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PARENTS CONCERNED ABOUT TEEN'S EXCESSIVE GAMING HABITS

Q: Our teenage son is extremely intelligent. The problem is he only wants to play video games all day and night when he's home. It's a struggle to get him to do any physical activities or even just read a book. How can I encourage him to do other things without completely taking his video games away?

**Jim:** You're not alone. A study by the Kaiser Family Foundation revealed that kids aged 8 to 18 now spend more than seven and a half hours every day using electronic gadgets, including game consoles!

It's time to go beyond "encouraging him to do other things" and actually set some limits. Sit down with him and explain your concerns in clear language. Tell him you feel things have gotten out of hand and that you're going to start limiting the amount of time he spends gaming.

Point out that it's important to live a balanced life that includes interests outside of video games -- things like reading, spending time with friends, playing sports or enjoying the outdoors. Say that you won't allow any video games until homework and chores are complete.

Then be sure to follow through! Don't back down in the face of whining and complaining. At worst, you might need to get rid of the game console for a time. Most parents who stay strong in this battle find that their teens eventually discover that there's more to life than pixels on a screen.

We have implemented this plan with our own two boys, ages 10 and 12. We also use an "earn to play" system. Both approaches have worked well for us.

Q: I'm a single father, and I'm having a hard time juggling work, home, school and my children. I want to be the best I can be for them. Do you have any advice for single dads in these types of situations?

Leon Wirth, executive director of Parenting and Youth: My heart goes out to you. We often read about the plight of single moms, and rightly so, but your situation is no less challenging.

To encourage you, here's an excerpt from an article that another single dad, Don Barlow, wrote for Focus on the Family:

"In January 1987, my wife of 12 years died from pancreatic cancer. This left me with the responsibility of raising my 8-year-old daughter alone. After the shock of my wife's death, I became aware that I knew nothing about raising a daughter by myself ...

"When she was in elementary school, I became a 'Room Father.' (When it was my turn to bring cookies, I could buy the dough in rolls, cut it into individual cookies and bake them.) I helped coach her softball team. I encouraged her involvement in church activities, so she would be spiritually grounded. I enrolled her in charm school and we joined ballroom dancing classes together ...

"I tried to be involved by balancing work and family. I passed up a job at a local university because of the position's frequent out-of-state travel ...

"My daughter is 23 years old now. Like any parent, I didn't know it would turn out OK, until it did. It boiled down to this: Ultimately, the best gift I could give my daughter was my time, my love and my encouragement."

You're probably thinking, "That's easier said than done," and you're right! You're going to need all the prayer and support you can get as you tackle the challenges of being a single dad. But take courage in the fact that investing time, love and encouragement in your kids will reap huge benefits. For more insights, check out the Dad Matters blog at www.focusonthefamily.com/dadmatters.

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