

A P A R E N T ' S  
T O  
G U I D E

**Fortnite**

**axis**

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I wake up *every day* wondering if there's going to be a surprise addition that day, something people don't know about yet. I've *never* felt that in a game before, never truly believed that “anything” could happen on an ongoing basis. ***Fortnite feels alive in a way that few other games do.***

—Patricia Hernandez for *Kotaku*

# If You Build It, They Will Come . . .

There's a lot to keep up with as a parent these days. As soon as you've become aware of the most recent internet trend, another one is sweeping youth culture and commanding their attention. One of the most recent of these fads is the online video game [Fortnite: Battle Royale](#).

*Fortnite* has [a minimum of 45 million players](#) and more than 3 million concurrent players. Popular among both kids and adults, [the game earned \\$223 million](#) in March and [\\$296 million in April](#). If it continues to pull in that kind of money, it will surpass *Call of Duty* in annual revenue. The game's creators have successfully targeted women as part of their audience: Almost half of *Fortnite* players are female.

During the month of April, people [streamed 128 million hours of Fortnite](#) on Twitch, the primary online platform for watching people play video games (see our "[Parent's Guide to Twitch.tv](#)" for more info). With around 7.7 million subscribers, the [most popular Fortnite streamer on Twitch](#) by far is Tyler Blevins, aka "Ninja," who set a record in March for the most-viewed Twitch stream (over 600,000 viewers) when rapper Drake played the game with him, then [broke that record in April](#) with 667,000 views while playing *Fortnite* at an esports event.

So what is this crazy game, and why on earth is it so popular? More importantly, what should we do if our kids are obsessed with it?

## What is Fortnite?

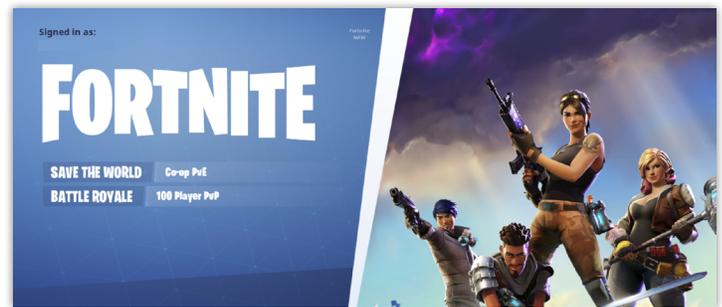
[Described in layman's terms](#), it's a game in which "you run around building defensive positions (AKA 'forts') and killing people king-of-the-hill style until there's one player left standing."

More technically, Epic Games released the game [in the summer of 2017](#) as a multiplayer sandbox survival game.

"Sandbox" refers to the fact that, in contrast to the progressive storyline of many video games, players are put in an open world with few limitations. Instead of completing a level and moving on to the next one, in a sandbox game, players have free access to the world, can change it, and complete challenges within it ([Minecraft](#) was perhaps one of the most well-known sandbox game up until now). [Techopedia notes](#) that the fact that sandbox games lack a linear storyline can pose difficulties for the games' creators. (Keep this in mind for when we discuss what has made *Fortnite* so popular.)

Survival video games typically put the players in an antagonistic setting, hence the challenge to survive. When *Fortnite* was originally released, the premise was that a global storm had killed off most of the human population and those who are left must defend themselves against zombies. Players team up and complete missions, constructing traps and defenses against the oncoming horde.

But something happened to change all that. The battle royale game [PLAYERUNKNOWN'S BATTLEGROUNDS](#) (PUBG) was released in early 2017 to widespread success. In response, Epic Games quickly created a battle royale version of *Fortnite*, releasing it in September of that year and changing the original game's title to *Fortnite: Save the World*. It is the



battle royale version of *Fortnite* that has taken the world by storm (no pun intended).

In *Fortnite: Battle Royale*, participants [begin on a hot air balloon bus](#) and parachute onto an island with up to 99 other players. Each player begins with a pickaxe and a standard parachute and must collect weapons, building materials, and other loot upon landing. They must then defend themselves against attacks from other players as the global storm periodically shrinks. Players who fail to stay within the eye of the storm will die. The last player or squad (team) standing has the honor of achieving the “victory royale.”



## What's it rated?

[T for Teens](#), with a content descriptor of “violence.” (See our “[Parent’s Guide to Video Games](#)” for a more thorough explanation of game ratings.)

