** skills. New mechanics have been introduced through the new Wonder flower power up as well, seen when the player picks them up to find the entire environment changed! (It is important to mention that when selecting the characters Yoshi or Nabbit that the character will be unable to use most power ups, but instead gain special properties with their character and the inability to take damage from enemies; giving younger or more casual audiences a much more relaxed gameplay experience.)

Badges

Badges are one of the newest gameplay mechanics seen in the Mario series, providing a number of bonuses when a player tries to complete a level. Action, Boost, and Expert badges all provide different types of effects to the player, and give chances to master their abilities through brand new mastery courses across the overworld. This new mechanic will call upon the player's **planning** skills, their ability to make impactful decisions when preparing, and one's ability to make the right decision for their playstyle when selecting which badge to use.

Overworld



The overworld in Super Mario Wonder provides many choices to entertain the player, from levels, collectible shops, as well as new and improved challenge levels for special rewards. Players can walk around wherever they please as their character of choice, wandering the flower kingdom in search for wonder seeds. Structured areas of the map can require special steps in order to continue, calling upon one's **organizational** skills to not only keep track of where they are in the world but where to go next and how many wonder seeds are needed to continue.

Levels

Level design in Super Mario Wonder is more creative than ever, with colorful animated characters and enemies to encounter as well as new difficulty ranks to communicate difficulty to the player before attempting the level at all. Along with the badge system, this element of gameplay provides a great opportunity to improve one's **flexibility** skills. These levels also provide a great opportunity to use **self-control** skills, as players will determine when or when not to progress while traversing the shifting platforms of certain courses.

Bosses

Mario Wonder adds a plethora of new boss characters/creatures with plenty of unique ways to overcome them, ranging from the

familiar method of jumping on their heads to shaping the environment to your advantage to beat them or even just finding ways to escape them as fast as possible. Players must practice their **self-awareness** skills both before and during these battles, remaining attentive to the power ups and lives they have as well as the chaotic environment around them when trying to defeat the boss.

New Super Mario Bros. Wonder appears to be a love letter to all fans of Mario, taking the foundation of what made the first games great and giving directors complete creative freedom to add onto it. The new additions to gameplay bring both new and veteran players back to the beloved series, reawakening the childlike *wonder* the original games provided. Though the game seems to assist in the strengthening of certain executive function skills, children should limit periods of play time to 60-90 minutes per session. However fun adventuring in the flower kingdom may be, it can’t beat spending time outside.