

# 13<sup>th</sup> Annual **MEDIAWISE**<sup>®</sup> Video Game Report Card



presented by



NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON  
MEDIA + THE FAMILY

# 13th Annual **MEDIAWISE**<sup>®</sup> Video Game Report Card

David Walsh, Ph.D.; Douglas Gentile, Ph.D.  
National Institute on Media and the Family  
November 25, 2008

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

2008 Year in Review . . . . .	3
2008 MediaWise Video Game Report Card Summary . . . . .	11
2008 Research Update. . . . .	12
2008 MediaWise Parents' Guide to Video Games . . . . .	14
2008 MediaWise Video Game Buying Guide. . . . .	26
• Great Games for Kids . . . . .	26
• Games to Avoid. . . . .	29

---

This MediaWise Video Game Report Card is the 13<sup>th</sup> issued by the National Institute on Media and the Family, an independent, non-partisan, non-sectarian, nonprofit organization. The MediaWise Video Game Report Card provides a snapshot of the interactive gaming industry with a focus on issues related to the welfare of children and teens.

# 13th Annual MEDIAWISE® Video Game Report Card

For the past 13 years the National Institute on Media and the Family has issued an annual report on the issues and opportunities electronic games present for American families. The report card has been a very effective tool to bring about reforms in marketing practices, ratings accuracy, ratings education, and ratings enforcement at the retail level. We are proud that observers have called us the “conscience of the industry.” This year’s report card builds on our 13-year history by offering a progress report and road map.

As the industry has made reforms we have increasingly shifted our attention to the role of parents. This year’s edition continues in that direction. As the games become more sophisticated, parents must be aware that both the potential benefits and harm grow. So this year’s report card includes the 2008 ***Parents’ Guide to Video Games***, an all-in-one summary that provides parents with everything they need to begin or continue making MediaWise video game choices for their kids.

We hope you find this year’s report comprehensive and useful. New technology will present new opportunities as well as new challenges. We remain committed to providing parents with the tools and information they need to make every child’s relationship with video games a healthy one and usher in a MediaWise future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Walsh". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "David" and "Walsh" being capitalized and prominent.

David Walsh, PhD

## 2008 Year in Review

### Gaming is Becoming a Big Part of Family Life

As video game technology continues to evolve, so does its influence in the lives of American families. Once perceived by some to be a hobby for the young and the isolated, the video game is now an undeniably mainstream medium and often a catalyst for social activity involving people of all ages.

And just as video games once conjured images of violence and cruelty in the minds of many, the term “video game” is now regularly accompanied by the term “family entertainment.” Video game producers continue to release ultra-violent and mature-content titles, but increasingly, the big industry players are targeting parents and families as an important market for their products and services. Despite the controversial M-rated games (for Mature) still receiving much of the hype and the headlines, the vast majority of game titles have family-friendly ratings. The industry emphasis on educational and family-friendly games has been accompanied by tie-ins with other family entertainment brands, such as Dora the Explorer. Content-neutral titles such

**65%** of  
25-34 year old  
women are playing  
electronic games

as *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero* continue to be family favorites. The past year has also seen a growing rise in games explicitly marketed to girls and women. With the Consumer Electronics Association claiming that 65 percent of 25-34 year old women are playing electronic games, the attention paid to female gamers is only going to continue to increase.

This effort by the industry to shed its previous reputation and expand its base of customers seems to be paying off as video game consoles are becoming common components of many family home entertainment centers. Increasingly, the big three console makers, to varying degrees, are portraying their machines as “entertainment hubs,” to use Microsoft’s term. Americans can increasingly rely on them as catch-all devices serving the same functions previously only obtainable with the use of multiple components. All three of the major consoles offer users access to the Internet for online play as well as general browsing, and both the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 include a high definition DVD player. The Nintendo Wii’s unique requirements for active game play (a subject discussed in more depth below) have meant the Wii is directly marketed as a family video game device. The campaign, and the functionality of the device itself, has made Wii the biggest seller among the three consoles. The three home consoles also now come equipped with parental control technology (as do some of the major handheld devices), making these entertainment systems as family-friendly as TVs with V-Chips. At the same time, the video game industry has stepped up its efforts to offer information and resources to help parents protect their kids (also discussed

below). Thus, it seems, video game consoles have become both more useful and more palatable for American families than ever before.

As discussed in years past, the increasing prevalence of video games in family life is probably also largely a matter of demographic change. Many people who played video games as children are now parents themselves and it seems that many of them continue to play games. Research shows that parents often play video games with their children. According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 97 percent of all teens—both boys and girls—play video games regularly, and most parents pay attention to what their kids are playing. The same study emphasizes the social aspect of gaming for most teens. The majority of teens play games while other people are in the room, even if they also play them alone. According to the IGN Entertainment and Ipsos Media CT study, “Are You Game?,” 75 percent of video gamers play with other people, either online or in person, and 47 percent of people living in gaming households say that video games are a fun way to interact with other family members. Industry marketing campaigns seem to reflect this aspect of gaming behavior, often portraying families enjoying the games together. And most parents think of video games as having a positive impact on their children’s lives, according to more than one study.

**75%** of video gamers play with other people

## M-Rated Games Are Still as Popular as Ever

Although the video game industry has expanded its efforts to offer family-friendly titles and technology, M-rated (for Mature) games continue to be some of the most well-known titles and the biggest sellers. And these games, intended for players 17 and older, continue to be played by pre-teen and teenage youth.

The interactive equivalent of R-rated movies, M-rated games continue to be the segment in which video game producers often display their most graphic boundary-pushing content as well as, according to many critics, their highest artistic achievements. The popularity of these games seems to be driven by these two factors. Players appreciate the complex story lines, intricately crafted worlds and compelling characters and also are eager for the shocking images and amoral themes.

While the popularity of M-rated games is not a new phenomenon, the degree to which the mainstream news media have taken notice of their intense following by fans seems to have changed. This year’s release of *Grand Theft Auto IV* was anticipated with the same exhaustive excitement as the release of a blockbuster Hollywood sequel, with even media titans such as CNN and the *New York Times* providing reviews of the game for their readers. The game’s sales were examined like box office receipts, and its parent company stock price was discussed in financial journalists’ articles. In terms of revenues, these games rival, and in some cases eclipse, Hollywood films.

