

# the kids are alright

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How games  
are changing  
our kids for  
the better

**P**arents have a lot to worry about these days. Between maintaining that ever-elusive “work-life balance” and raising their kids in an always-on, interconnected world, the last thing they need is to worry about what video games are doing to their children. Well, we have some good news – you don’t have to worry about games anymore.

Maybe that’s a little oversimplified, but according to our research, we really do think “the kids are alright” when it comes to games. In our book **The Kids Are Alright: How the Gamer Generation™ is Changing the Workplace**, we show how growing up playing video games actually helps kids to be more sociable, develop strategic thinking and become better leaders later in life. Why do we think this? Because those who grew up on the first generation of video games told us so.

For parents, games may have been a quirky, embarrassing sideshow, played in dingy parlors or shag-carpet basements. But for people under 35, games were and are literally everywhere. Four-fifths of people under 35 – and virtually everyone under 18 – have played video games. Games have risen to become a multi-billion dollar industry that challenges the movies for kids’ time, money and attention.

Games have changed significantly since the last time you may have picked up a controller (if ever). Along with the Internet, games are the defining media experience for kids today. That’s not a bad thing, since most video games encourage engagement, not passivity. They require many different mental and social skills, often simultaneously. They allow players to nurture people and pets, build or destroy societies, and discover a lot about themselves. Just as music improves math, games impart many complex lessons.

**O**ur research shows three big picture takeaways from games and how they affect our kids.

First, **gamers are more social**. Gamers regularly talk to each other about strategies, watch while others play (taking turns), and compete against each other either in the same room or remotely. In the workplace, they value other people more than non-gamers do, and firmly believe in teamwork. This is because they’ve experienced early on what working together can accomplish through games.

Second, **gamers are natural strategic thinkers**. Every game involves countless risk and reward decisions. In thousands of hours of practice, gamers learn to take risks without being reckless. They also learn to brush off failure; they’ve crashed and burned thousands of times before they even learn to drive. As adults, we find them resilient—optimistic and determined to keep working at problems.

Third, **gamers are prepared to be great leaders**. They’re confident, motivated, and expect a lot of themselves—in any area they care about. Like entrepreneurs, they want to rely on their own abilities. They care more about their companies. And they have a measurably broader skill set for leading groups—what company couldn’t use people like this?

The world our kids will inherit will be quite different from what we know today. It will change faster than ever before, and kids will need skills that will prepare them to deal with that change. Games are the perfect practice ground for developing the ability to adapt to rapidly changing rules in a safe, consequence-free environment. That’s why kids like them so much – because no matter how many times they fail, they know they’ll always be given another chance to get it right.

**S**o now that you know what games can do, what should you do as parents to let kids enjoy their benefits, without letting games overtake their lives? We have a few pointers.

First, provide structure: gamers want defined, goal-directed tasks. Give them missions to complete and set clear boundaries around what's expected. Hand out "points" for a job well done, establish a leader board – and tie performance to rewards.

Second, use the Gamer Generation's "selfish" nature to inspire great performance. Gamers want to be recognized as experts; give them a chance to earn that respect. Compliment them on their mastery of a certain topic, and make them the "go to" person for whatever motivates their desires.

Third, tap your kids' instinct for heroism. In games, your performance matters to others—you're saving the world—so frame their chores or homework in heroic terms. Being chief of the kitty litter is indeed a very brave thing.

Fourth, try to overlook their multitasking. They really can concentrate while switching tasks. Crazy as it

looks, it may feel unnatural for the Gamer Generation to work any other way. And given how the world is changing, that's probably a good thing. Corporations use instant messages and blogs now ... imagine what they'll be doing in 10 years.

Finally, play a game with your kids. You will both need patience as you learn the ropes of Madden or Tony Hawk, but you will achieve a level of understanding you can't get any other way. It may be silly, but you'll jump about ten places in your kids' eyes just because you picked up the controller.

Bottom line – games deserve a role in helping a child become an adult. The rules and lessons learned are as important as any other element we regard as crucial, like exercise, reading, socializing, learning and family time.

Games are not a panacea, and a child raised solely on games will definitely have a cartoonish view on life. But games really do have the power to teach things that textbooks, lectures and sports just don't. So relax—by allowing some games, and building on the lessons they impart, you will give your child the edge to succeed in the world just taking shape.

#### *How games are changing gamers*

- Gamers are **better at handling risk** and uncertainty.
- Gamers are **more creative** and have **better problem solving skills**.
- Gamers are **more sociable** and have a greater need for human relationships.
- Gamers think of themselves as **experts** and want to tackle problems head-on.
- Gamers **aren't discouraged by failure** and believe each setback is just a chance to try again.
- Gamers are **more flexible** about change.
- Gamers are better at seeing problems in a **deeper perspective**.
- Gamers are great at **learning in informal ways**.
- Gamers are **more globally oriented** and outward-looking.
- Gamers are **more confident** and have a **more positive outlook** on life.

#### *What games teach gamers*

- **Be a hero.** The star's role is the best way to succeed or get satisfaction.
- **Be an expert.** Get really, really good so you can perform at your peak early and often.
- **Failure isn't the end of the world.** Crashing and burning isn't so bad, and persistence pays off in the end.
- **Everything is possible.** You're capable of amazing things—you can defeat hundreds of bad guys single-handed or beat the best NBA team ever.
- **Trial-and-error is almost always best.** The only way to advance in most games is to try new things and see if they work.
- **Practice makes perfect.** Practice at something long enough, and you'll be ready for whatever comes your way in real life.
- **Go global.** Bond with people who share your experience, not necessarily your national or cultural background.

***For more about The Kids Are Alright, visit [www.kidsarealrightbook.com](http://www.kidsarealrightbook.com).  
The Kids Are Alright will be available in paperback from Harvard Business School Press in November, 2006***