**Video games can also help people who are dealing with mental disorders like anxiety, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**. Social interaction. Multiplayer and online games are good for virtual social interaction.25 Oct 2021



Mind games: How gaming can play a positive role in mental health

[**https://news.microsoft.com/features/mind-games-how-gaming-can-play-a-positive-role-in-mental-health/**](https://news.microsoft.com/features/mind-games-how-gaming-can-play-a-positive-role-in-mental-health/)

Deborah Bach 3 May, 2021

As a child, John Kieswetter played video games with his younger sister and two cousins who lived nearby as often as he could. Kieswetter kept playing into adulthood and became even more passionate about gaming. He enjoyed playing with friends and meeting new friends through gaming. Gaming was a community, and gamers were his people. Kieswetter is now an Xbox Ambassador who loves helping other gamers.

When Kieswetter’s sister died unexpectedly almost a decade ago from complications following a surgery, gaming provided a refuge from his overwhelming grief and sadness. When he felt up to it, Kieswetter would play games, and sometimes he’d talk with his gamer friends about what he was going through. Many of them reached out to offer support.

“Gaming gets your mind off things for a little while, and that helps,” says Kieswetter, who lives in Ontario, Canada. “Gaming has had a huge impact on me as far as my mental health. The friends I have made over the years are so incredibly supportive and I consider them family. They have been there for me, and I’m there for them.”

“Learning from video games ended up giving me social scripts that I could carry forward in my day-to-day life.”

Like many people worldwide, Kieswetter has turned to gaming to cope with the isolation and anxiety of the past year. A recent Microsoft study within the Xbox Research Accessibility Community Feedback Program, a group made up of players with disabilities, looked at gaming and mental health during the pandemic. The study found that 84% of respondents agreed gaming has positively impacted their mental health over the past year, while 71% said gaming helped them feel less isolated.

Those findings are particularly resonant as people worldwide mark Mental Health Awareness Month this May, some 16 months into the pandemic. But even before the pandemic, researchers have cited the [benefits of gaming](https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/amp-a0034857.pdf?ref=dtf.ru) on mental health, and game creators have in recent years begun portraying [mental illness in games](https://www.thegamer.com/mental-illness-health-video-games/) in more thoughtful and less stigmatizing ways than in the past.

Those include [Hellblade: Senua’s Journey](https://www.hellblade.com/), whose main character struggles with psychosis; [Celeste](http://www.celestegame.com/), about the quest of a girl who has anxiety to climb a mountain; and [Psychonauts](http://www.psychonauts.com/), about a boy who projects himself into other people’s mental worlds and helps them fight their demons.

Kelli Dunlap, a clinical psychologist who has a master’s in game design, says video games can help people living with mental illness by providing a way to relax, connect with others and feel competent.

“We know that games are exceptionally good at helping us feel like our decisions matter, and that we can have power over the world around us and that we can have a sense of accomplishment,” says Dunlap, who is based in Rockville, Maryland.

“These are things that are crucial to mental wellbeing in general, but they’re not things that we get a lot of in our daily activities. Even if you don’t dislike your job, you’re probably not getting all the mental health vitamins, so to speak, out of your job. So games can be incredibly helping in meeting needs that are not being met otherwise.”

For people with severe mental illness, Dunlap says, games can help counteract the self-defeating narratives that often accompany conditions such as anxiety and depression, “when our brains lie to us and tell us, ‘You’re no good, you’ll never accomplish anything, you’re worthless.’

“People rarely have that experience when they’re playing games, because games induce the opposite — you’re the hero, you are Master Chief saving the universe from intergalactic space zombies,” she says. “You can do the thing, and there’s constant feedback about ‘you’re doing good and you’re progressing.’”

Dunlap uses video games in her clinical practice and co-facilitates a therapeutic Dungeons & Dragons group that uses the popular role-playing game to teach a range of skills such as communicating and problem-solving. Role-playing has a long tradition in psychotherapy, she says, and can be “incredibly powerful” for people who have anxiety.

“Being able to take on the mantle of someone strong and powerful and capable can have a really positive therapeutic impact on the person playing,” she says.

