Video Game Addiction in Children: 4 Warning Signs You Child Has a Gaming Addiction Transcript

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Understanding Device Overuse

Device over usage. Is it just a phase or is your child's brain getting hijacked? Video games are automatically the problem, but when gaming starts to control your child or teenager instead of your children controlling gaming, that's when we need to look deeper.

And the real issue often isn't just addiction per se, it's a nervous system that is in overdrive or underdrive and it is just really craving that stimulation.

And we all know that gaming and devices give us lots of dopamine hits. They're designed to do that. And they can be easily addictive. I've seen, I know adults that are addictive, in fact, a met a colleague when I spoke at the Northeast region biofeedback conference in October with Bessel van der Kolk and a bunch of other great people.

A met colleague who is from Germany and he's a neurofeed back provider and they in their country, which was shocking to me, have a serious gaming problem amongst, not what you think, parents.

And the parents grew up with gaming, and they are not parenting, they're over gaming.

What True Addiction Looks Like

So when he does neurofeedback, he actually treats the parent for their gaming addiction so they can be more connected and involved parents, really fascinating, but that's a different issue because of their country.

But are we far behind? I don't know the answer. So first, let's really redefine addiction. True addiction involves loss of control, withdrawal symptoms, escalating use despite consequences.

Interference with daily life. That's what addiction looks like. It doesn't matter if it's food drugs or gaming or devices, but many kids who look quote unquote addicted are actually overstimulated using gaming to regulate dress, escaping anxiety or social overwhelm or their difficulties with executive functioning, really just mental fatigue and they just don't have another outlet.

Screens don t create the dysregulation, they amplify what's already there and that's what s different. that I see a lot of. So here are four warning signs that your kid could be addicted to video games.

Number one, no surprise, explosive reactions. When gaming stops, you're not seeing mild frustration like, oh, I wish I had a little more time. We're seeing rage, panic, tears, aggression.

Warning Signs of Gaming Dysregulation

You're ruining my life. I hate your freaking guts. This is a nervous system rash. this happens more than people are willing to talk about as a therapist and school psychologist.

People tell me these things and people embarrassed. to talk about how out of control usage can be. And I have lots of professionals, medical doctors, all kinds of people who are like, I'm so capable, but I can't control this.

So let's keep going. Gaming floods with the system with dopamine and adrenaline. That's what it's designed to do. When it stops abruptly, the brain experiences a drop.

And that drop feels like a threat to the nervous system. You see where I'm going? So this isn't an attitude. It's

withdrawal from overstimulation. Very, very different.

And it becomes challenging, not impossible, to address it. But we're going to talk about it too. We're seeing a loss of interest. In everyday life activities so everything else so if your kiddo stopped wanting to see friends with hobbies they used to love avoids outdoor play or socializing and doing things not wanting do sports and they use to only talks about gaming.

That's a red flag to say, to put it mildly, the brain starts preferring high reward digital stimulation over real world effort. And over time, motivation is going to narrow flexibility is gonna shrink.

Tolerance for boredom disappears. Like, I'm bored, bored. Now, this isn't like once in a while. This is all the time. A regulated brain can shift activities.

Disregulated brain will cling. So three, gaming becomes the only way they can calm down. Many, many of my neurodivergent people, don't get mad at me. They will get mad at me and say, well, I need it.

I needed to calm down. There are a lot of ways to come the nervous system down, you may feel this calms you down because this is your only pathway. So if every meltdown ends with fine, just go and play or gaming is the only tool.

that stops anxiety, reduces irritability, prevents arguments. That really tells us something pretty significant, that your child doesn't know how to regulate without intense stimulation.

You're really creating a dependency on it and video games become a self-soothing strategy, but it's a short-term regulator Not a long-term solution that they can use all the time Look at my colleague in Germany.

He can't even get people to parent their kids.

How Gaming Affects Sleep and School

I'm not sure why they're having kids but It's literally he said it's like a national crisis They also have a lot of graffiti there one if there's a connection just kidding, but who knows number four sleep mood or school performance decline.

I have lots of stories of people who are sneaking in the middle of the night, stealing devices and parents having to lock it up. You've heard my story, Max, where I had to break his iPad in front of him and he never got an iPad again.