## The Video Game Industry Continues to Grow

Until the economic crisis in September, it appeared as if video games sales would make 2008 another record year. In fact, even in the midst of the most dire financial crisis since the Great Depression, video game sales continued

The North American video game workforce grew by **13%**

to outpace the previous year's sales through the third quarter by 26 percent. This makes video games seem more recession-proof than other entertainment industries. It's possible that final sales figures will show that 100 million video game machines, including home consoles and portable devices, were sold worldwide in 2008. And even in the midst of an economic crisis that prompted many industries to make broad job cuts, the North American video game workforce grew by 13 percent.

Video games have become a very big business. Monthly sales figures are reported in mainstream media sources such as *USAToday* and Bloomberg. Such reports catalog the number of different consoles sold, the month's biggest-selling games and make comparisons to the previous year's sales figures for that month. In short, the video game industry is treated with the same degree of analysis and speculation as any other multi-billion-dollar "growth industry." The industry's arrival as a gigantic economic motor may have been signaled when Activision and Vivendi merged in late 2007, forming an \$18 billion company. In 2008, the ripples of the industry's reorganization were apparent as rumors of mergers and acquisitions affected company stock prices.

Another example of the growth of industry is in its increased diversity and the entrance into the market of previously established business leaders. Internet giant Google announced it would enter the video game market by offering ad-supported online games. Company rival Yahoo already offers downloadable games with accompanying advertisements. Taking advantage of a similar technology offered by online console games, Barack Obama's presidential campaign made news by buying ad space in swing state player's online games of *Burnout Paradise* for the Xbox 360.

Just as firms in other industries increasingly seek success entering the video game market, video game franchises continue to find success in and from other industries as well. Following in a long line of big screen adaptations, the popular M-Rated video game *Max Payne* has been transformed into an October, 2008 PG-13 release of the same name, and a now pushed back 2008 release of a Halo movie has been the subject of much anticipation. Meanwhile, some of the biggest selling games, including *Star Wars: The Force Unleashed*, find their origins in entertainment franchises from other industries.

## A Growing Trend: Video Games Tackling Obesity, Health and School Success

Although habitual video game playing (and other use of electronic media) has long been linked with inactivity and the risk for obesity, one of the most prominent and, some say, promising new gaming trends involves the use of video games to encourage better health. The most prevalent example of using video games to combat unhealthy lifestyles can be seen in the rise of fitness games that require vigorous activity by players. New devices like the Game Bike—an exercise bike linked with a home video game—and new games like *Yourself Fitness*—a virtual personal trainer for yoga, pilates, and other exercise available for several consoles and computers—offer families healthy options for physical activity while playing video games. Schools, youth centers, and gyms continue to make news by supplementing their programs to help kids stay slim and active with video games such as *Dance, Dance Revolution*.

Although games and devices that require physical activity beyond movement of one's thumbs, such as the Nintendo Power Pad, have been around for years, the availability, popularity and ease of use of such games have taken a giant step forward in the form of one console in particular: the Nintendo Wii. A video game system that requires active rather than sedentary participation (for instance, swinging the controller like a bat for a baseball game), the Wii is transforming the console landscape. One game in particular, *Wii Fit*, and its accompanying "balance board," turns the video game console into what some consider a legitimate means of developing a habit of daily exercise. *Wii Fit* has already sold more than 8.7 million units and if it continues at this pace it will surpass *Grand Theft Auto IV* in sales. Other Wii games, including *Wii Sports*,

*Wii Fit* has already sold more than **8.7 million units**

also encourage a great deal of physical activity. Many so-called non-traditional users report enjoyment of and ease of play with such games, making the Wii a rare piece of video game technology that is becoming popular with people of all ages. The Wii is thus opening up the video game market to new users and at the same time causing people to rethink the way they play video games.

Video games are beginning to be used to promote better health in a variety of other ways besides requiring physical activity. One notable 2008 release is, *Allen Carr's Easy Way to Stop Smoking*, a game based on the bestselling book of the same name. This game is designed to help players choose a healthier lifestyle simply through playing the game. The 2008 Games For Health Conference in Baltimore, Md., featured panel discussions on "exergames" (games that involve physical exercise), but it also explored the possibilities of health education games such as *Re-Mission* (a game that teaches young people about cancer), and demonstrated innovations in using video games as a method for pain distraction and anxiety reduction for patients in hospitals. Allstate, the insurance provider, also announced it might use video games

to promote health and safety. If the plan is implemented, the company will provide a discount on the premiums of customers who play games designed to combat age-related cognitive decline.

Schools are also increasingly using video games as innovative teaching techniques. This past fall, 109 New York City middle schools began using *Dimension M*, a fast-paced *Jeopardy!*-like video game that quizzes students on pre-algebra and algebra topics. The use of video games in learning has also extended into the standardized testing world. Currently, the Princeton Review Inc. and Aspyr Media Inc. are offering SAT prep material in video game form.

## Gaming Industry and Retailers Work Harder to Educate Parents and Keep Inappropriate Games out of Children's Hands

### FTC Finds Retailer Compliance Improvements

A new report by the Federal Trade Commission showed a dramatic turnaround for an industry that seemed to be growing complacent on the issue of protecting young people just last year. Only 20 percent of kids who tried to buy M-rated games from retailers were successful in the FTC's secret shopper survey. This rate of one in five is a vast improvement over the results of previous "sting operations." In 2006, 42 percent of secret shoppers were allowed to buy M-rated games. The 2008 figure of 20 percent also means that young video game buyers now have more difficulty buying M-rated games than they do purchasing tickets to R-rated movies, the first time the video game retailers' standards exceeded those of the movie theater industry. The retailers that had the best record of preventing underage gamers from purchasing M-rated games were GameStop, Wal-Mart, and Best Buy, all of which achieved the rate of 20 percent or under. A few retailers such as Hollywood Video and Circuit City only turned away three in five underage customers of M-rated games, but even this rate marks an improvement, since this year's outliers still exceed the average ratings enforcement compliance rate from two years ago.

Only **20%** of kids who tried to buy M-rated games from retailers were successful

### ESRB Ratings Education Makes Major Progress

At the same time that retailers have improved their record of keeping age-inappropriate content out of children's hands, the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) has stepped up its efforts to educate parents about the importance of video game ratings. The ESRB launched a new ratings education campaign in April, distributing copies of its Parent's Guide to Video Games, Parental Controls and Online Safety to all 26,000 American PTA chapters. Also in 2008, the ESRB renewed its commitment to helping retailers train employees, providing 25 retail partners with sales associate training information.