## On what platforms is it available?

As of June 2018, the game is available on Windows, Mac, Playstation 4, Xbox, and iOS, though an Android version is [currently slated](#) to release summer 2018.



## Ok, what's a “battle royale” video game?

The “battle royale” genre of video games is a PvP (player versus player) scenario in which gamers try to kill each other until there is only one survivor. It’s basically *The Hunger Games* (minus the evil government)—although [the genre gets its name](#) from *Battle Royale*, a 2000 Japanese film in which the government forces a group of ninth-graders to fight to the death.

There are multiple battle royale video games, but *PUBG* was the first to seriously [popularize the genre](#). These battle royale games have become so trendy that other companies are coming out with their own versions of the genre, such as *Motor Wars*, a [battle royale version of Grand Theft Auto](#).

After Epic Games released *Fortnite: Battle Royale*, the game quickly surpassed *PUBG* in popularity. While *PUBG* uses Epic Games’ [gaming engine](#), the *PUBG* creators have not been at all happy about *Fortnite*’s success and [recently sued Epic Games](#) for copyright infringement.

## So why is *Fortnite* way more popular than *PUBG*?

*PUBG* is a fun game in its own right, but you could argue that *Fortnite* took what was best about its rival and improved on it.

### Similar premises

There are several similarities. In each game, 100 players start in the air and land somewhere on a map where they will battle each other to the death to see who is the final victor. Both games feature a force that gradually shrinks the playing area as the game progresses. In *Fortnite*, that force is a storm, and in *PUBG*, it's an energy field. Both games allow players to play solo, in pairs, or in teams of four, and both allow people to match up on teams with strangers. In each game, the matches are relatively short lasting, either 20 (*Fortnite*) or 30 (*PUBG*) minutes, depending on how long players survive.



### Differences

One difference between the two is that *Fortnite* is always in third person (i.e. you see the back of your character's in your view), whereas *PUBG* allows you to play from either a first (i.e. you see through your character's eyes) or a third person point of view. *PUBG* offers players a lot more by way of [customizing their weapons](#) and also offers a different type of diversity in its terrain because players can choose between multiple maps. But despite the fact that *Fortnite* has only one map, its creators are still doing a lot to keep the game fresh and interesting. While *PUBG* has always contained vehicles, *Fortnite* only just added its first one: [a shopping cart](#).

### Where *Fortnite* shines

*PUBG* differs from *Fortnite* in its aesthetic (which affects the gameplay), the number of maps *PUBG* offers, and the lack of a building element (more on that below). Whereas *FN* is colorful and cartoonish, *PUBG* has a militaristic design and open terrain (see images below for comparison). There are fewer places to hide in *PUBG*, and it's visually similar to many other shooter games. This more realistic aesthetic is somewhat limiting. For example, *PUBG* could never get away with adding a shopping cart as a vehicle. The fact that people can build in *Fortnite* adds a level of depth to the gameplay that *PUBG* does not have.



The absurdity of *FN*'s world allows the creators to make decisions, say, to add a [Thanos avatar](#) (for anyone who is lucky enough to secure it) or to offer weapons like a plunger with a knife through it, a disco ball (a take on a mace), or a shark. These quirks are part of what makes *FN* interesting. In addition, the fact that it's free is a huge advantage. In contrast, *PUBG* costs \$29.99, and *Fortnite: Save the World* costs \$39.99.

## — What's "Battle Pass" and how can a "free" game cost me so much money?!

Despite being free to play, the game does make [quite a bit of money](#) from microtransactions. For those of us who don't game, it might sound strange that anyone would spend money in a game that's *free to play*. What else do you need?! That's another area that *Fortnite* has nailed.

There are 10-week, themed seasons in *FN*. During these seasons, there are new challenges to complete and new "[skins](#)" (costumes/looks), dances (see image), graffiti, stickers, and [other loot](#) players can earn for their avatars (all of which are purely aesthetic and [have no effect](#) on one's power within the game). *But these things are only available if one has purchased a [Battle Pass](#)*, which [costs \\$9.99 per season](#) and unlocks these features and challenges within the game. Completing the challenges gives a player more experience points, which in turn helps them to level up to new tiers, and each new tier unlocks more loot. And since only 1 out of 100 players wins each round, having these little perks can make the game more fun for those who don't win and can make it feel like progress is being made. (It can also be a status thing, since not all the loot is earned/purchased/unlocked by everyone.)