Raffael Boccamazzo (Photo courtesy of Raffael Boccamazzo)

Raffael Boccamazzo understands that as well as anyone. He became fascinated at an early age with video games, which offered a predictable framework and made sense to him in a way that social interactions with his peers often didn’t. Through gaming, he felt a sense of empowerment and capability that could be elusive in real life.

Boccamazzo got into role-playing games in his teens, and in his early 20s realized that the charismatic, extroverted characters he played in games, who were “sort of a fantasy wish fulfillment” for him, came from within him. If he could play that person in a game, he reasoned, he could *be* that person in real life.

“It just became a question of transferring it over, using some of the same skills I used at the gaming table in real life,” says Boccamazzo, who lives in Seattle. “In a way, learning from video games ended up giving me social scripts that I could carry forward in my day-to-day life.”

Boccamazzo, who was diagnosed with autism at 35, went on to become a doctor of clinical psychology and an expert on the use of tabletop role-playing games in clinical and educational settings. “Doctor B,” as he’s known, is now the clinical director of [Take This](https://www.takethis.org/), a nonprofit based in Kirkland, Washington, that focuses on combating stigma and increasing support for mental health in the gaming community. (Dunlap is the organization’s community manager.)

In 2019, Boccamazzo helped create a Dungeons & Dragons adventure in which players enter the subconscious mind of a young woman to battle the monsters of anxiety and depression plaguing her. [Gardens of Fog](https://www.dndbeyond.com/posts/525-gardens-of-fog-is-a-charity-adventure-for-mental) aims to depict some of the ways anxiety and depression can affect people, Boccamazzo says, and draws from his own experience with both issues.

Boccamazzo and others emphasize the need to involve people who have experienced mental health challenges from the start when creating any game depicting mental illness. Even before that, Boccamazzo says, game creators should ask themselves why they want to depict mental illness and what purpose it serves.

“Whose story are they telling, and are they using mental illness or mental health challenges as a vehicle?” he says. “There are lots of other compelling stories you can tell.”

“Mental illness is not a plot twist. Trauma is not a plot point.”

Tanya DePass, a Take This ambassador who lives in Chicago, says mental illness is often used as a justification for game villains’ actions. Instead, she says game creators should “explore reasons for someone to do bad things other than mental illness. “Because doing that reinforces the idea that mentally ill people are dangerous. And the most dangerous a mentally ill person is is to themself, not society.”

Negative tropes about mental illness — the mad scientist, the psycho killer, the insane asylum — have existed in video games since at least the early ‘80s, Dunlap says. But the game industry, she says, is ahead of the curve in depicting mental illness in more positive ways than in film and television.

Monsters depict characters’ inner struggles in the game Psychonauts. (Image courtesy of Double Fine Productions)

“It’s not that games do it badly; it’s that society does it badly, and games are in some respects a reflection of society and its values.”

[Nearly half](https://www.mhanational.org/mentalhealthfacts) of Americans are projected to have a diagnosable mental illness in their lifetime. And with [75%](https://www.theesa.com/resource/2020-essential-facts/) of U.S. households having at least one person who plays video games, Dunlap says, game developers need to consider that their audiences will invariably include people who have mental illness.

“If you’re putting out a stereotypical portrayal of mental illness, you can be doing a lot of harm, because individuals with mental illness are a vulnerable population,” she says.

“If you want to address something like suicide in a game, that’s a very emotionally triggering kind of content. It’s not that you can’t include it, but be mindful about how you’re doing it.

“Are you doing it for a wow factor or a plot twist? If so, don’t,” Dunlap says. “Mental illness is not a plot twist. Trauma is not a plot point.”

When Dom Matthews and Tameem Antoniades set out to make what would become Hellblade, they decided to center the game on a character who experiences psychosis. They thought Senua’s unique way of interacting with and seeing the world would make for a compelling game and journey but understood the gravity of taking on an oft-maligned and misunderstood illness.

“We knew that we had to do our research. We had to get it right,” says Matthews, the studio head for Ninja Theory, a Cambridge, England-based video game studio that is part of Xbox Game Studios.

