



## Fortnite and Kids With ADHD or Social Skills Issues: 7 Things I Tell Parents

Expert Corner blog post by Mark J. Griffin, Ph.D.

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I played the video game Fortnite the other day with my teen grandson. As an educator, I've worked with thousands of kids with ADHD, social skills issues and similar challenges. And I wanted to know more about how Fortnite might affect them.

Fortnite is an online, multiplayer shooter video game. It's free and can be played on a computer, on a gaming system like the Xbox, or on a mobile device. The most popular game mode is Battle Royale, where 100 players drop onto an island, try to find construction materials and weapons, and fight each other to be the last person (or team of people) standing. Players can talk to one another, and each game lasts 20 minutes. To get a sense of what it's like, imagine an arcade version of the film *The Hunger Games*.

Fortnite has taken the world by storm. An estimated 50 million people play. There are news reports of kids playing at all hours of the day, late at night, and even under their desks at school. And many experts have weighed in on whether the game is good for kids.

What hasn't been addressed is the impact on kids with learning and attention issues. After playing Fortnite, I have some specific things for parents of kids with ADHD and social skills issues to keep in mind.

### **1. The age recommendation for Fortnite is 13 and up, but each child is different.**

The Entertainment Software Ratings Board rates Fortnite "T" for teen, which means ages 13 and up. Common Sense Media, an Understood founding partner, also recommends the game for kids 13 and up, because of its action violence and open chat. This is a good starting

point.

However, you know your child best. Some “tweens” can handle the action. But other kids with ADHD or who struggle with social interaction may not be mature enough. Or they may need more supervision. You’ll need to make a personal decision regarding your child.

## **2. Kids with ADHD can get absorbed by Fortnite and need limits.**

Kids with ADHD can get hyperfocused on things that interest them. That can happen with any video game, and Fortnite is no exception.

If you allow video game screen time (with Fortnite or any other game), it’s important to have clear rules and set limits about when and where. How much time each day? How will your child transition to other activities when needed? Fortnite, like many other video games, also allows players to spend real money on in-app purchases. If your child is impulsive, you’ll need to address this too.

## **3. Your child needs explicit guidance on Fortnite (and screen time).**

Kids with ADHD or social skills issues need rules spelled out clearly. After you decide on screen time rules, I encourage you to talk to your child as directly as possible about them.

At the same time, be willing to listen. A lot of kids want to play Fortnite because it’s a hot topic among their peers in middle and high school. That’s not a reason to let your child play if you feel it’s not appropriate. But it’s important to be open to your child’s feelings.

## **4. If you don’t allow Fortnite, your child may find a way to play anyway.**

If you don’t allow Fortnite at home or elsewhere, your child may be tempted to play behind your back. The game is present at school, summer camp and friends’ houses, where you can’t monitor your child’s use.

Again, that’s not a reason to allow Fortnite, but it is something to consider when you set rules. If you don’t allow it, there are videos of people playing the game on YouTube, and you may want to watch one of those videos with your child. That will at least give your child enough

background to talk about the game with friends.

### **5. Fortnite may encourage kids to practice planning, collaboration and teamwork.**

After I played Fortnite with my grandson, I realized that the game requires a lot of skill. Players need to gather equipment, build forts and fight battles. These tasks require executive functioning skills like flexible thinking and planning. Team play is also a big part of Fortnite. Playing in a duo team or four-person squad requires teamwork and collaboration.

All players must learn to escape potential danger, think on their feet, and be alert to external threats and changes. These are the same skills that can trip up many kids with ADHD in their daily lives. Some practice developing these skills in a game format could actually help kids when they're not playing.

### **6. Player communication in Fortnite can be good for social skills development.**

In Fortnite, players chat with their partners or squads as they try to win. This can have positives for kids who struggle to connect with other kids. It gives a reason to talk about strategy and find common ground with peers.

At the same time, players can also communicate with strangers in Fortnite. This can be risky, especially for younger players. It's important to be aware of this and take precautions. On some devices—the Xbox, for instance—you can turn off voice chat in the parental control settings.

### **7. The violence in Fortnite is less than other games, but keep a close eye on your child.**

While playing Fortnite, I noticed very little blood and gore. There's less graphic violence compared with other shooting games, like Call of Duty or Grand Theft Auto. Still, violence is part of the game. In Battle Royale, for example, players try to eliminate enemies in combat using weapons.

Research hasn't established a clear link between playing violent video games and engaging in physical or criminal violence. However, there is

evidence that video games can lead to aggressive thoughts and behavior, as well as leading to less empathy in kids. This is a hotly debated area in which experts don't always agree.

My advice is to keep a close eye on your child's video game play. If your child has ADHD or social skills issues and is playing excessively, it's time to reinforce screen time limits in clear terms.

Allowing your child to play a video game like Fortnite is a personal family decision—and it's OK to say no. Keep in mind, however, that video games and screens are here to stay. Whatever you decide, make sure you have a plan when your child asks for a chance to play.

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For more information about Fortnite, check out Common Sense Media's guide to the game. Watch as an expert explains the pros and cons of video games for kids with ADHD. And read an expert's take on the popular game Minecraft.

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## About the Blogger



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