But that's not the cleverest way in which they make money. Epic Games says that unlocking all 100 new rewards each season will typically [take 75 to 100 hours of play](#), something not every player has the time or patience to commit. Not to fear! You can just pay more money (\$25 or 2,800 [V-bucks](#), the in-game currency that can also be earned through play) to get the Battle Bundle, which immediately boosts you to tier 25. Essentially, giving Epic Games more money is the shortcut to coolness, status, and more fun within the game.

And finally, they make money by making challenges that connect with trends in pop culture or by making things available for a limited time (the limited-time [Thanos mode](#) coincided with the release of *Avengers: Infinity War* to theaters). Says Keith Stuart of *The Guardian*, "My sons were obsessed with unlocking the 'Rust Lord' outfit, clearly inspired by Star Lord in *Guardians of the Galaxy*...You remember when you were at school and just had to have the latest cool Nikes? It's like that, but virtual."

## — Why did the game skyrocket in popularity so quickly?

There are quite a few reasons why it's unrivaled in popularity. (It's worth noting, though, that copycats are iterating on what makes *Fortnite* stand out, hoping to chip away at its massive success by creating similar graphics and gameplay. [Realm Royale](#) is most notable at this point, since [Ninja was playing it](#) going into the [E3 Expo](#).)

### 1. Gamers want battle royale.

It helped that the battle royale genre was already popular when Epic Games came out with *Fortnite: Battle Royale*. There's a reason why people might prefer a PvP game to a PvE (people versus environment) game like *Fortnite: Save the World*. Would you rather go up against AI, or would you rather know that you (or you and your friends) are defeating skilled human beings who exist somewhere in the world?

Something else about the battle royale genre is that the very format of the game makes people want to keep coming back. As [Lisa Damour of The New York Times](#) puts it, "Instead of feeling as if they've lost, players may feel as if they nearly won...As with gambling, it's hard to walk away if you believe that good fortune is always just around the corner."

### 2. The battle royale genre helped *Fortnite*, but *PUBG* REALLY helped *Fortnite*.

As we said, [PUBG came out first and was already successful](#) before *Fortnite* came along and gave its own twist to the battle royale genre. Steve Rousseau of Digg [points out a key difference](#) between the two games:

*At a high level, PUBG requires impeccable situational awareness, near-perfect aim and an uncanny ability to use your position and the nearby terrain to put your enemy in a place where he doesn't want to be. Mostly this boils down to two folks just kinda peeking out behind trees and rocks. Fortnite: Battle Royale requires all of that, but also demands that you're able to furiously out-tower your opponent until you can jump down onto them and lay waste to them with a shotgun. It looks absolutely insane.*

### 3. *Fortnite* has figured out how to offer people a free game while raking in money.

(See "battle pass" section above for more on this.) By doing so, they've significantly lowered the barriers to entry, increased the number of players and therefore the hype/buzz, and gotten players hooked enough that they *want* the cosmetics and loot offered only by purchasing, thereby massively increasing their revenue. It's brilliant marketing.

### 4. As far as skill goes, there's a low barrier to entry and not a huge upfront commitment.

*Fortnite* is well-suited to both amateur and professional gamers. Beginners can pick it up easily, but it's also possible to become highly skilled at playing it. If you're already good at shooter games, then your skills can carry over to playing *Fortnite*. [Ninja used to play Halo 3](#) before he moved to *PUBG* and then *Fortnite*.

Individual matches in *FN* only last about 20 minutes. It's easy to hop in, play for a little while, and then stop (although we should note that it's just as easy to get sucked into playing match after match for a long time...similar to the autoplay function on Netflix).

### 5. *Fortnite* allows for cross-platform play.

It's a [cross-platform game](#), which is a huge benefit. If you and your friends want to

play, you don't all have to use the same device like an Xbox or PS4. You can collaborate on any kind of device, whether it's a PC or a gaming console. This ability gives a lot more people opportunity to play and is an area where *PUBG* is limited. *Fortnite* even [works well on older devices](#).

#### **6. Epic Games has been on point with fixing problems and making updates.**

While *PUBG*'s creators have been [slow to fix the problems in their game](#), Epic Games tends to be much faster at resolving issues, fixing glitches, and making updates. Epic Games [really got the upper hand](#) by providing a "technically stable" game at a time when *PUBG* failed to do so.

