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FACTSHEET

How video games help people connect

Youngsters need to talk to each other, have conversations, and get out into the world. To well-meaning parents, video games often look like a waste of time; a waste of childhood. The games they grew up with didn't have controllers, keyboards, screens, or a headset. In this case, the headset is the key. Although the players are physically isolated, they're spending time with friends in the same way that people do when they talk to one another on the phone. 77% of kids play online video games with friends at least once a month.

What do gamers talk about?

A study conducted in 2006 showed that socio-emotional messages are the instruments which helped players connect with one another, such as "Thanks for the help," "Yeah, I agree with you," and "Wow, that was funny." Task-oriented messages are focused on the game itself, such as "How do you open this door?" or "Just practice

some more.” Additionally, these emotion-based messages were over 2.6 times more likely to be positive than negative.

This means that, contrary to parents’ fears, the vast majority of the messages people send while playing video games are used to interact with others in a positive way.

Video Games as Safe Places

There is also evidence to suggest that video games can be a safe place to experiment with social interactions for vulnerable people.

These include:

- people with autism spectrum disorders
- people with insecure attachment styles (those whose unreliable relationships early in life have led to a feeling of mistrust in most other relationships)
- shy people
- people with depressive symptoms, and people with social anxiety

Successful conversations require a wide variety of skills, such as reading body language, understanding tone of voice and maintaining eye contact. Online video games can allow players to talk to others and make friends at their current level even when they are not emotionally or physically able to leave their homes. This can help build the skills and confidence necessary to try it in-person.

In fact, research has shown that many people who meet while playing games online do end up spending time with those people. This is cause for celebration for the parents of young people who are otherwise socially isolated.

Conclusion

Children and youngsters are spending more and more time playing video games online with their friends. For most, this is a positive experience, allowing them to communicate with others over distance. This is particularly true for people with difficulty spending time with others in-person, like those with major depressive disorder, autism spectrum disorder and social anxiety disorder.

References

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