“We had to do it justice and tell a story that would be truthful to someone who experiences psychosis.”

So Matthews and Antoniades, Ninja Theory’s co-founder, reached out to the nearby University of Cambridge and connected with Paul Fletcher, a professor of health neuroscience who specializes in psychosis. Fletcher did a presentation about psychosis to the project’s development team, then connected them with people who had experienced psychosis.

Matthews and his team would meet with the group and listen to their experiences, then try to replicate those through audio and visual content. Then they’d go back and show the group what they’d developed and ask for their feedback.

That input informed how the voices Senua hears are depicted in the game — instead of just adding voices, the team used binaural audio, a way of recording sound that uses two microphones to create a 3D effect, to reflect how people with psychosis hear voices externally and from various directions.

“That was one of the things the group really loved,” Matthews says. “It felt so genuine to them.”

Similarly, the development team learned through those conversations that though the experience of psychosis can be very difficult, it can also have moments of positivity and warmth, Matthews says. That reality is reflected in a moment when Senua steps into a sunlight-soaked scene bathed in radiance and color. One woman in the group told Matthews the scene was her favorite part of the game because it showed the “sheer beauty” that can come with psychosis.

“If we didn’t have that collaboration, we never would have learned those things,” Matthews says.

Hellblade won multiple awards, including one from the [Royal College of Psychiatrists](https://twitter.com/rcpsych/status/1060179717331001344), and was broadly heralded by critics. But it was the messages that poured in from fans, compiled in a touching [video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-n7RTnRZ_QQ), that meant the most to Matthews. They wrote that Senua’s journey made them feel seen and understood, less alone, that the game gave voice to what they’d felt but struggled to express.

“We achieved success from whichever perspective you look at it, and that’s great,” Matthews says. “But by far the most fulfilling of those successes is meeting those people and reading comments from people about how the game impacted them.”

Tim Schafer (Photo courtesy of Double Fine Productions)

Tim Schafer didn’t set out to make a game about mental health when he created Psychonauts, released in 2004. But the game focused on the inner struggles of its characters and conveyed a hopeful message about healing.

As he began working on Psychonauts 2, to be released later this year, Schafer took a more intentional approach to the issues the game’s characters were grappling with, from anxiety to addiction.

During the development process, Schafer and his team at Double Fine Productions, which is part of Xbox Game Studios, would play the game together, then sit and talk about it. Team members would share experiences from their own lives and offer thoughts on how to represent those issues most authentically.

Schafer also consulted with mental health experts including Boccamazzo. That input led to the inclusion of a content warning for the game and some language changes. Schafer believes games depicting mental health issues can be helpful, provided those portrayals are sensitive and informed by experience.

“Showing someone positively healing and dealing with some of these problems … it’s not an instant fix or anything, but I feel like just showing that can be a positive step for people,” he says.

“I think gaming is a proxy for facing troubles in your own life. It’s a very low-stakes way to experience emotions and anxieties and go through them in a safe way and build up the capacity to do that in the real world.”

A [2016 study](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1556-4029.13214#:~:text=After%20removing%20duplicate%20titles%2C%20mental,17.7%25%20of%20the%20games%20sur%2D) of almost 100 of the highest-selling video games found that more than one-quarter depicted at least one character with mental illness, but most were of the “homicidal maniac” variety. Dunlap says that’s changing, with games like Hellblade and others, such as [Adventures with Anxiety](https://ncase.me/anxiety/) and [Stardew Valley](https://www.stardewvalley.net/), portraying mental illness with more empathy and understanding.

“There’s a lot of innovative stuff coming out of indie game studios,” she says. “I’m very excited about that transition.”

Game creators have only recently started to more explicitly address mental health challenges in video games. Tara Voelker, one of Xbox’s accessibility program managers, says that while game developers are attuned to thinking about accessibility in gaming for people with physical disabilities, there’s less awareness about players with mental health issues.

“If you think about them in the same way you would think about any other group and accessibility, you can really help them and provide a great gaming experience for them,” she says.

