

SCREEN AGERS

Fortnite is the latest video game grabbing youth's attention. My 18-year-old loves playing it with his friends. Meanwhile, we are getting lots of questions about it at screenings and in other settings with parents and kids.

The game has been attracting millions of players with its survivor-style play where people compete to be the last one standing. Players I've spoken with say that it is the team interaction and strategy that hooks them. Other factors that seem to be contributing to its popularity are that it is free and that it can run on the simplest of computers.

Fortnite is a third-person shooter game. Violent games, even non-gory ones like Fortnite, warrant conversations with our youth. Parents need to decide if they will



allow such games in the home. Whatever decision is made, the rationale behind the decision should be shared with the kids. It sounds easy, but it can be tricky to verbalize these kinds of thoughts around our kids. Hearing our kids' and teens' input is also crucial. We want them to have chances to talk about all of this.

Today I spoke with my son's friend Thomas, who is a freshman in college, about Fortnite. I asked him what age he thought the appropriate age should be for the game. He had to stop and think awhile but ultimately said he thought 10 was definitely too young but 13 years old would make sense. He added that violent video games were not allowed in his home while he was growing up and now looking back on it, he is happy about that.

What I am particularly concerned about is that kids are struggling to control the amount of time they play it. Last week, a ninth-grade teacher said that several of her students are coming to class exhausted from staying up all night playing Fortnite. A college freshman who is not much of a gamer, in general, found himself rushing back from class

with the intention of playing for a half hour before doing homework and then heading off to basketball practice. Then he started noticing that he would begin playing and in no time it was time for practice, and he had not done his homework. Luckily, this older teen had enough self-awareness and drive to change this habit quickly.

For younger kids, and for people who are more susceptible to compulsive behaviors, changing a habit on one's own is not so easy. That is why it is vital for us as parents to talk about how to set limits for appealing things like Fortnite. If you are unsure whether your kid needs strong time constraint rules, try this:

1. Decide (ideally with their input) the amount of time they have until the game needs to be turned off.
2. When that time is up, do they shut off the game themselves?
3. If not, talk to them about what is happening and why they think they are having a difficult time.

Recently I was on [NPR with Dr. Mike Rich](#) from Harvard who said that when parents bring their teens into his clinic because they worry about the teens' video game use, the teen will commonly say that they don't have a problem. Rich will then ask the teen how much time they think they can limit their playing. From there the teen goes home and tries to play with the self-imposed limits. Often the teen returns to his office and tells him that they realized that they could not limit themselves. They say to him that it is easier for them to not engage in the game at all than it is to limit their time.

For this TTT, let's talk about what you can do when a game like Fortnite consumes your child's every waking moment.

- Ask your child what they like about the game? What is it that makes you want to play for hours on end? Is it the camaraderie? The strategy?
- Do they think there is a difference between 1st-person-shooter games and 3rd-person-shoot games?
- Is it easier to not start playing a video game than to have to stop yourself once you are playing one?
- What do they think they can do to stop when they don't want to?

For more discussion ideas, you can peruse [past Tech Talk Tuesdays](#). If you are interested in seeing Screenagers, you can [find event listings](#) on our site and find out how to [host a screening](#).

Stay in touch with the Screenagers community on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and at www.screenagersmovie.com.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Delaney Ruston". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Delaney Ruston, MD
Screenagers' Filmmaker
www.screenagersmovie.com
[415-450-9585](tel:415-450-9585)