

Being Game Savvy

a gamers guide to maintaining balance

Why Game?

Games are awesome. They are fun, challenging, immersive, and interactive, and can be incredibly social. Some franchises have developed amazing worlds and detailed characters with in-depth and interesting stories.

As well as these things games can provide:

- A sense of purpose and goals – games provide clear milestones and tracks for progression. They create a sense for players of having a meaningful impact on the game world.
- A sense of achievement and mastery – games provide competition and challenge, and give clear feedback about achievement and success.
- A sense of belonging and community – games create a sense of being needed and valued by others in the game world, including opportunities for leadership and team work.
- A sense of freedom and escape – games are fun, and also enable players to become fully immersed in the game and escape difficult feelings such as stress.
- A sense of identity – games provide players with an alter-ego, and the opportunity to create a new identity for themselves without judgement.

Crafty ways free to play games make big \$

Despite being “free to play” some such games can earn millions of dollars a day. There are some crafty ways these games are geared to try and get your \$. These include:

- In game currency- Typically these games will never ask for money to directly purchase things, instead they have in-game currency that a player will purchase. This is intentional so players are desensitised to how much actual money is being spent. However, these games are often careful to also make exchange rates difficult to make sense of. This often means you have left over currency which encourages you to spend more so as not to waste it, or if the exchange rate is more confusing it can make it hard to know how much actual money you are spending.
- Frustration points – These games can often be very easy initially to progress without the need to spend money but they are carefully designed to make progressing increasingly difficult and

increasingly frustrating without making in-game purchases. They do this using a number of different techniques but are careful to do it later in the game once a player is more likely to have a more vested interest in progressing.

- Upgrades- Some free to play games provide in-game purchase options that allow a player to quickly and sometimes significantly improve their standing in the game. Other games, such as Clash of Clans, encourage in-game purchases in order to protect your progress from players who might attack you while not playing. This can lead to a type of virtual arms race, with the potential for players to want to purchase more and more to keep ahead of opponents.



Tricks Game Developers use to keep you playing

Game developers want to make their product interesting to keep you playing, that is their job and moreso than with tv for example, game developers employ Psychological techniques to do this.

These include:

- Progression ladders- the idea that levelling up is easy to begin with but takes increasingly longer the longer you play and therefore more invested in the game you are.
- Randomised rewards- some reward structures within the game can be random with a sense of never knowing what that next loot box might hold, or boss might drop. These randomised rewards are similar to that which is used in pokies for gambling and are known to be quite addictive.
- Online attributes- with games moving to be increasingly online the games no longer stop when you pause or turn off your console or device. Rankings continue to change and the game world continues to exist whether you are playing or not.

For most players these techniques are part of what can makes games more enjoyable, but for some, it can also lead to gaming that can get out of balance.

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Gaming and your health

An increasingly important part of professional gaming is a focus on diet, exercise and psychology to keep teams playing at their best. For those who may game for a few hours or more at a time it is important to remember to:

- Eat regularly and eat healthy- don't get so lost in your game that you forget to eat and try to have some balance to what you eat- fruit is good.
- Have a break- Sitting inactive for long periods of time at its worst has actually led to the deaths of gamers. Get up every hour or so and have walk around, look at other things than a screen to give your eyes a break, do some stretches and get the blood flowing.
- Get some sleep- It can be really easy if you're spending a bit of time gaming, to start playing into and through the night, and start sleeping during the day. This has lots of unhelpful consequences for your mental and physical health as well as your relationships (or potential relationships). Try to maintain a more typical sleep/wake balance to stay healthy.

What could problem gaming look like?

As well as having fun, games can meet many needs such as a sense of: community, achievement, identity, escape and purpose. These are not bad things BUT when gaming becomes the primary or only way to experience these things, then this can become a problem. When this happens the game can take increasing and unhealthy importance in someone's life at the expense of other commitments (e.g. school) and relationships. Some signs to look out for can include:

- Thinking obsessively about gaming, even when not playing.
- Losing track of time gaming to the detriment of other aspects of their life.
- Becoming agitated or depressed when their gaming is interrupted.
- Needing to play for longer and longer to feel satisfied.
- Changes to sleeping patterns due to gaming.
- Very limited or no social connections or activities outside of gaming.
- Using gaming to help deal with things (e.g. stress)

Usually it is a combination of these signs that may indicate a problem.



Tips to keep Gaming Fun

- Maintain balance- game and have fun but not at the expense of other commitments and relationships.
- Maintain face to face friendships. Even gaming with someone in the same room is better than only gaming online.
- Get outdoors regularly. You don't have to play sports or go hiking (although these are great), but a walk a day for example and connecting with nature is important for our health.
- Eat regularly and healthily. Try to maintain some balance to your diet.
- Find meaning in things other than gaming. You might want to be a pro gamer or work in gaming or whatever- but having relationships and other things that you find meaning in (even if gaming is your common interest) is important.
- Find someone to talk about things with; don't use games as your only strategy in order to escape difficult thoughts or feelings.
- Seek help if you feel you might have a problem. You can also check out www.netaddiction.co.nz