“I think the accessibility space is growing and more becoming inclusive, and so we have to do that education now.” The Microsoft gaming accessibility team has started planning what that education for developers could look like as part of their future work.

A gamer herself, Voelker is open about her struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder and says games help channel her energy and divert her mind from potential triggers. Mental health issues are often isolating, but seeing those challenges reflected in games can help normalize mental illness and break down the stigma around it, Voelker says.

“We all have mental health struggles,” she says. “The more examples we can have out there, the more normal it becomes. The more we can help normalize mental health struggles, the more comfortable people will be talking about them and seeking care.”

# 15 Video Games That Deal With Mental Illness

**BY**[**WILL HARRIS**](https://www.thegamer.com/author/will-h/) UPDATED MAY 28, 2021

Mental health awareness is becoming more of an important topic in today's world and these video games do an incredible job of shining a light on that.

It has been a long and painful road for the topic of mental health and for those who suffer with it, to get to where we are now: a place where depression, anxiety, PTSD, grief, and more are openly being discussed. Laws are changing, discussion is opening up, and art is getting better at reflecting life.

Video games are a form of art which has, in recent years, gone from reflecting and discussing mental health in a harsh and damaging way to doing so in a positive light; with incredible strength and creativity. It's even served as an avenue in helping those who suffer with a form of mental condition or illness. Even for those who don't — stories exist to increase one's level of empathy. If one does wish to understand or get a clearer insight into the mental illnesses that others may suffer from — you could do worse than to try out some of these incredible video games.

***Updated May 25th, 2021 by Stephen LaGioia:***Mental health is an absolutely vital part of the human condition, one that can often be susceptible to certain elements and conditions. The various stresses and hardships of life can burden and generally affect many as it is. Yet, the added burdens brought by the Covid pandemic — and the relative isolation it's brought to many — has put mental health in the spotlight to a degree rarely seen.

Additionally, the quality and quantity of games dealing with emotional and mental health seem to be on the rise, especially [*from the growing indie scene*](https://www.thegamer.com/best-indie-games-2020/). With these factors in mind, it seemed fitting to revisit this list and revitalize it with even more great titles that explore mental health in a positive, wholesome, or otherwise interesting way.

## 15 Aether

This unique flash game is designed by Edmund McMillen of Super Meat Boy fame, though the serene experience stands as a pretty big departure from that grueling affair.

In this atmospheric ride, players control a lonely boy along with an octopus-esque creature that he encounters. He swings, soars, and strolls his way across clouds and asteroids using the monster's elongated tongue. He travels to various monochrome planets, which he must restore to glorious color by solving puzzles. The game plays with the feelings of isolation, [worry, and anxiety](https://www.thegamer.com/games-help-with-anxiety/) — acting as a visual representation of these emotions in the boy's head.

## 14 Lost Words: Beyond The Page

Dealing with the loss of a loved one can be tough, and even more so for the delicate mind of a child. This game creatively deals with the crucial coping mechanism of a grief-stricken little girl, who yearns to escape in her fantasy world.

This inventive platformer shifts between her imaginative land of Estoria and her literal diary pages. The latter is full of sketches and phrases that document her life events and convey her whirlwind of emotions as she deals with the prospect of losing her bed-ridden grandmother. Beyond the Page is a majestic ride rife with clever puzzles, vibrant locales, and tear-jerking emotional moments.

## 13 Change: A Homeless Survival Experience

While many [survival romps](https://www.thegamer.com/best-survival-horror-games-scare-easily/) thrive on thrilling gamers with loads of action or ample gore, this emotional journey from Delve Interactive shines by doing the opposite. In fact, it's the gritty realism of this homeless simulator that makes it so captivating and intense.

Just like real life, players are given one chance in this roguelike to emerge from the depths of homelessness and earn a degree of success and stability. They'll do this by begging for cash, sifting through trash, searching for a job, and generally doing anything possible to scrape by and literally survive. What's key here is that both your physical **and** mental state must be tended to. Change is both an addictive, somber, and educational journey all in one measure.