Other ESRB ratings education efforts include in-store PSAs running in Wal-Mart, Best Buy, Target, and Blockbuster retail locations as well as radio PSAs running on several major radio networks. Print PSAs running in family and gamer magazines and partnerships with state governments to create local PSAs have also extended the ESRB ratings education effort's reach.

The ESRB's efforts to raise awareness were accompanied in the fall by new resources for parents. Beginning in November, online "ratings summaries" were made available for all games rated after July 1, 2008. These summaries explain, in a few sentences, a detailed rationale for the rating each game has received. The summaries offer a level of information not provided by any of the other major media rating systems, and as such they represent an unprecedented resource for parents. The ESRB will also provide this information on a mobile-phone-friendly site so that parents can access the information at retailer locations. In addition to the "ratings summaries," the ESRB also launched a new service, ParentTools, a twice-a-month console-customized list of all the new game releases and accompanying ratings. Again, these new resources represent a quantum leap for parents in keeping tabs on the games their kids want to play. The National Institute on Media and the Family is proud to partner with the ESRB to help families find these resources.

### **Microsoft Continues Outreach on Safe, Healthy and Balanced Media Use**

In November 2007, Microsoft, maker of the Xbox 360 console, launched the second year of its ongoing public service campaign to help provide families with the appropriate tools and information to make media choices that are right for their homes. Microsoft has been a leader on the parental controls front, most recently adding a Family Timer to the Xbox 360 that allows parents to set the amount of time the Xbox will operate in a day or week.

Microsoft also encourages families to make a PACT or contract on media use rules in their home. The PACT acronym stands for: "**P**arental involvement; the amount of **A**ccess children can have, including who they are allowed to play and interact with online; the types of **C**ontent children are allowed to play or watch; and the amount of **T**ime children can use media." The contract uses a fill-in-the-blank form for parents and their children to discuss and decide together the proper limits for media use in the home. This campaign, especially in its attention to the most crucial factors in determining a healthy media diet, is the first of its kind for one of the major video game industry players, and the National Institute on Media and the Family is proud to lend its support to this effort.

## Numerous Challenges Remain

Just as 2008 was a year of much progress on the part of the video game industry, it is also a year that demonstrates the danger of slowing or abandoning careful efforts to protect children and offer families options to make healthy choices. As long as video game technology continues to evolve and become more integrated with everyday life, so will the challenges that this powerful technology creates. Of the many video game-related problems yet to be adequately solved, many are the same issues that have long challenged American families, while some reveal unforeseen challenges.

Parents and others have worried about excessive use of text messaging for several years now, but as the prevalence of smart phones begins to put wider functionality in the hands of young people, video games have once again become part of the issue. Many phones, such as the iPhone, allow easy downloading of video games. Such games present difficulties to parents attempting to monitor ratings, content and time spent playing games. Some games also involve a fee for download. As increasingly sophisticated handheld devices become the norm, American families will have to face the challenges seen in technologically advanced South Korea and Japan for several years now. Experts in these and other countries have begun to catalog a litany of issues that seem to be linked to a population of young people with access to video games and other media anywhere, anytime.

A similar challenge for parents comes in the form of games that can be downloaded from the Internet. Most game download sites will not be blocked by parental control software, meaning kids can download games without supervision. The availability of the game *Beer Pong* (later changed to *Pong Toss*) on the Wii online store drew criticism for promoting irresponsible drinking. Even though the game had an E rating (for everyone), many parents did not feel that a game with the word beer in the title was appropriate for children. Even without such controversies over a rating, downloadable games present a challenge in terms of access by children and difficulties for parental oversight. Download sites rarely have tight age restrictions and sometimes offer unrated games.

Another online challenge is the vast and alluring world of mega multiplayer games that put many users at once into virtual worlds. These games, such as *Second Life's Teen World* and *World of Warcraft*, put users in unpredictable social environments. There have been anecdotal reports of extreme psychological trauma for players who become too involved in the virtual world. And, any online environment involving kids seems to be a hunting ground for sexual predators. Most parents are aware of the dangers posed by chat rooms and social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, but do not yet realize that predators can gain access to kids through video games as well. Even console games, now that they often include an online component, can be used as a way to access young victims. Young gamers and their families face

other challenges as well, including bullying, peer pressure, and inappropriate behavior on the social networking sites that can now be accessed via video game consoles.

As we have noted in years past, excessive, compulsive video game play bears all the hallmarks of an addiction. A growing number of addiction experts consider compulsive gaming as real a problem as gambling addiction and substance dependence. Some have launched AA-style support groups, residential treatment centers and other therapies to ameliorate the problem. As video games have grown in popularity and ubiquity, reports of addiction have risen. In China, video game addiction has been classified as a mental illness and some experts there have established video game addiction clinics. Meanwhile, the American Psychiatric Association continues to debate whether or not video game addiction should be added to the list of official mental disorders.

The rapidly advancing video game industry is going to allow the gamer to increasingly be immersed in virtual video game worlds. With the invention of the Emotiv EPOC headset, gamers will be able to control a video game using only their thoughts. Such technology is amazing and may even prove useful, but it also raises grave questions about the impact of video games on children's developing brains and worldviews.

## **Conclusion: Progress in the Making, Progress Still to Come**

Overall, the past year has been characterized by positive change for young gamers, their families and industry at large. Most of the good news for American families, however, is good news in the making. It remains to be seen to what extent the video game industry will follow through on its praise-worthy efforts, just as we cannot yet know how extensively American parents will take advantage of the growing array of resources designed to help them make healthy choices for their families. Such progress is absolutely essential, as video games become an ever-larger part of American life. We are cautiously optimistic that this progress will continue.

## 2008 MediaWise® Video Game Report Card Summary

### **ESRB Ratings** ..... **Grade: A**

The addition of ratings summaries is yet another step forward in the growing list of improvements that the ESRB has made in recent years.

### **ESRB Ratings Education** ..... **Grade: A**

We commend the ESRB for intensifying efforts to help parents understand the video game ratings. The ESRB has become the entertainment industry leader in educating retailers and parents about the rating system.

### **Retailer Ratings Enforcement** ..... **Grade: B+**

The 80 percent enforcement rate shows significant progress with still some room for improvement.

### **Gaming Console Manufacturers** ..... **Grade: A**

Parental controls, timing devices and parent education efforts are all major improvements giving parents more tools to supervise game play.