#### **7. Speaking of which, Epic Games listen to its audience.**

They have prioritized [responding to feedback](#) from the *Fortnite* community. If a majority of players complain about a certain aspect of the game, the company will respond accordingly with an update, as they did earlier in the year when they got rid of unfair weapons or the limited-time ["Close Encounters" battle mode](#).

#### **8. "You can't separate Fortnite from Ninja."**

Twitch is popular, Ninja is popular, and their powers combined have been [key to driving FN's success](#). *Fortnite* is quite fun to watch if the people you are watching are any good, and, apparently, if the person you're watching is Ninja. One gamer we talked to believes that Ninja has single-handedly driven *Fortnite: Battle Royale*'s popularity and that while Ninja isn't the best *Fortnite* player on Twitch, he is the best *FN* streamer. See [this tweet](#) for an analysis of how Ninja, who is one person, is easily surpassing an entire *Overwatch* league in viewership.

#### **8. Fortnite's visuals and building element set it apart.**

As we already mentioned, *FN* visually stands out among its competitors. While the point is to kill other players, it's not violent and gory (compared to something like *Call of Duty*), and the ability to build makes the gameplay distinctive. Not only are players trying to hide and shoot each other, but they also have the ability to construct walls, ramps (see image), and forts to protect themselves, gain access to different areas on the map, or build high towers in order to launch themselves onto their enemies. As [one website says](#), "*Fortnite* building is what sets the average player apart from pros like Ninja and Myth." Not only that, it makes the *FN* map dynamic and different each round, which keeps the gameplay from ever getting sterile or boring.



*Fortnite*'s cartoonish aesthetic is also more appealing to a younger audience and does not depict graphic violence. It allows for a more creative, interesting, downright goofy world (you can unlock a lollipop pickaxe, for crying out loud). [James Davenport of PCGamer says](#), "The latest update even added hidden dance floors for a new challenge, and I've already seen players forget about the encroaching storm in order to peacefully break it down for a few minutes."

## 9. Fortnite fosters community.

Yes, you can play solo, which is useful for players who are just starting out so they can get experience. But it's also possible to match up with strangers online or—even better—to play with your friends. We've had multiple moms tell us that *FN* is the source of their kids' community.

Playing on a squad is advantageous because you can share materials or healing with your friends or launch them from one point on the map to another. When shopping carts were added to the game, we watched Ninja and his squad experiment with putting C4 on a shopping cart, building a ramp as high as they could go, and launching it onto their enemies. It didn't work so well—but it was fun to watch.

## 10. It might be a sandbox game, but the creators understand the power of narrative.

Epic Games has been hitting home runs when it comes to creating a unique experience for players and keeping them wondering what will happen next. Probably the best example of this is [what they did with the meteor](#) in the spring of 2018. In January, a meteor appeared in the sky over the *Fortnite* map (see image) and hovered there for month, creating suspense as players [wondered what it could mean](#). Would aliens invade? Would one part of the map be destroyed? It wasn't until May 1st that the meteor finally hit, transforming the section known as Dusty Depot in Dusty Divot.



The meteor also resulted in new items that gave players special abilities. Nick Statt of *The Verge* [points out](#) that what *Fortnite* did was exceptional because it successfully created a one-time, shared gaming experience:

*Epic crafted a narrative for an online multiplayer game exclusively out of contextual clues, in-game hints, and other forms of environmental storytelling. The end result is a game that feels richer, deeper, and more purposeful than its battle royale trappings would have you believe.*

[Patricia Hernandez of video game website Kotaku](#) says:

*Perhaps the most impressive thing about all of this is that it is a very “you had to be there” moment for gaming. If you didn't catch the build-up, if you didn't come along for the ride, that's it. The map is different now. The game is different now. It's not really something that Epic can pull off again, but they don't have to. We're on a grand new mystery now, we have a new season to decipher and unravel. The only question is, where will Fortnite go next?*

Where it will go next seems to have something to do with the crater the meteor left behind. [Something is glowing red inside it.](#) . . .



## — Is the battle royale genre inherently bad?

In the wake of all the school shootings that have occurred lately, discussing the morality of shooter games is a delicate matter. It's easy to see why people would view

any kind of shooter video game as inherently negative. This is a tendency of many of the parents commenting on *Fortnite* [here](#).