## 12 We Happy Few

Take [a survival horror with hostile foes](https://www.thegamer.com/best-greatest-survival-horror-games-decade-2010s-ranked-compared-metacritic-scary/) and fuse it with a drug-fueled dystopia a la Brave New World, and We Happy Few might be the result. This one takes a unique approach; not just from a gameplay standpoint but with regards to mental health. It hones in on mental instability and delirium through the warped filter of mind-altering drugs.

The kicker? These drugs are actually mandated by the new oppressive government of England, who forces its citizens to take the feel-good opiates to blind them to the dark, gritty truth of a war-torn land. While the actual gameplay is pretty rough around the edges, the atmosphere and plot are delightfully twisted and compelling enough to keep players fighting through this 22-hour trip.

## 11 Life Is Strange: Before The Storm

Fans may recall this title from the 2015 graphic adventure featuring a unique heroine that can rewind time. Unfortunately for her friend Chloe, however, she is absent of this convenient tool — and deprived up much else to boot. Instead, this troubled lead is equipped with little more than her own wits and an artistic sensibility. The latter is conveyed through her frequent bouts of marking the walls with graffiti.

This prequel features a [choose-your-own narrative](https://www.thegamer.com/games-decisions-matter-adventure/) that hones in on a rebellious protagonist. She is bogged down by depression, fueled by her brushes with abandonment, loss, isolation, and betrayal. Unlike its [quasi-sci-fi](https://www.thegamer.com/sci-fi-games-only-make-sense-on-replay/) predecessor, Before the Storm stresses a more emotional core for its depth and intrigue. This, combined with some clever puzzles and solid writing, makes for a truly gripping tale.

## 10 Gris

Gris, meaning gray in Spanish, is about a girl who is going through a personal loss. She journeys through the five well-known stages of grief as she attempts to find her voice (literally). The world of Gris is drop-dead gorgeous and is comprised of stages and moments which represent the grief which our protagonist is moving through.

As she journeys, she is pursued by a black amorphous inky creature which takes several monstrous forms throughout the game, a metaphor for grief and depression’s ability to appear as anyone or anything, unexpectedly and at any moment. She must survive this thing, lest it devours her and drown us in inky blackness. This metaphor is very on-the-nose, but the way it is presented through the game’s art is staggering – and that staggering effect is what makes the game so perfect.

## 9 Child Of Light

In this darling little 2D indie RPG, Aurora, a princess, falls into a cold sleep after the death of her mother and the re-marriage of her father. In this state – an allegory for depression and grief – she arrives in a dreamlike fairy-tale world where she must learn, love, grow and battle grief. The game is a great exercise in using storybook style, mood, tone, and atmosphere to deliver a unique experience which blends real-life fairy tales with video game mechanics.

The world is pastel bright and charming and its animation is gorgeous, but its tone is dark and its metaphors convey deep adult themes. This is the kind of game that can be enjoyed and [appreciated by all ages](https://www.thegamer.com/video-games-kids-adult-friendly-best/). Yet, it particularly holds a message for kids and grown-ups alike on the power of depression and grief, and how people can cope with it.

## 8 Celeste

[Celeste](https://www.thegamer.com/tag/celeste/) is about a girl called Madeline. Why is she trying to climb a mountain (which bears the name of the game's title)? Because Madeline suffers from anxiety and has reached a crisis point in her young adult life where she doesn’t know what path she should be taking. She seeks a sense of challenge and accomplishment, and so has come to conquer Celeste.

As the game progresses, the player is introduced to Madeline’s self-doubt and anxiety in the form of a sardonic, cruel version of herself who mocks her and knocks her confidence. Her anxiety manifests as panic attacks, and there are moments where players must help her reach an inner calm by balancing an on-screen feather. Many fans have pointed to this memorable moment — among others — as resonating with them.

## 7 Night In The Woods

Mae, 20 years old, drops out of college and returns to her quaint, dull hometown. Her loss of place in the world is clear from the beginning, as she feels dislocated, lost, wandering through life without purpose. Players attempt to figure her out as she eludes us, even though we are in control of her. She avoids questions and her parents welcome her with open arms without making much of a fuss at first. As the story progresses and things get weirder, players learn just how deep Mae’s dissociation goes, internally and externally.