### **Parental Involvement** ..... **Grade: Incomplete**

The focus of this year's report card is providing parents with the information they need. All segments of the industry have made significant improvements in recent years. Parents now have more information and tools than ever before. However, the constant changes present new challenges. Parents need to pay more attention to the amount of time and the types of games their kids play. The parent guide section in this report card is intended to motivate and equip parents to do this.

## 2008 Research Update

by Douglas A. Gentile, Ph.D.  
Director of Research, National Institute on Media and the Family  
Assistant Professor, Iowa State University

As games become an ever-greater part of our culture, more researchers are conducting studies to try to understand the multitude of effects they can have. Some of the effects games can have are intended, such as providing entertainment. Some of the effects games can have are unintended, such as violent games increasing aggressive thoughts and tendencies. As the research evidence for effects grows, it becomes clearer that parents need to take both the *amount* of game play and the *content* of game play seriously.

This year was a banner year for the first longitudinal studies of violent video game effects research. This has been the real missing link in the research literature. Dozens of experimental studies have demonstrated a short-term causal increase in the likelihood of aggression after playing, but we have not known if this became a long-term increase or whether the aggression transferred to the “real” world. Dozens of correlational studies have demonstrated a link between violent game play and “real” world aggression, but it was not known which came first. Longitudinal studies track the same children over time, and can determine which comes first. Several longitudinal studies have now been published.

The first, by Anderson, Gentile, and Buckley, was a study of 430 American third through fifth graders measured twice during the school year. This study found that children who played more violent video games early in the school year became more aggressive (as measured by their peers and teachers) by late in the school year (controlling for prior aggression). Very recently, two studies demonstrated similar results in very different cultures. The journal *Pediatrics* compared a sample of 181 Japanese 12- to 15-year-olds, 1,050 Japanese 13- to 18-year-olds, and 364 American 9- to 12-year-olds. All were measured at two points in a school year, and all showed similar patterns that playing violent games predicted increases in aggressive behaviors after controlling for prior aggressive behavior.

These longitudinal studies are important, but they have only looked at times of up to six months. This year saw the first published two-year longitudinal studies. Hopf, Huber, and Weiss studied 314 German students (starting in fifth to seventh grades, ending in seventh to ninth grades). This study also measured many other risk factors for aggression, including TV and film

violence, and many variables at the individual level (e.g., personality variables), the peer level, the family level (e.g., poverty, parent aggression), and the school level (e.g., school climate). Violent video game play was one of the strongest predictors of aggression and aggressive delinquent behaviors two years later.

Wallenius and Punamäki studied 316 Finnish 12- and 15-year-olds for two years. This study also found that violent game play predicted later aggression, controlling for earlier aggression. Interestingly, this study found that parent communication could moderate the effect. Better parent-child communication lessened the effect of violent game play on later aggression.

One common criticism of longitudinal work is that no study measures all of the variables that relate to aggression. This is not an entirely fair criticism. It is certainly true that many variables influence aggression, such as poverty and parent aggressive attitudes. These would therefore be part of the reason that children might be aggressive at Time 1. By controlling for Time 1 aggression, however, this also controls for all those other variables that might influence Time 2 aggression. (Actually, it's an even more complicated statistical issue.) In sum, although no one study is perfect, these longitudinal studies provide strong evidence that violent video game play does influence later aggressive behaviors.

A second area of research that is continuing to build strength is on computer, Internet, and video game “addiction.” It is important to note that the research is becoming clear that some children and adults are using these Internet and regular video games in such a way that it damages their social functioning, their school functioning, their occupational functioning, their family functioning and their psychological functioning. In fact, this is what it means to have a pathological behavior pattern. It is also important to note that although these studies often focus on one of these media—either Internet or video games—we expect that as the research evidence grows about the underlying issues, we will find that they are not different in any way other than medium of choice. In other words, all media probably can be used for addictive behavior. The early research seems to suggest that no matter which medium is studied specifically, the problems that some people have seem to be very similar. The research is still in the early phases. In sum, we seem to know that some people do have patterns of use that damages several areas of their lives. We do not know, however, which people are at greatest risk, how long and severe the problem is, or what types of help are most needed. We therefore are recommending that more resources be put into studying this emerging problem, and we will be hosting an international summit in 2009 in order to help understand the scope of the problem.

*For a complete list of the references used to compile this report, please visit [mediawise.org](http://mediawise.org).*

# 2008 MediaWise<sup>®</sup> Parents' Guide to Video Games



## Getting Ready for MediaWise Family Gaming

If you're a parent, this year brings good news for you. Parents have never before had so many effective tools and resources to help make video games a healthy part of family life. From parental controls that allow you to limit the kinds of games your kids play to a wealth of online information explaining game content, you have the power to make healthy video choices for your family.

But all of the parental control technology in the world is no substitute for carefully thinking about the role of video games in your family's life and establishing a healthy dialogue with your kids. Whether your child has yet to begin gaming or is already an old pro, it's never too late to reclaim the powerful role of parent in your child's gaming life.

Start by making sure all the adults in the home are on the same page. That way, you can ensure that your children are following the same standards no matter who is in charge at the moment. Together, ask yourself some of the bigger questions:

- What role do we want game playing to have in our house?
- What are some of the benefits we would like to see come out of game play? What are we most worried about?
- Where do we want game playing to happen?
- What sort of content are we comfortable with?
- Are we comfortable with online play?
- How much time do we want our children to spend gaming?

With the answers to these questions you can begin to decide the limits you make for your kids' game play. It's also extremely important to discuss the limits with your children. Make sure they know what's allowed and what's not. Make sure they understand why you're setting limits—because not all video games and video game experiences are meant for kids. Finally, be sure they understand the consequences they will experience if they don't follow the rules of the road.

As your kids grow, their relationship with video games will too. Technology evolves, new games are released, and new options pop up nearly every day. Stay informed. Use the ESRB tools and resources. Surf the Web to find out what other parents are saying. Above all, talk with your kids about the games they play and the ones they want to play.

This guide provides parents with a quick reference to the information you need to make safe choices for your family. Following a few simple steps, you can become MediaWise and develop healthy family togetherness. You'll know what to do every step of the way—from entering a retail store to purchasing the right game, bringing it home and finally enjoying it with your family.

## The Power to Make Healthy Choices for Your Family

Video games are becoming a part of everyday family life. Whether your family has a console, a computer, or handheld device, it's a pretty safe bet your children play video games. With careful planning, video games offer good family fun. As technology evolves, video games have become more useful and a source of more fun for families. Most consoles offer Internet browsing and social networking capabilities. Some games even promote exercise, encourage cooperative fun for all ages and educate kids while they play.

