

"I'm not addicted!" Kids have a right to play – even digitally

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Credit: Pixabay

Parents, teachers and the media need to stop pathologising game play as "addictive" or a "disorder" as it is potentially harmful to a child's sense of identity and the benefits of play, according to new research.

The study, led by Dr. Marcus Carter, in the School of Literature, Arts and Media, who has previously researched the appeal of Fortnite, examined how Australian children aged 9-14 years understood claims that Fortnite is "addictive" and applied it to their own play.

They found children adopted the word "addictive" to describe a [game](#) simply being fun, or used the term to describe their desire to play a game beyond the length or occasion it was allowed. This made some children avoid playing Fortnite, or in some cases, any games at all.

The research, published in the journal Media International Australia, argues that the risk of pathologising all video games as "addictive" is that some children might miss out on the benefits of playing games, and others may start to associate

the normal and reasonable desire to play as something forbidden or deviant.

What the kids say

(Names have been changed for privacy)

"I'm not addicted! It's my third favourite game," said Harry, 11, when asked about Fortnite:

Liam, 13, said a teacher told his class "we shouldn't be playing Fortnite...it's like, bad for our education."

Narah, 11, felt that kids "pooping" or "wetting" themselves was probably just "one person out of millions of people who play Fortnite."

James, 13, said "a lot of that media stuff is bullcrap....I just can't believe them."

What the expert says

Dr. Carter, an expert on the science of gaming, says games are "an appealing hobby, enthusiastically engaged in, but [parents](#) shouldn't misinterpret this desire as problematic, compulsive or addiction. We wouldn't call someone 'addicted' to books just because they wanted to read another chapter of Harry Potter after bedtime," he said.

Dr. Carter says that "the formal designation of 'gaming disorder' as a disease by organisations like the World Health Organisation is [not supported by current research](#) and is a highly problematic move."

"The risk of calling all video games addictive is that children might miss out on the benefits of playing games. We already know games are good for children's creativity and imagination, and are an engaging way to develop their problem-solving skills, spatial skills, and [strategic decision-making](#) abilities," Dr. Carter says. "Games are also an enormous amount of fun; and kids need to have fun, whether it's to de-stress, relax, or have positive

social experiences with friends, the play of digital games is—in moderation—as important as non-digital play."

Advice for parents

Dr. Carter says concerned parents should try playing digital games with their kids.

"Co-play is a really great mediation strategy for digital games. Parent perspectives and behaviour while playing influences how children understand their media experience and react to things like loss, challenges, and how [children](#) develop important sportsmanship and teamwork skills. It's also an opportunity for parents to let their kids be the expert and ask them how to play!"

Key points

Dr. Carter says the research highlights:

- Fortnite is not addictive, its [success is cultural](#) and not chemical
- There are benefits to digital play with kids
- Kids have a right to play, and this includes digital play
- Games are not addictive
- The discourse of games being addictive is potentially harmful to kids
- Parents should join in to understand digital [game play](#) better

More information: Marcus Carter et al. Children's perspectives and attitudes towards Fortnite 'addiction', *Media International Australia* (2020).
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