[It’s a complicated story](https://www.thegamer.com/best-story-driven-video-games/) in which nothing much seems to be happening, much like the life of a person dealing with depression or anxiety. These people can be reclusive, avoidant, disillusioned, and somber. They need help but don’t reach out. Mae is all of these things. Night in the Woods is a smart game at its core and has much to teach about the many forms depression and anxiety can take.

## 6 The Last Of Us

[The Last Of Us](https://www.thegamer.com/games-similar-to-the-last-of-us/) is a survival game about zombies based on those real-life spores which burrow into the brains of ants and take control of their motor functions. It’s also an incredibly poignant and intimate story of grief. In the game’s opening prologue, protagonist Joel loses his teenage daughter in the event which ruined the modern world.

He has existed since then as a survivor and the game makes it very clear through his tone, dialogue, and body language that he is surviving in the same way that any instinct-driven animal does. When Ellie, a girl who reminds him of his daughter, enters his life and gives him a renewed purpose, his grief begins to subside. The darkness that's been growing inside him for all these years has turned him into a complex character far from altruistic — leading to a truly memorable ending. This works to point out that grief cannot simply be fixed, but it can be treated.

## 5 Wolfenstein 2: The New Colossus

This may seem an odd choice at first, but [Wolfenstein 2](https://www.thegamer.com/tag/wolfenstein/), the game about killing Nazis in an alternate timeline where the Allies lost World War II and are fighting to take back the US and Europe, has much to say about PTSD. In the early moments of the game, the player is given some powerful background information on protagonist BJ Blazkowicz: growing up as a half-Jewish boy to an abusive father and a poor immigrant mother, BJ suffered through a childhood filled with fear and domestic abuse.

He's thus been traumatized, which has long fueled him and spurred him to become a soldier in the war. The relationship between him, his mother, and his father is explored more as the game goes on, and the intensity with which the story is told is commendable. It's honest and brutal, and when a campy, gory video game about killing Nazis puts out such a powerful message about toxic masculinity, that is a wonderful thing.

## 4 Limbo

A sparse, quiet world with no music and no color. A lonely child who is too small and too fragile to thrive in this landscape. A journey across a bleak and dangerous landscape to reach someone he loves. Limbo lays on its themes thick, demonstrating loss and grief with a kind of attack on the player’s senses of sight and sound. The black and white world is cruel and violent, and players are alone without a voice or anyone to help.

This is grief and depression given form. This is how it feels to lose a loved one, or to fall into depression and not know how to climb back out, with only one direction to move in. Limbo gives the player a jump button, a grab button, and the ability to move right. With only these limited tools, the lead must find his way out of his depression and into the light, all the while stumbling and making lethal mistakes. It’s not subtle, but it certainly resonates.

## 3 Persona 5

Most will agree this one doesn’t do everything right. A game about a group of vigilantes who, rather than try to redeem the game’s gallery of villains, or address the corrupt capitalist system/toxic masculinity/hierarchical class system which lies at the heart of these villains’ problems, instead opt to literally go into their hearts and change their personalities so to stop committing crimes. It’s not the greatest metaphor.

What is great, however, is the game’s approach to mental illness. There are several characters that could be mentioned, but the focus will be on Futaba: struggling with the belief that she caused the death of her mother, Futaba has lived as an agoraphobic, anxiety-riddled recluse. With the help of the Phantom Thieves, she is able to come to terms with her mother’s death, the truth of how it happened, and thus begin to heal and lead a healthier life. Her arc is an absolute pleasure to watch unfold.

## 2 Dark Souls

The game that’s all about dying over and over again had some dubious marketing strategies. Putting the focus on its difficulty — and the fact that death is assured — arguably does a disservice to the philosophy of this awesome series.