But with so many new advances, it's important to remember one thing that hasn't changed: the influence of video games, like all media, have a powerful impact on your kids. While there are an increasing number of options and tools to ensure that video games play a positive role in family life, parents need to be vigilant to protect their kids from negative impacts like online dangers, inappropriate content, over use and addiction.

## Weighing the Benefits Against the Risks

Video games can be a lot of fun and a healthy part of sharing family time. They can even be educational. Of course, allowing your children to play video games poses certain risks and challenges. Any activity involves some risk and it's important to remember that there's nothing inherently wrong with video games. But because video games require so much focus and can immerse players in whole other worlds, too much gaming and too much of the wrong games can have a serious impact on young people.

Make sure you're aware of these challenges and risks when you make a family video game plan.



### ***Video Game and Internet Addiction***

Millions of kids love video games, especially boys. Our national survey revealed that 92 percent of kids age 2-17 play regularly. That translates into 59 million young players. The overwhelming majority of these kids play their video games, do their homework, keep up their responsibilities, and have other interests. No problem. So it's clear that video and computer games are not inherently bad for kids.

Some kids, however, get hooked. Computer game addiction is real and growing. Our research shows that almost one out of seven game players shows signs of an addiction. If you think that you or your child is struggling with video game addiction, seek professional help.

### ***Cyberbullying***

Cyberbullying can mean sending derogatory insults or threats in messages, often many of them. Sometimes it entails circulating humiliating information or pictures of a youngster among peers. Sometimes it involves demeaning postings on Web sites. Now that video games often involve online play and social networking, cyberbullying can become an unwelcome part of gaming.

In many ways, this is the same problem kids have had to put up with for years. But in other ways, cyberbullying is a new kind of problem. Unlike the bullies of yesteryear, cyberbullies can get to their prey right in their own bedrooms. For the victims of cyberbullies, this access to the most private spaces and moments can be quite traumatizing. They can feel that there is no escape from their torturous social lives, or worse yet, that they are never safe from threatened harm. Make sure you talk with your kids about cyberbullying. Let them know they can tell you if they're being bullied through a video game.

### ***Aggression and Disrespect***

Whoever tells the stories defines the culture. That isn't new. It's been true for thousands of years. What is new is that during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, we have delegated more and more of the story telling function to mass media like video games. Some video games stories inform, educate and even inspire our youth. Too many, however, don't. Too many specialize in dishing out heaping servings of violence, disrespect and degradation.

The research linking violent media with attitudes and behavior is so overwhelming that few researchers even bother to dispute that screen violence has an effect on the kids watching it. Does this mean that children

directly mimic what they see on screens? Not necessarily. But an even more pervasive effect of violent media is not so much violent behavior, but rather the culture of disrespect it creates and nourishes. What stories are we telling? Make sure you talk with your kids about the values and stories they see in video games. Make sure they realize these stories and values aren't necessarily appropriate in the real world. More importantly, make sure your kids aren't playing games with age-inappropriate stories.

### ***The Big Three: Too Much Time, The Wrong Content, Sedentary Lifestyles***

Since the dawn of video games three problems have raised the eyebrows of parents and experts alike. You've probably heard a lot about them before, but they're not going away anytime soon, so here is a quick review:

#### **Too Much Time**

Many video games require a lot of playing time to master. Most kids want to spend more time in front of video game screens than is healthy. A large body of research shows that too much screen time is linked to a host of problems including lower school performance. Some screen time is OK for kids over two years old, but only when it's balanced with a variety of other activities.

#### **The Wrong Content: M-Rated Games and Other Content issues**

Some games aren't meant for kids. Games rated M are intended for players 17 and older, but because they are interactive such games can be much more influential than R-rated movies. It's important to make sure that your kids are only playing games appropriate for their age in keeping with your particular family values.

#### **Sedentary Lifestyles: The Obesity Connection**

Lifestyles that include a large amount of media use (often including video games) have been linked to sedentary lifestyles by a number of studies. But there's not reason that video game players can't play games, eat healthy foods, and get enough exercise. Make sure your kids don't think playing video games is a reason to pig out and turn into a couch potato.

## A Video Game Glossary

The world of video games includes a whole new vocabulary. Here are a few of the terms you need to know to navigate your way to MediaWise choices.

### The Basics:

**Console** - the machine that allows you to play a video game. Popular consoles include the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, and Nintendo Wii.

**Handheld Device** - a portable machine that allows you to play a video game. Popular handhelds include the PlayStation PSP and Nintendo DS.

**Online Play** - a mode of play that allows players to connect to the Internet in order to play with and against other people connected to the Internet. Many games offer both a regular mode, in which players do not interact with other people, and an online mode.

**Parental Controls** - settings on a console or computer that allow parents to determine the rating content of the games their kids may play as well as the amount of time games are played. Parents use parental controls to prevent games with age-inappropriate content from functioning on their child's console or computer.

### More Specialized Terms:

**Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOs)** - a genre of online computer role-playing that bring together players from all over the globe in a large game world. In these games, players work alone or together to gain points and accomplish goals within the game.

**Online social networking** - a Web site offering social connection by supporting user-created content that includes personal profiles, chat rooms, blogs, clubs, and the ability to post music, videos and audio commentary. Examples of online social networking sites popular among teens include MySpace, Xanga and Friendster.

**Profile** - a quick online description of a person, usually including name, nickname, or username, personal information such as age, birthday and interests, and photographs. Most profiles have a unique URL that can be visited directly.

## Using the ratings

Using the video game ratings is easy to do and almost always the first step in choosing the right game for your kids. Every game made for a console and nearly every game made for a computer includes a rating determined by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). Grouped by age, the categories provide easy reference and a quick assessment of a game's age-appropriateness. Most stores that sell video games offer customers information on the ratings.

### **ESRB Ratings Descriptions**



#### **Early Childhood**

Titles rated EC (Early Childhood) have content that may be suitable for ages 3 and older. Contains no material that parents would find inappropriate.



#### **Everyone**

Titles rated E (Everyone) have content that may be suitable for ages 6 and older. Titles in this category may contain minimal cartoon, fantasy or mild violence and/or infrequent use of mild language.



#### **Everyone 10+**

Titles rated E10+ (Everyone 10 and older) have content that may be suitable for ages 10 and older. Titles in this category may contain more cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes.



#### **Teen**

Titles rated T (Teen) have content that may be suitable for ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violence, suggestive themes, crude humor, minimal blood, simulated gambling, and/or infrequent use of strong language.



