

Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) games

What are they?

MMO's are online games such as World of Warcraft, Everquest and Second Life. These games can be immersive and enjoyable. In these games a player will control a character that they can customise in terms of race, features, clothing, weaponry, skill preferences etc. The player's character exists within a fantasy world generally either science fiction (think star wars) or mythical fantasy (think lord of the rings).

These online fantasy worlds are vast and provide almost limitless possibilities for players to interact with the characters of other players and



provide a great sense of adventure. Other players can be from all over the world and who are online in the game world at the same time. Players can pursue hundreds of different quest options within the game world. Completing quests and spending time in the game world will allow a player's character to upgrade equipment and skills so a player's character evolves over time. The online fantasy world never stops and programmers are constantly updating it with new quests and regions, so there is always an incentive to stay playing.



There is a significant social aspect to these games with a lot of quests needing to involve multiple players working together in order to complete them. The nature of such quests means players may often join groups within the game where they develop allegiance, often referred to as guilds or clans. These guilds or clans can become highly organised with leadership structures and coordinated collaboration to complete quests that become increasingly complex and take up increasing hours to complete.

What's the appeal?

MMO games can be really enjoyable as they create vast interactive fantasy worlds with immersive and enjoyable story or quest lines as well as the ability to customise each unique character as the player upgrades. The social aspect of these games also becomes very important for players who will often develop friendships with players they see often in the game world and who are in their guild or clan. The quests become increasingly more difficult and complex the more time you spend in the game and so they are stimulating and challenging for players. Players will often talk about these games being a great form of escapism that taps into long-held and powerful human fantasies regarding heroes overcoming evil.

Did You Know?

World of Warcraft, arguably the most well known MMO Role Playing Game (RPG) had over 10 million subscribers as of November 2014 and its total revenue was \$1.04 billion US dollars for the same year.

The 2016 World Championship for World of Warcraft Arena was played for a prize totalling \$250 000 USD.

MMO games are considered to be the most at-risk of contributing to problem gaming behaviour and at its most extreme this has led to the deaths of players due to health complications associated with excessive, non-stop gaming.

A number of countries have government funded treatment centres for those struggling with gaming addiction, many of whom developed addictions to MMO games.



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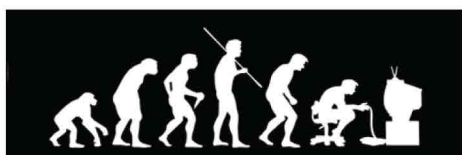
Stuff to know

Whilst the majority of players will simply enjoy these games without significant consequence, MMO games have been found to be the most likely for some players to develop problematic or addictive gaming habits. These games utilise psychological principles to encourage players to play for longer. Early in the game players will upgrade quickly and easily but the longer spent in the gaming world, the longer it will take for players to upgrade, with tasks taking increasing lengths of time to complete.



With the collaboration often needed to complete these tasks players can begin to feel a real sense of being needed by their guild/clan and a sense of obligation to help others. This can lead to more time spent in the game and difficulty stopping. The fact that the gaming world continues whether you are playing or not can also be a powerful pull for some players. Given that there is essentially limitless possibilities for ongoing play it is important adults are aware the game is never really finished or beaten so there can always be a reason for a player to keep playing.

Some MMO's such as World of Warcraft have also been adapted to battle arena games and as with other eSports games, top players can compete in tournaments nationally and internationally with big prize money up for grabs. Young people will know this and so some will inevitably have aspirations of being a professional player (whether this is realistic or not).



Tips

- Be aware of what type of game your young person plays.
- Talk about it- be interested, be curious, be non-judgemental.
- See how they are emotionally during and after the game. It can be normal for players to become quite animated during a game. It might be important then to negotiate and talk with your young person about how loud they are (especially if wearing headphones) or where they play for example. Being animated during gaming does not necessarily mean there is a problem.
- Negotiate some limits (e.g. when they stop at night, how long a gaming session is for, where their gaming console or pc is in the house).
- Be aware that a gaming session can involve trying to complete a quest with other players from all over the world and may take some time to complete (even hours). Your young person might not be able to 'just pause it' or easily turn it off if in the middle of this. You may want to ask when is the next opportunity they will have to log off and try to negotiate from there or talk about this before they start the game.
- If you talk with them when they are in the middle of a game they could be quite distracted and even get agitated. Ask them to let you know when they are between tasks or notice this if you can yourself. These games are immersive so anything said while playing is likely not to be heard. This isn't their fault necessarily, it is not dissimilar to trying to hold a conversation while also trying to watch a movie you are really interested in.
- Encourage other face to face activities and social connections outside of gaming. A first step might be to simply encourage more social gaming; gaming with a friend or friends in the same room is different to gaming alone with others online and may more naturally lead to other face to face activities.
- Talk with your young person and/or seek help if you notice the game becoming more important than relationships or commitments (such as school).
- Encourage other ways to cope with difficult thoughts and feelings so that they don't rely on escaping into the game.
- Checkout: <http://www.netaddiction.co.nz/>
www.reddit.com/r/stopgaming