Your seeing late night gaming, trouble falling asleep, morning irritability, increased anxiety. you're also seeing worry about the time they'll have for gaming.

might see declining grades, especially when sleep is really being shortcutted. How can you have less sleep and do well in school and also not be so impulsive?

Like when you're not sleeping, impulsivity really starts to increase. Chronic screen overstimulation disrupts melatonin, elevates cortisol, keeps the nervous system in a hyperarousal state that becomes hard to come down from because it's artificially created.

When the brain never fully powers down, regulation gets harder and harder. And harder, we need to power down to, power up in the. What are you seeing with high intensity gaming?

You're seeing that spiking of dopamine. activates reward pathways, it's triggering fight or flight, especially in games that are aggressive. But this happens within games, that aren't aggressive because of the level of stimulation and the circuitry that gets activated in the brain.

For the child who's already anxious as ADHD, sensory seeking, under stimulated during the day, gaming feels like a relief for them. But over time, the nervous system becomes dependent on that level of stimulation.

And what do we have in life that is that stimulating? I mean, I like doing things that I think are really stimulating because I'm a nerd. Like, i love to read about science.

I love writing. Writing is probably the most stimulating thing that i do.

Why Gaming Feels So Regulating

i just love it. I could do it all day. Find myself sneaking writing, but that's not what most people want to do in real life. Everything starts to feel dull, frustrating, overwhelming, underwhelming.

Instead of thinking my child is addicted, what I want you to think is my childhood nervous system is relying on this gaming to cope. And that's the shift that is going to change things for you because now we're not punishing we're going to focus on regulating.

So what helps instead without power struggles? This is really the path that you need. And by the way, in my book, The Disregulated Kid, other side, I have a whole chapter.

I've trademarked the term device dysregulation. You've heard episodes on it. and I walk you through at a very deep level on this, exactly why this happens in the brain and body.

How can you manage this? This is really important. I'll be diving deeply in this as well in my comms dysregulation certification, which is coming. So it's all part of this change so that we can change the conversation about nervous system and getting parents to put nervous systems first everywhere.

Not just you, but you. the person across the street, your teacher, and then we can have a much more regulated commerce society. How about that? So always regulate before you remove screens because it's going to be a battle and you have to as calm as possible.

You have be like the calm wall. That's what it is.

Regulating First, Then Setting Limits

Then we add regulation tools before subtracting gaming using gradual transitions, not abrupt cutoffs, and then build in non-digital dopamine things like movement, connection, sunlight.

There's lots of ways to increase dopamine. We have to be more intentional and consistent because Otherwise, you're never gonna get them to have anything, wanna do anything other than the gaming.

We have to protect sleep like it's sacred. You are never, for those of us that are in perimenopause or menopaus and our sleep is disrupted, holy cow, You start to see how little patience you have.

So you'll have somebody who is not gonna be sleeping properly. And even if you tell me, oh, my kid goes to bed on time, don't tell the rested. because the melatonin is disrupted, the nervous system is so activated, they're not getting quality sleep.

And most importantly, your nervous has to be calm again before you set those limits. So two dysregulated brains arguing about screens never ends well.

You both feel like garbage. The big truth is video games really aren't evil. When a child's nervous systems depends on them to function, That's the cue.

You got yourselves a problem. The goal isn't zero screens. For most families, you gotta do what's right for you.

Some kids can't handle it at all. Like I had to throw Max's out and he, you know, he had get older.

But the goal is a brain that doesn't need them to feel okay and over rely on them. And that's their only pathway. You can have one pathway, You have to be doing multiple things.

That is something that needs to stick with you. So if your child melts down when the controller turns off, It's not about discipline, it's about dysregulation and lack really, you're lacking that ability to regulate.

And when you calm the nervous system first, limits will finally stick. If you want more nervous systems strategies that actually work in real life, Join me inside the dysregulation insider.

That's my newsletter comes to your inbox. Go to drrosanne.com forward slash newsletter. I know this is a big topic and I really gave you a high level discussion about why it's so addictive.

And now you need to focus on regulating first and putting in some of those limits. Now I'm a movement to help you transition from one activity to another.

And you just have to keep at it. This is just not going to go away because it is a push and a pull, which you don't have full conflict every time you are talking to your kids about device usage and gaming.

You can set the pace and regulation first is how you start. Want more insights and solutions? Well, subscribe to our Disregulation Insider and it will show up in your inbox every week.