#### **Mature**

Titles rated M (Mature) have content that may be suitable for persons ages 17 and older. Titles in this category may contain intense violence, blood and gore, sexual content and/or strong language.



#### **Adults Only**

Titles rated AO (Adults Only) have content that should only be played by persons 18 years and older. Titles in this category may include prolonged scenes of intense violence and/or graphic sexual content and nudity.



#### **Rating Pending**

Titles listed as RP (Rating Pending) have been submitted to the ESRB and are awaiting final rating. (This symbol appears only in advertising prior to a game's release.)

### ***Using the Box***

Every video game is sold in a box that displays one of these ratings on the front. On the back of the box, more extensive content information is provided with the rating symbol. This information explains the levels of violence, sexual content, language, and other elements a game contains. Make sure you read this information in addition to the symbol. The back of the box usually features screen shots and other copy that describe the content of the game.

### ***Online Play***

Although games that allow online play do have an ESRB rating these games also provide a warning: "Online Interactions Not Rated By The ESRB." In other words, games with the online option have been evaluated, but that doesn't mean everyone who plays them will follow these standards.

Parents need to take special precautions with online-capable games. Please refer to the section of this guide entitled "Making Online Play Safe For Your Kids" for more information.

### ***Ratings Summaries***

Starting this year, the ESRB now offers more extensive ratings summaries. Providing parents with more information than the symbol and content descriptors, these summaries give an in-depth assessment of each game.

Every ESRB rating is available via its Web site, [esrb.org](http://esrb.org), in addition to a the ParenTools newsletter that keeps parents up to date on new releases, and a special ESRB site for mobile devices, [m.esrb.org](http://m.esrb.org). ESRB.org also allows parents to download a searchable "widget" that parents can use to find the rating and rating summary of any game.

These new tools offer parents more information than similar ratings systems for any other entertainment medium. This information is also easier to access than other ratings information. Make sure you take advantage of the helpful resources mentioned above. At the same time, make sure you're aware of the potential dangers video games pose, seeking the advice of outside resources, other parents and your own observations. While helpful and welcome, these new tools from the ESRB are not substitute for MediaWise parenting.

## Parent-Friendly Game Reviews and Other Informational Resources

The Internet offers a wide array of alternative sources of information on games. These reviews, recommendations and commentaries often offer a perspective and a level of detail that many parents find helpful. Useful resources include commonsensemedia.com, whattheyplay.com, and gamerdad.com

### **Ratings: A Useful Start**

While the ESRB ratings are great tool for parents who want an initial sense of a game, they do not replace parental involvement and supervision. Often you can use the ratings to narrow your choices but the only way to know if a game is right for your family is to use alternative information resources, talk to other parents, and ultimately supervise game play or play with your child.

## Parental Controls

All the major consoles as well as computers running the Windows Vista operating system allow parents to determine which games their kids can play. Sony's handheld PSP also offers parental control settings. These parental controls use the ESRB ratings to set age-appropriate limits for kids and they can be used to prevent or limit online play and Internet access. But unless parents know how to use these parental controls, they won't work.

Each of the parental controls systems is different. Find the instructions for your console or computer and get to know your options. Follow the step-by-step instructions to set the right boundaries for your family.

### **Xbox 360 Family Settings (link\*)**

Select the "System" tab in the Xbox Dashboard with the left stick or round pad on your controller. After choosing "Family Settings," select "Console Controls" with the green A button. Choose "Game Ratings," then select the ESRB symbol that represents the highest rating you want to allow.

To "Set Pass Code" choose this option and double click the green A button. Then enter a four-button pass code. Make sure you select "Done" after you make changes and "Yes, Save Changes" to activate your new settings.

The "Family Timer" setting allows you to limit the total amount of time the console may be used each day and week. You can also manage access to Microsoft's online service and block access to movie DVDs by MPAA rating.

### **Sony PlayStation 3 and PSP (PlayStation Portable) Parental Controls**

Both Sony's console and handheld device use the same parental controls system. Use these steps to set up your controls or alter them:

Select Settings, using the left stick or directional pad. Then press the X button to select "Security Settings." Next select "Parental Control." You'll see a number system indicating various levels of ratings restrictions. Select the one that is right for you child.

The parental controls for the Web browser can also be found in "Security Settings." Choose "Internet Browser Start Control," then activate the Internet blocking tool by selecting "On" or "Off." "On" means Internet access is blocked.

To make sure your settings are secure you need to choose a password. Again, in "Security Settings," this time choose "Change Password." The first time you do so, choose the default password 0000, and then punch in your new password. You can also block access to the DVD player by MPAA rating.

### **Nintendo Wii**

Choose "Wii Options" in the Wii Menu. In "Wii Settings" click on "Wii System Settings 2" and then, in "Parental Controls" click on "Yes" so you can create a four-digit PIN.

Then, in "Game Settings and PIN," find "Highest Game Rating Allowed" and choose one of the ESRB ratings. Make sure you press "OK," "Confirm," and "Settings Complete."

The Wii settings can also be used to prevent use of the "Wii Shop Channel," restrict online user-to-user communication and the exchange of user-generated content, and block use of the "Internet Channel" and/or "News Channel."

### **Windows Vista Parental Controls**

In the lower left-hand corner of your screen, click on the "Start" button to find the "Instant Search" menu. Type "par" to search for "Parental Controls." Once you're in the "Settings" menu "Create a new user account." After creating a username, you will be able to block certain kinds of Internet content and determine which ESRB ratings are allowable for computer games

Later, go to "User Controls," then "Parental Controls" to monitor your kids' use using the "Activity Viewer."

## Eliminating and Limiting Online Play

Again, even if a game has a safe ESRB rating, online play can put your kids into contact with people who do not have the same standards. Using the Parental Controls described above, you can take steps to prevent your kids' from having inappropriate experiences in online play. But changing the settings alone won't keep your children safe. You have to decide how to use them, and before that, you have to know how.

Setting appropriate online boundaries requires that you understand your options and what you need to watch out for. Here are a few things you should think about when you're making your family's choices for online play.

### **Buddy Lists**

Just as you care about who your children play with in the real world, you should care about their playmates in the online world. Unlike the real world, however, the online environment is not limited by geography or age. Often, anyone can play with anyone...unless you set limits on your child's buddy list. A buddy list is a predetermined list of people that a user can interact with. Make sure you help your kids set their buddy lists so they include safe, appropriate friends.