[Dark Souls](https://www.thegamer.com/tag/dark-souls/) is a game about surviving everything life throws at us. Its world is indifferent to our presence, just as the real world around us is. Dark Souls is not about fighting villains, but rather about surviving against the bleakest, darkest of times. It’s about battling depression. Everything the player sees and does in Dark Souls, including bringing light to a dark world, is representative of the struggles against depression and the struggle of any human being to simply stay alive and keep one's grip on reality and joy, day to day.

## 1 Hellblade: Senua’s Sacrifice

If there is one game that goes above and beyond in the representation of mental health – it’s Hellblade. It was designed to be fully true to the experiences and feelings of those who suffer from mental health issues, and this dedication has paid off in spades.

Senua is a girl living in the world of Norse Mythology. She is attempting to reach Helheim and save the soul of her deceased partner. From the game’s outset, she is plagued by voices of doubt, disdain, and threat (an experienced enhanced ten-fold with headphones). She fights against demons and creatures that we might frequently doubt are even real.

She must search for signs and symbols hidden in the trees and the environment – more examples of a paranoid mind searching for meaning when there is none. This game does much to represent a mind being torn asunder by paranoid schizophrenia; bombarded by grief, thoughts of death, and depression.

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About Healthy Gamer

Healthy Gamer is a mental wellness company built to help the internet generation succeed.

We create accessible, inclusive and affordable mental health resources that empower the internet generation to find peace and purpose through content, community and coaching.

## **Our Mission**

Helping the internet generation take an active role in their mental wellness.

## **Our approach**

For many, it’s not about an SSRI or a diagnosis. It’s about creating a life worth living, and that’s where Healthy Gamer can help.
‍
Created by Dr. Alok Kanojia, the world-leading expert of gaming psychiatry, Healthy Gamer programming is developed with a combination of well-evidenced interventions: peer-based solutions, meditation, neurochemistry research, and psychiatric/psychological principles.
‍
We call it AoE (area of effect) healing because our approach encompasses the entire individual and the community around them - as one person gets better, we all do.

## **Why We Exist[EPT](https://www.healthygamer.gg/impact-report)**

Mental illness is on the rise, especially for young people, but mental health resources as they exist aren’t built for the internet generation. Traditional resources are too slow, too old, and too expensive:

### #2

cause of death ages 10 - 34 worldwide

### 18 - 25

year olds have highest rate of major depressive disorder

### 10wks

average wait time for an appointment

### 55%

of psychiatrists are 55+ years old

### 6th

most expensive disease is depression

We believe in a proactive approach to mental wellness - much like nutrition and exercise are active parts of maintaining physical wellness, coaching and community are just some of the ways to begin taking a more active role in your own mental wellness.

**Video Games and Mental Health Explained**

<https://www.healthygamer.gg/blog/video-games-and-mental-health-explained>



Video games seem to be blamed for all sorts of negative effects on mental health. Some studies indicate that gaming results in people becoming anxious, depressed, angry, or even violent. There is some truth to each of these claims. However, there is more to the story. What is the relationship between video games and mental health? Are video games good for your mental health?

**Excessive video gaming is found to be associated with positive emotions and social relationships while playing. However, problematic and excessive video gaming is also associated with maladaptive coping strategies, negative emotions and attitudes, low self-esteem, loneliness, and poor academic performance.**

Video games are not evil by nature. They do not necessarily cause anxiety or depression. However, video game addiction can certainly make these issues worse. Keep reading to learn the effects of excessive gaming on the brain, and how you can keep playing video games without sacrificing your mental health.

**Video Game Addiction Questionnaire**

<https://healthygamer.typeform.com/to/cztOpkN7?typeform-source=1ow98l1dbn0.typeform.com>

### **How Do Video Games Affect Emotions and Mental Health?**

To answer this question, we need to first ask another question: **why do people start playing video games?**

A lot of gamers started playing video games to escape something in real life. Maybe they were bullied in school, and when they came home, they were bullied on social media. In such a situation, the only escape for the gamer is a video game. That is the only place where they can immerse themself and escape the emotional pain of real life.

