

### **Weller Health Tip for Parents: Violent Video Game Labels Actually Attract Kids**

Parents are unlikely to be surprised to learn that putting mature ratings on video games with objectionable content only makes kids want to play them even more.

Still, a new study is the first to officially point out that restrictive age and violent-content warnings make blood-and-gore games more appealing — not less — to minors. As with raunchy TV shows and movies, the lure of viewing something off-limits tends to increase kids' demand for it.

In the study, researchers asked 310 Dutch children ages 7 to 17 to read fictitious game descriptions and rate how much or how little they wanted to play each game. In every group, the more objectionable the content, the more kids wanted to play it.

To counter kids' enthusiastic interest in "forbidden fruit," as the researchers called the games, they recommend that:

- kids not be allowed to buy their own games
- parents and doctors be aware of telltale signs of problem video-gaming (such as a drop in grades)
- the classification system be rethought, as it currently makes M-rated (appropriate for those 17 and older) games "unspeakably desirable" to kids

### **What This Means to You**

Kids already see too much violence on TV: most will witness 200,000 violent acts on TV by age 18. Such violence sometimes begs for imitation because it's often promoted as a fun and effective way to get what you want; thus, kids may become desensitized to violence and more aggressive.

And M-rated video games often go farther in their depiction of violence. Geared toward ages 17 and up, the M rating means the game may contain not only heavy-duty violence, but also strong language and sexual content.

To help keep your kids from playing inappropriate video games, it's wise to:

- Put computers and video-game consoles in common areas — not in kids' rooms.
- Make sure younger kids aren't playing games meant for older siblings.
- Look at ratings, but also be sure to preview games before giving them to your kids. To try before you buy, check your local library or video store first.
- Talk to your kids about the games they're playing and monitor how games might be affecting them.

You can also reduce exposure to unacceptable online games by keeping tabs on your kids' Internet use with:

- parent-control options, offered by many Internet service providers (ISPs)
- software that can ban access to certain sites based on a "bad site" list
- filtering programs to keep certain sites from coming in
- programs to monitor and track your child's Internet activity

Just as you should be aware of which shows and movies your kids watch and the websites they frequent, make sure you know what kinds of games they're playing — and what types of messages they're sending.

This information was provided by the Weller Health Education Center. For more medically reviewed health information written for parents, kids and teens, please visit [www.wellercenter.org](http://www.wellercenter.org).

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