

FORTNITE BATTLES

I was sitting in my front room the other day reading. The house was quiet and peaceful, other than my 11 year old son's conversation with a friend on his headset while playing Fortnite on the computer nearby. He was saying things like "epic" "tilted towers", "launching", "and shield pop" and it was rather entertaining to listen to him. Then I heard it: shrill, joyous laughter of children outside. I quickly jumped from the comfort of my recliner and peered out the window. What a foreign sight and sound! There were 4 children, 8 or 9 years old, running down the street, laughing, chasing one another. It was a beautiful vision to my eyes and music to my soul. How long has it been since I heard children play outside? It was a disturbing realization considering we live on a street with many families. Even my son stopped playing and said "what is that sound?" Why are there so few children outdoors playing? Looking at my son, as he quickly turned his attention back to his game, I realized that therein lies the problem.

Nearly every parent has heard about Fortnite. Nearly every family with school aged children (particularly boys) have had a battle or two about the game, whether playing it, talking about it or watching YouTube videos about it. In my numerous conversations with parents throughout Northern Gateway Public Schools, I have learned that it is a concern in many homes. Children and young adults are obsessed with this game!

I have done extensive research, reading, observing and engaged in numerous conversations with kids and parents about this particular video game. Here is what I learned:

Fortnite is a survival game against a zombie apocalypse in which players can play solo or team up to be the last contestant standing. The game begins when you parachute onto an island as storms clouds gather. Armed with a pickaxe, you begin rounding up weapons and supplies to build fortifications to try and fend off the zombies. To make the game harder, the area in which you play is shrinking and you must remain in that area to survive, set traps, scavenge weapons and build defenses. As the map shrinks, it pushes players together as time goes on, forcing confrontation. Each game typically lasts about 20 minutes.

Fortnite is rated "T" for Teen, and though it is violent, there is very little blood and gore. The game can be downloaded for free with a PS4. You will have to pay for Xbox Live Gold with an Xbox One to play online. You can also buy a "Battle Pass" to get new outfits, gliders, and other items, which ranges in price.

According to www.statista.com/statistics, Fortnite had 1 million players in August 2017 and exploded to 125 million players by June 2018.

While there have been other games that are exciting and enticing such NHL2K, Call of Duty, Mario, Zelda, to name a few. ***But what is it about Fortnite?*** One day it was just a spark of interest as the latest video game and the next it had fanned into an out of control wildfire that is consuming youth and young adults! What exactly is the attraction? This is what I was learned in my research:

- There is no way to pause in the middle of a game.
- The game is a little different each time you play so there are always new places to explore.

- You lose only by a hair, meaning, you are only a move or two away from winning: “I was so close! Next time I’ll win for sure!” Epic Studios, the makers of Fortnite make sure that gun fights are almost always the result of one player winning only “by the skin of their teeth” (www.byrslf.co)
- When you win, it is AMAZING! A few more levels and you’re on a hot streak! After one gun battle, you can climb between 10-30 ranks. Overall winners of the entire game averages only 5 kills. So even just 2 bullets is the difference between coming in 70th or 1st. Practically every gamer believes those 2 bullets are going to work in their favor next game.
- When playing in a team or duo mode, collaboration matters. Communities and alliances form to survive. If one player suddenly quits, it can mean the death of another player. There is peer pressure of letting your friends down.
- There is a feeling of being part of a larger mission, giving a player a sense of purpose.
- When your character gets shot at or is engaged in a battle, real life instincts kick in and your adrenaline spikes, your heartbeat races and your stress hormones flood your body. This heightened sense of stress is actually fun - and addicting.

The Nightingale Hospital in London, UK, which founded the UK’s first internet rehab service for kids as young as 12, lists the following "warning signs of technology addiction":

- Spend increasing amounts of time on the computer, electronics and/or gaming
- Fail to limit time spent on the computer, electronics or internet
- Neglecting family, friends and other responsibilities
- Becoming angry when others criticize the amount of time spent online/phone/computer/gaming
- Withdraw from other pleasurable activities
- Gaming or other use of electronics interferes with studying or work
- Restless, anxious, irritable or even aggressive when not gaming or on phone or electronics
- Willing to forgo necessary sleep, eating or hygiene to continue to game or go on electronics

While Fortnite can have clear positive impacts, if you have noticed some of the above behaviors in your child, here is a summary suggestions that other parents have tried with various success:

1. Kick the habit cold turkey. Remove ALL access to any electronics completely: iPad, iPod, cell phones, tablets, computer, etc until you notice your child returning “to normal”.
2. Have all devices set up with passwords that only you know, so your child needs to ASK before they have access. It is the UNLIMITED ACCESS that causes the problem.

3. After a period of detoxing, slowly allow brief, supervised and limited amounts of time on the game, with practicing safety protocols of PERMISSION, REQUESTING and GRANTING.
4. Talk with your gamer about how best to keep Fortnite in check. Bring them on board with setting limits.
5. Position yourself as not being AGAINST Fortnite but FOR other activities: sleep, homework, exercise, etc.
6. Earn minutes to play Fortnite: every minute of play/chores/homework = minutes played on the game.
7. Install an app called Circle. It hooks it up to your router and then you register all of the devices in your house. You go through and assign each device to a person in the house, and there's a scrolling wheel where you can see a headshot of everybody. You can just click "pause" on any device that your child has and the Wi-Fi is immediately turned off.
8. Another app for handheld devices is "Our Pact" which works in similar fashion.
9. Ensure that your family is engaging in fun activities TOGETHER, so your child feels connected to REAL LIFE PEOPLE.
10. Talk to other parents and work with one another. Share ideas and strategies.

This article was submitted by Tammy Charko BA, BSW, RSW. Tammy is Northern Gateway Public School's Student Support Facilitator. She is a support for schools, students, parents and caregivers to encourage success in school. Tammy advocates for students and provides a link between the student and other supports within the community. Tammy has been a social worker for nearly 20 years and is a mother to 4 children, 3 of whom are teenagers.