



BECOMING GAME AWARE

Gaming as a Hobby Not a Habit

The world of gaming can be quite intimidating for some parents. You might ask yourself, is my child playing games too much? What IS too much? Are they becoming addicted to games? What can I do to keep my child's mental wellbeing safe?

So **Alexis McLaren** sat down with Andrew Kinch, founder of GameAware, to answer all your concerns. With 25 years gaming experience, and nearly 15 years of wellbeing and teaching experience, his skillset is primed to tackle this issue. Through the use of his intelligent gaming strategies, he helps gamers enjoy their games without it being the number one priority in their lives.

Overall, Andrew's goal is to improve mental health, reduce excessive gaming, and achieve a win-win scenario around gaming within the family dynamic – and GameAware has what it takes to help that happen.

Most importantly, Andrew stresses that it is as much about educating parents as it is children. So read on to begin this important education...

Andrew, safe-gaming is something that concerns a lot of parents. Tell me, how can we manage our kids in this gaming-driven world?

It's not really about managing your children anymore. It is about them managing themselves. There is still a bit of management for parents, and this is something they can learn from my online program.

One of the strategies I like to implement is a sustainable gaming contract. Now, setting contracts isn't anything new,

but the idea of this type of contract is that it has to be a win-win scenario. For example, the conditions of that contract may be that the parents are asking for things like a clean room all the time, or not letting school grades fall. In return the kids may then have conditions such as playing when their friends are playing – a request for the time that they can play. The idea of this win-win contract is, that if they fail to live up to the contract then they have to undergo a cold turkey challenge – going cold turkey from gaming for a while – and then after this period, they come back and renegotiate the contract, so that it's a win-win again. Obviously, if they fell off the wagon then something in the contract isn't good enough. Quite often it is something along the lines of not filling enough of your child's spare time with basketball, or kung-fu, or knitting, of whatever it is that they want to do.

It's also important for parents to sit down with their kids and have them be a spectator.

Be an audience for them as they play. That way they will feel that you have invested a bit more time in their game, which means that they feel you've invested a bit more time in them. Or even better, ask them to coach you to play a game that they play, so that they can become the experts!



I enjoy mastering the skills of certain games, which is what a lot of people like to get out of the games. And some people just love exploring open worlds that are fantasy based.

On your website you say that 'quality trumps quantity'. What do you mean by this?

So... social gaming in the same room with other people, especially your friends, is better than playing online with your real friends. In turn, this is better than playing online with people you've met online, which is then better than playing online with strangers or just randomly by yourself, which is better than playing online by yourself.

In saying that, there are some games that you can play by yourself – for example, a single player story game goes up the list a bit because it is different from playing something competitive in terms of the quality of the game.

Quality gaming also means intelligent gaming. On my website under the gamer page, there are a couple of YouTube videos where I have collaborated with a YouTuber about intelligent gaming. One of the things we talk about is the importance of not gaming every single day, and not for too long. If you don't play every day, then you look forward to it more, you will enjoy it more, and your concentration levels stay high, so you're going to get more out of your experience. So it isn't just about regaining a balance, it is also about improving your game play, and getting the best out of the gaming that you can – all by meeting your needs.

For example, if playing games is the only way you're meeting your needs, well then that's a problem. But if you're gaming 10-12 hours a week, and then during the other evenings you've got soccer practice, or basketball practice, or hopefully even a third thing that's regular, then you're getting your needs met by multiple sources, which is much better.

You mentioned that you think that storytelling games are better than competitive games...

So with single player story games, they have an ending – there is a finite session for that game, and sometimes they can be very long, and sometimes they are only 6 hours. And then you are just left with the memory of completing it. Whereas multi player games you could play for years, they don't end.

In saying that, I'm not that attracted to single player games. Instead, I enjoy mastering the skills of certain games, which is what a lot of people like to get out of the games. And some people just love exploring open worlds that are fantasy based.

It just depends on what you are looking for. Games cover a variety of needs, which is why they're such a big culture.





What would I need to look out for if I think my child is addicted to games?

I don't like it when people play every single day. I'd be looking out for people who are dropping hobbies or, they might not continue one and then because of that it will add more gaming time. I'd also worry about any deception, like lying about gaming. These are the sort of things psychologists, come up with to measure the impact of gaming.

The common issue that parents are concerned with is when their children start to risk reasonable school grades; they will try and game as a priority and fit school in later – so that is something to definitely look out for. Also look out for preoccupation with gaming. For example, your child may know that there are negative consequences for playing too much and then they may do it anyway.

Sleep patterns are another big issue to look out for as well.

While there are a lot of things that you can look out for, it doesn't mean you have an instant understanding about the issue. I work very hard to balance this fine line between educating gamers and educating parents because the truth is always in between. There are going to be arguments where the parents are right and the gamers are wrong (and they're convinced that they're right), and then it will flip. Sometimes parents are completely wrong about what they think the problem is, and the gamers are actually right.

I'm able to look at it all from multiple perspectives – from the teenage perspective, from a teacher's perspective, as a competent counsellor, as a dad and as a gamer. I have 25 years of experience playing games, so I have discovered how to walk that line.

What would you say is the maximum amount of time anyone should be playing games each week?

I can't give you a maximum amount of time, but the priority is to not play every day, and play no more than four days a week. If you can manage that, playing four days a week with 2-3 hour sessions, which is still a satisfying amount of time to play, is 12 hours a week – which is a lot less than what most parents are concerned with.

I think a maximum of four days a week is a better way of looking at it than setting daily limits.

Doing anything daily is habit forming. If you're able to take a break and not do something daily, then that is going to be better for your overall gaming experience, and there will be space to do other things – you're creating space.

For more information on how you can stay on top of your child's mental wellbeing in the gaming world, and make sure gaming stays a hobby rather than becomes a habit, head to Andrew's website gameaware.com.au.



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