The question of whether violence in video games is problematic or whether certain types of violence in video games are bad touches on a much broader discussion about what sort of content is or is not ok for Christians to consume. We should consider this question not only as it pertains to video games, but also as it relates to movies, novels, and music. It's an important conversation, but not one we have space to fully flesh out here. Still, there are a few points about violence in video games we think are important to consider.

### **1. What's the context of the game? How mature are your kids? What are your own convictions?**

When evaluating the specific content within it, it's essential to assess the overall context of a game. *Grand Theft Auto* allows players to kill innocent pedestrians. But one gamer we know remembers that in *Call of Duty: WWII*, there's a point where players can either detain or kill someone and that the game made people restart the level if they chose to kill. That's a significant difference in context.

It's not just the stories of the games that are important. The personalities and maturity levels of your kids matter as well. Your older kids can probably handle games that your younger kids can't. Your children will likely react to games differently based on their personalities and experiences. Those are qualities that are important to weigh when considering whether or not to allow certain games in your family.

And of course, individual families will simply have to decide for themselves what is best for them. Are you going to ban all games with swearing? Are you going to allow some content with swearing depending on the context? Are you going to ban all content with swearing until your kids are a certain age? Your answers to these and similar questions will depend on your convictions and your particular family.

### **2. Keep in mind that all games abstract the idea of violence.**

When considering the question of violence, it's helpful to remember that all games (including traditional sports) are based on defeating an opponent. As such, they all abstract the concept of violence against another person on one level or another.

However, letting your kids play capture the flag, laser tag, or paintball is different than playing a video game where players shoot each other, **especially if the violence is graphic**. There is also a significant difference between playing a game where you're simply trying to shoot people to win versus playing a game where, say, the violence is extremely graphic or the point is to torture someone else.

### **What to consider when answering this question**

So when evaluating video game violence, we think it's important to consider its **realism**, the **context** in which it is occurring, and whether it's appropriate for your kids based on their **ages and tendencies**. We also believe it's important to ask the question, "What is this teaching my children about the sanctity of human life?" Are they learning behaviors, ideas, or beliefs that make human life seem expedient or devalued? If so, think seriously about allowing them to play such games. Not all children will come to these conclusions, but some might. As Christians, it's also important to consider whether such games are [true, noble, right, pure, and lovely](#). Just because a game may not be graphically violent, doesn't make it a life-giving experience to play.

The most violent we saw *Fortnite* get was when one player killed another with an axe in hand-to-hand combat. There wasn't any blood. It just seemed more violent because the players were close to each other, instead of shooting each other from a distance.

Consider this point as well from [New York Times writer Lisa Damour](#):

*Fortnite does, to be sure, involve firearms, and is recommended for ages 13 and up. But its graphics are free of blood and gore. And though adults may worry that shooting games cultivate aggression, C. Shawn Green, an associate professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison who researches video games, notes that “there’s really no evidence that playing a violent video game would take someone who has absolutely no violent tendencies and suddenly make them violent.*

See the “Additional Resources” section below for more information on the studies that have been done on whether or not violence in video games causes people to be more aggressive.

## — Is *Fortnite* better or worse than other video games?

Unfortunately, answering that question is hard, since it's highly subjective and since there are so many other video games with which to compare it.

Some pros of *Fortnite* are:

- It's free;
- It's creative and requires creativity;
- It fosters community (or it can);
- The violence is minimal—there's no blood or gore; and
- There aren't scenes where the characters swear.

Some cons are:

- You can instantly connect online with strangers over audio and text chat;
- It's super easy for kids to spend TONS of time on it, especially if their friends are on it all the time;
- It's consequently easy to neglect spending time enjoying and developing skills in the real world; and
- It's easy to spend a lot of money on items that only exist in the digital realm.

## — Are there parental controls?

No. So if your gamer has access to their account, they can see, do, and say anything they please.

There is a chat box for text chat (which has a “global” section for all players in the round and a “team” chat for a players team), as well as an audio chat function. [This article](#) explains how to turn off the audio chat (which, thankfully, isn't all 100 players in a round talking at once; a player will only hear the players who were in his/her lobby when the game started).

Currently, [there isn't a way](#) to turn off the text chat, which often has lots of trash talking, vulgar language, and bullying (see image). Luckily, there is a filter for “mature language” that can be turned on, though it won't be perfect and many players use abbreviations to get around the filter. [This video](#) demonstrates how to turn the filter on and off, though your gamer can turn it off whenever they please as long as they have access to their account.