### **Mods**

A "mod," or modification of an existing game's software, is usually not created by the people who made the game itself. Sometimes these "mods" just offer expanded gameplay options. Frequently, however, these mods insert mature content into the game. It's important to understand that even if a game has a safe ESRB rating, the mod is not rated. Make sure you limit the kinds of mods your kids use.

### **Cameras and Chatting**

Many games offer players the option to chat with people while they play and some use cameras so players can see each other. Sometimes these features are an important part of game play. Make sure you know if your kids are playing these kinds of games and who they're playing them with. These considerations should factor into your decisions when helping your kids with buddy lists and rating limitations.

### **Monitoring Use, Addressing Red Flags**

Some of the consoles and computers allow you to go back and monitor the kind of online experiences your kids are having. If you use this feature, make sure you discuss online play with your children to determine if you need to make changes to the settings you've selected. You can block people from their buddy lists, mute their ability to chat online, or even eliminate online play altogether. You also have the option to report offensive or dangerous users who have contacted your kids.



## Three guidelines every family should follow:

1. Don't disclose personal information online. Chat and interactive online features offer kids the chance to talk with other people. Just as they would never disclose personal information to a stranger in the real world, they shouldn't offer such information to their online acquaintances.
2. Make a habit of playing games together or watching your kids play. Even if you find them boring or confusing, it's important to understand why your kids love the games they play. Make sure you regularly play games with them or watch them play so you understand what they're doing in their virtual worlds.
3. Balance video games with other healthy activities. Video games can be fun and even helpful, but they shouldn't crowd out the other important things kids do as they grow up. Make sure your kids gaming is balanced with reading, exercise, playing with friends and studying for school.

## Parent Checklist

Use the following checklist to make sure you are ready for MediaWise gaming in your home. If you can't check every item on the list, think about why and how you can take steps to check it off.

- I understand the ESRB ratings
- I am familiar with all the games, consoles, devices and computers my kids use.
- I understand how to use the parental controls.
- I have made a plan for the kinds of games and gaming experiences I want my kids to have.
- I have made sure the other adults in the home understand and agree to this plan.
- I make sure I check in with my kids to see if there is anything new in their gaming lives.

## Parent Tips

The following list of tips covers most of the major issues associated with video games. But remember the most important tip of all: watch what your kids watch! Staying involved in your kids' lives is the most important way to help them make healthy choices.

1. **LIMIT** playing time. MediaWise recommends no more than one hour a day.
2. **USE** other content sources and reviews to help you understand the game. A lot of the major online games do have ESRB ratings. Other games do not. Check out online reviews for a sense of the game.
3. **AVOID** first-person shooter, killing games. There are plenty of great online games with age-appropriate content from which to choose. Try fantasy problem solving games instead of shoot-em-ups.
4. **WATCH** for warning signs of video game addiction. Stop obsessive playing before it gets out of control. Find the MediaWise addiction survey at [mediawise.org](http://mediawise.org) for more information.
5. **DO NOT PUT** video games or computers in kids' bedrooms. Putting consoles and computers in family areas make it easier to monitor playing time and content.
6. **PLAY** and **ENJOY** games with your kids. Online games are constantly evolving. Be sure to watch or play with your kids as they advance in any game, so you can monitor content and connect with your kids.
7. **TALK** with your kids about griefers (players who give other players a hard time online) and cyberbullying. Come up with house rules of "netiquette" and follow through with consequences if these are broken. Encourage your kids to talk to you if they see inappropriate behavior online.
8. **MEETING** online gaming friends requires adult supervision. Your kids may feel quite close to other gamers they meet online. Remind them that these people are still strangers and that it isn't safe to meet them alone.
9. **SET** clear house rules around Internet/game use and time. Require that homework and chores be done before playing.
10. **DISCUSS** teamwork and good sportsmanship with your child. Kids can learn great lessons in collaboration and teamwork in online games. Discuss the value of being a respectful and positive team player. Ask about what they've learned from the other players on their team or in their guild.
11. **ENCOURAGE** your child to play with friends "off line," away from the computer.

# 2008 MediaWise<sup>®</sup> Video Game Buying Guide



In years past, we have provided parents with a list of games we recommend for kids in addition to a list of games that you should make sure kids avoid. This year our list has been expanded to include brief descriptions as well as a list of games for younger children and a list for teens.

## GREAT GAMES FOR KIDS

### **Recommended E-rated Games**

**All Star Cheer Squad** sends players through a year in the life of a cheerleader. Players learn cheers, create routines and attend practices with the ultimate goal of being the captain of cheer camp's champion squad. When used with the Wii console, players can use the Balance Board to incorporate movement and exercise into their game play. Available on Nintendo DS and Wii.

**Animal Crossing: City Folk** begins with players setting out to live life in a colorful virtual town filled with something different to do and new people to meet at every turn. Time passes in 24-hour increments and can be set up to mimic real life down to the minute. Available on Wii.

**FIFA Soccer 09** has received praise for giving gamers near-perfect control over movement and feel. For example, bigger players are more likely to use their strength, while smaller players rely on quickness. Gamers can also create a custom player and develop their skills over a four-season period. Available on Nintendo DS, PC, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, PlayStation Portable, Xbox 360 and Wii.

**Hasbro Family Game Night** lets parents and children come together to play classic Hasbro board games with new age video game technology. Players can create their own game room filled with familiar Hasbro originals with a new twist. Games include: CONNECT FOUR Power Chips, BOGGLE Portal Cubes, Reverse YAHTZEE and BATTLESHIP Barrage, among others. Available on PlayStation 2 and Wii.

***High School Musical 3: Senior Year DANCE!*** lets fans experience the energy, fun and music of the *High School Musical* movies. Gamers can choose to be their favorite character from the movie or create their own player. Either way, *High School Musical* fans will enjoy dancing to 29 songs from the movies alongside their favorite characters. Compete with friends in dance-offs or play together in dance duo. Available on Nintendo DS, PC, PlayStation 2, Xbox 360 and Wii.

***LittleBigPlanet*** is a revolutionary game that requires both brains and teamwork to explore, collect and solve puzzles. The most anticipated feature is the ability to build entire levels, which can be shared throughout the world via the PlayStation Network. NOTE: Although the game's included content comes with an E-rating and is suitable for children, not all player-generated content is appropriate. Parents should monitor and be aware of the levels their children are accessing on the PlayStation Network. Available on PlayStation 3.

