

Can “Active” Video Games or Exergames Make Your Kids More Active?

When you become a parent, I think you magically develop certain super powers. Extra-sensitive hearing, for example. The ability to fit 10 days worth of kids clothes in an overnight bag. The reflexes to catch a tipped cup of juice before it hits the carpet.

Of course, there are a whole lot of other things you have to learn by doing, instead of picking them up magically. You quickly realize that when it comes to kids, you have to pick your battles. Sooner or later, one of those battles is likely to be video games, and after a certain point, it's one worth fighting.

We've talked a lot about the negative effects of a sedentary lifestyle on children (visit [here](#) to learn more), but how do you get a couch-loving kid to be more active?

You want them to exercise something more than their thumbs; they just want to get to the next level in Plants vs. Zombies. How do you make a bridge?

While exergames – active video games – are a fun start and a way to break up sedentary time, they're not recommended as a strategy to help kids get more active (see [here for why](#)).

“It's a big challenge to get kids who are involved in sedentary activities active,” says Scott Goosney, an elementary school phys ed teacher in St. John's, NL (and an accomplished athlete). “They are not used to being very active, which creates challenges for a 30-minute phys ed class.”

Goosney says he can often tell which kids are the screen kings and queens: many times they're the quietest ones, usually not wanting to bring attention to the fact that they aren't participating, but also not wanting to move unless it's something they're particularly interested in. “Forgetting” gym clothes to avoid having to participate is something Goosney, who has been teaching for about seven years, sees often. As technology grows, he says, the problem gets worse.

“Providing the kids with lots of opportunities is the best way to motivate them,” he says. “Lunch time and after school sports programs are helpful but also encouraging the kids to try and variety of sports is very important.”

One of Goosney's tactics to get kids active is to correlate physical games with video game names and themes, and coming up with games that give kids “missions” and allow them to use strategies to come to a common goal.

“It helps them relate to video games and keeps them active,” Goosney explains.

Here are some ways to turn video games into real, active play:

- Turn regular tag into Pac-Man tag by limiting the play area to the lines on the gym floor (or draw your own on pavement with chalk). Pick a Pac-person to be “it” and tell the players they must escape by walking along the lines only. Two players cannot cross each other coming from opposite directions- they both must turn around. Last untagged player wins.
- Play Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle tag by choosing a home base. Have a participant play bad guy Shredder by standing in front of the base; the “turtles” must stand in a row facing him, a distance away. On “go” the turtles must try and get past Shredder to home base without being caught, and anyone caught becomes a member of Shredder’s clan and must help him catch the other turtles. Once all players are either caught or at home base, the turtles return to their starting position and try another round. Last turtle standing wins.
- If you’re stuck inside on a bad weather day or don’t have the space for tag games, Goosney is a big fan of GoNoodle, a free online library of videos designed to get kids moving during “brain breaks” in their school day. Check out Kristi’s blog about it [here](#).

Here’s to getting your family to put down the video game console and put on their sneakers!