Because players on a team need to communicate with each other somehow and because the text chat includes *everyone* in a round, it may be better to keep the audio chat on and allow your child to utilize that to communicate with his/her team, rather than the text chat.



## Should I let my kids play it?

Whether or not you let your kids play *Fortnite* depends on their ages, maturity levels, their demonstrated abilities to make wise decisions, and your assessment of how playing the game affects them. Generally speaking, if you are setting good limits on time and how they're interacting with strangers online, we don't see a major problem with the game.

If you are going to allow it, we think it's helpful for you to take an interest in *FN* and even play it with your kids. We also think it's important for you to encourage them to spend more time developing skills and creativity in the real world than they spend playing or watching video games.

## How can I set good limits for my kids when it comes to playing *Fortnite*?

1. Don't be **against** *Fortnite*. [Be for other pursuits](#). Encourage them to develop skills and interests outside of the game. Spend time together as a family. Serve other people on a regular basis.
2. Do set limits on their screen time, and make sure this includes *all* screen time, not just time spent playing *FN*. It's possible to spend a lot of time watching Twitch or YouTube videos about *FN*. (And realize, as one mom told us, that **setting a “match/round limit” is better than setting a time limit** for *Fortnite*. Why? Because if your gamer is in the middle of a round when the time's up, and you force them to quit without finishing the round, their squad or friends will be left in a lurch and they will be really angry with you.)
3. Don't overreact and come down with the hammer of justice, suddenly cutting them off from the game. Work with your kids to determine what good limits look like.
4. Make them earn their purchases! If they want the Battle Pass or Battle Bundle (or

other purchases), find chores they can do around the house or have them babysit to earn the money first (date night, anyone?).

5. Take an interest in *Fortnite* and talk to your kids about it. Says Lisa Damour, “I have found that many teenagers love to talk about it with anyone who’s willing. And while learning about the details of this latest craze may not be at the top of every parent’s agenda, learning more about why the game captivates one’s kid just might be.”
6. Play *Fortnite* with your kids. If they want to invite you into their world, take advantage of their openness, [like this mom did](#).
7. If you let your kids play with strangers, don’t let them use an audio headset. You have no way of knowing or vetting what other people are saying.
8. If you’re still at a loss for understanding *Fortnite*, we recommend watching [Ninja’s stream](#) on Twitch. He plays [most of the day for most days of the week](#) and participates in a tournament every Friday. The [world’s biggest gaming expo](#), E3, was June 12–14 (2018), and Epic Games hosted the first [Fortnite: Battle Royale tournament](#). It included professional gamers, YouTube stars, and celebrities. So that’s definitely something to be aware of and to watch. You can also check out *Fortnite*’s twitter account [here](#).

## Discussion questions

- What do you like about *Fortnite*?
- What do your friends like about it?
- How is it different from other games you’ve played?
- Do you like watching *Fortnite* on Twitch? If so, why?
- Do you feel you’re spending a healthy amount of time on *Fortnite*?
- What are the benefits of playing it?
- Do you feel that *Fortnite* helps you to build community and get to know your friends better? Explain.
- How much time are you spending face-to-face with people or on being creative in the real world?
- What are the benefits to spending time with people face-to-face and not just on a video game?
- What are the advantages of spending time in the real world?
- How does Battle Pass make you focus on the wrong things?
- What do you think is a healthy/realistic amount of money to spend on video games each month? Why?
- Is it tempting to spend more than that? Why? What would decrease that temptation?
- Are video games a good way for you to rest and rejuvenate? Why or why not? If not, what boundaries can we set to make sure you get the rest you need?

## Takeaway

So many people enjoy video games because they’re an immersive form of storytelling and can often be a way of being in community with other people. But as with anything,

we have a tendency to misplace our priorities and escape from the world God created, instead of playing a stronger role in it. *Fortnite* has a lot of good qualities, but your kids need you to help them steward their time, gifts, and communities well. As with most things, moderation and balance are important. If your kids play *Fortnite* for an hour, have them play outside for an hour as well. Ultimately, you know your children best and want the best for them, so look for signs of how they play the game in healthy or unhealthy ways and engage with them accordingly. Good luck!

## — Additional Resources

“[Signposts: Should Your Family Play Video Games?](#)” Dr. Russell Moore

“[Do video games lead to violence?](#)” CNN

“[Does playing violent video games cause aggression? A longitudinal intervention study,](#)” Nature.com

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