An fMRI [study](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S027858461400219X) looked at the activity of different parts of the brain in gamers. The amygdala is the part of your brain that governs fear and negative emotions. The study showed that when your amygdala is active i.e when you are experiencing pain or fear, and you start playing a video game, then the amygdala calms down. Video games literally allow us to escape negative emotions and suppress them.

**Negative emotions are one of the strongest teachers for the human brain.** If a child touches a hot stove once, they learn to never touch it again. Therefore, since video games suppress our negative emotions, they also make it harder to learn from our mistakes.

Thus, people get stuck playing video games, even though they realize that their gaming habit is hurting their progress in life. Since they do not understand why they cannot quit, they start to believe that they are lazy and continue to play video games.

**Alexithymia**

If someone suppresses their emotions for long periods of time, they develop a condition called Alexithymia. **Alexithymia is the inability to determine one’s inner emotional state.** A majority of gamers are alexithymic, because of the way video games suppress our emotions and affect our mental health.

Alexithymia is an adaptive and protective mechanism. At a young age, people often do not have an emotional guide who can explain their emotions to them. They end up suppressing them because that is easier to do than to keep feeling the emotional pain.

Over time, they start to lose their ability to determine what emotions they are feeling. This does not mean that emotions no longer control their behavior — they just can’t recognize when that happens.

In our society, men who show emotions such as fear, sadness, and shame are considered weaker or less masculine than those that don’t show these emotions. Therefore, the only acceptable emotion that they can express is anger. This severely limits their emotional capacity and makes **men more susceptible to developing alexithymia.**

Over time, due to this continuous suppressive action, negative emotions keep building up. Eventually, the pressure that they exert on our mind becomes too strong to be contained. This is when gamers have emotional outbursts.

They end up using the only strategy that they know of: using gaming to suppress these emotions. As a result, they play video games all day long. Aspects of their life such as performance in school, physical health, and hygiene get neglected, which results in more negative emotions that they have to suppress. Eventually, they get stuck in a negative feedback loop.

**Video Games and Depression**

Video games are correlated with increased depression and anxiety. However, correlation does not necessarily imply causation — people who are unhappy or depressed are drawn to video games because they help to suppress negative emotions. They develop a gaming habit that causes them to get stuck in life. Naturally, they end up being unhappy.

There is a difference between clinical depression and feeling unhappy. Someone can be content in life, but still have underlying feelings of sadness — that is clinical depression. However, if you are stuck in life and are not moving towards your goals, then you will most likely be unhappy. Sometimes, you can have both, and it becomes hard to distinguish one from the other. If you think you are depressed, it is best to get the opinion of a [licensed mental health professional](https://www.healthygamer.gg/mental-health-resources-how-to-find-professional-help/).

Dr. K explains the difference between clinical depression and unhappiness in this video:

<https://youtu.be/V4ta_jcw5zY>

### **Video Games and Anxiety**

Our mind has the ability to predict potential problems in the future. If this ability gets out of control, then that is what we call anxiety.

Being addicted to video games causes us anxiety because when we are playing games, we are not doing the things that we know we should do. However, we are not anxious about neglecting them in the present or not having done them in the past. We are actually anxious about **the consequences** of not addressing those things. Those consequences lie in the future.

Every anxious thought has its root in the future. **Video games do not necessarily cause anxiety**, but when they take over your life and you start to neglect other important things, then that creates anxious thoughts.

**Do Video Games Cause Low Self-Esteem?**

If a person is addicted to video games and is going nowhere in life, then they will probably have low self-worth and confidence.

Moreover, gamers aren’t judged for external things when they are online. Other people see them for who they are as a person and do not judge them based on what clothes they wear, how they look, how much money they make, or what car they own.

But when they move out into the real world, they are judged for these things, and since they are not used to being judged, they feel really uncomfortable. They start to stay inside and avoid going outside. That makes the situation worse because then they miss out on opportunities to grow and explore. This makes their low self-esteem even worse and their confidence continues to decrease over time.

### **Conclusion**

Video games are not necessarily the source of mental health problems. It is possible to be a healthy gamer and enjoy video games as a recreational activity. However, when people do not know how to deal with their emotions, they tend to use video games to suppress them and end up getting stuck in life.

