UNDERSTANDING VIDEO GAMES

What's a parent to think?

A USA watchdog group lobbies for more controls on video games: young children are playing violent and sexist games designed for adults, they say—and this must be stopped.

A British research group reviews the literature and finds that playing video games can actually enhance kids' problem-solving abilities and non-verbal intelligence.

A Canadian psychologist tells parents to "chill," that only the most violent "killing games" may have a negative influence and then only on children who are already aggressive. He says game playing may be a good way for kids to harmlessly vent their frustrations.

So, what's a parent to do? Video games are here to stay. A recent USA study reveals that 3 times more Americans play video games than read books. Canadian children are among the world's most active players, averaging between 5 and 8 hours of gaming a week.

Ask your child why he or she likes playing video games: to vent, to decompress from school, to keep from being lonely, to fit in, etc. Ask what are his or her favourite games and why.

Become knowledgeable about video games, the good, the bad and the ugly, and the ratings system in place. There are Role Playing Games, violent First-Person Shooters (which boys tend to love) as well as Real Time Strategy Games, multi-player war games with built in time limits.

Ask yourself if your child is getting enough sleep and exercise. Is school work getting done? If necessary, restrict the amount of time your child plays video games just as you would television time.

Remember… video games are just another form of media, like television programs and movies. Parental guidance is required!

Further Reading: *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy*, James Paul Gee. 2007. Palgrave Macmillan, Publisher.