***Nancy Drew: The Haunting of Castle Malloy*** finds Nancy travelling to Ireland to be the maid of honor at her best friend's wedding. The groom goes missing and Nancy has to track him down by interviewing characters, solving puzzles and collecting tokens to pay for clues from the fortune teller. This game has complex characters and plot lines without unnecessary violence. Available on PC.

***NBA LIVE 09*** is the fourth edition to the *NBA Live* line of games. The game lets players work toward their dream of becoming NBA superstars. One of the most exciting aspects is the *Live Dynamic DNA*. This feature allows the player to update the game to match the NBA player's real life performance. Available on PlayStation Portable, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and Wii.

***NCAA Basketball 09*** is a new title for the popular NCAA March Madness franchise. The game offers a new feature, which challenges gamers to replicate a school's style of play by rewarding players for accurately playing with the same method and tempo as the real-life teams. *NCAA Basketball 09* will also feature Division I coaches providing real-time, in-game instruction and feedback to help players mimic their team's style of gameplay. Available on PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

***Samba de Amigo*** gives a new twist to the music game genre. Players shake maracas to the tune of catchy Latin beats with the goal of matching the designated height and patterns in rhythm with the music. Available on Wii.

### **Recommended T-rated games**

**Guitar Hero World Tour** is expanding with drums and a microphone for its latest edition of the game allowing for a complete four-piece band (previous versions included guitar and bass instruments). The new guitar has a touch pad located on the neck that allows a player to alter notes by sliding up and down the strip. It is rated T for lyrics and mildly suggestive themes. Available on PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and Wii.

**Rock Band 2** brings back everything that was popular in the original *Rock Band* adding 84 new songs from AC/DC, Metallica, The Talking Heads, Journey, Modest Mouse and others. Players can still enjoy their original Rock Band favorites by transferring their previously downloaded songs to the new game. Rock Band 2 also introduces a new online mode. The game is rated T for lyrics and suggestive themes. Available on PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and Wii.

**Rock Revolution** is the latest addition to the rock n' roll game genre. Similar to *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*, players channel their inner rock stars by playing drums, guitar or bass. One add-on to this game is the Jam Mode that allows players to create their own music. This game is rated T for lyrics and tobacco reference. Available on Nintendo DS, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and Wii.

**Shaun White Snowboarding\*** allows players to test their boarding skills on four massive mountains. As you get better you can purchase new boards that will give you better speed and more air. The game is rated T for lyrics, mildly suggestive themes and mild violence. Available on Nintendo DS, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, PlayStation Portable, Xbox 360 and Wii.

**Spider-Man: Web of Shadows** allows players to explore in a free-roaming, open-ended environment. Gamers can choose to play as the red, heroic, web-slinging Spiderman or the precarious and destructive black anti-hero Spiderman. *Web of Shadows* is rated T for animated blood, drug references, mild language, mildly suggestive themes and violence. Available on Nintendo DS, PC, PlayStation 2, PlayStation 3, PlayStation Portable, Xbox 360 and Wii.

\*The Wii version is called *Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip*. On the other systems it is *Shaun White Snowboarding*.

## GAMES TO AVOID FOR CHILDREN

**Blitz The League II** is not your friendly football video game. Players can target which part of their opponent they wish to demolish. Steroid and drug use is encouraged, and wins are celebrated with hookers in a hotel room. The game is rated M for blood and gore, strong language, suggestive themes, use of drugs and violence. Available on PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

**Dead Space** is one of the latest titles in the survival horror genre of video games. The setting is hundreds of years in the future after mankind has used all of earth's natural resources. During the mission players, stranded on a crippled vessel, must destroy nightmarish creatures while trying to rescue any survivors and escape the ship. If caught the creatures will not just kill you, but dismantle your limbs and decapitate you. Dead Space is rated M for blood and gore, intense violence and strong language. Available on PC, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

**Fallout 3** is set in a post-nuclear world. The survivors must navigate their way through a world with giant insects, raiders, slavers and super mutants. Player's kill whatever is in their path with guns and explosives. This game is rated M for blood and gore, intense violence, sexual themes, strong language and drug use. Available on PC, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

**Far Cry 2** is set in an unnamed African country being torn apart by two warring groups. The gamer's mission is to kill The Jackal, an arms dealer who is supplying to both sides of the conflict. Blowing peoples heads off is a regular occurrence in this game. The game is rated M for blood, drug references, intense violence, sexual themes and strong language. Available on PC, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

**Gears of War 2** finds Marcus Fenix and the Delta Squad battling the Locust Horde for the survival of humanity. The game's main weapon is the Lancer Assault Rifle, which combines a rifle with a chain saw. The game is rated M for blood and gore, intense violence and strong language. Available on Xbox 360.

**Left 4 Dead** finds the player in a city where a new and highly powerful rabies virus is quickly spreading. Victims become grotesquely disfigured and launch vicious attacks on the uninfected. In this co-operative multiplayer action game the gamers fight for survival. The game is rated M for blood and gore, intense violence, and language. Available on PC and Xbox 360.

**Legendary** is the story of Charles Deckard, a thief who breaks into a New York museum and opens what turns out to be Pandora's Box, unleashing all of the world's evil and destroying all humans in its path. Deckard must defeat the newly unleashed beasts and reseal Pandora's Box to make society safe once again. *Legendary* is rated M for blood and gore, and intense violence. Available on PC, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

**Resistance 2** finds Nathan Hale fighting the same Chimera alien race he did in the original *Resistance* game. This version is set in the United States instead of Europe. The Chimera obliterates cities and kills civilians by the thousands. The game is rated M for blood and gore, intense violence and strong language. Available on PlayStation 3.

**Saints Row 2** is the second edition to the open-world, gang-affiliated, shoot 'em up game series. This game has expanded with new locations to explore and new vehicles to steal including motorcycles, boats, helicopters and planes. In the game, the player can choose to beat up strippers, slit rival game members throats, shoot cops and more. *Saints Row 2* is rated M for blood and gore, intense violence, sexual content, strong language and use of drugs. Available on PC, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.

**Silent Hill: Homecoming** is a "first-person shooter" game. The gamer plays Alex Shepherd, a recently discharged soldier who returns home to Shepherd's Glen. He finds that people are disappearing, the streets are shattered and strange creatures are roaming the town. Near the end the player is faced with a choice to shoot his mother in the head or let the rack rip her in half. The game is rated M for blood and gore, intense violence, language and sexual themes. Available on PC, PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360.