

# CHAPTER 2: ENTERTAINMENT

'Aishah (رضي الله عنها) said, The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said on the day when the Abyssinians played in the mosque: "The Jews should know that there is room for leisure in our religion. I was sent with a tolerant, monotheistic religion".  
(Ahmad)

عَنْ عَائِشَةَ   قَالَتْ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: يَوْمَئِذٍ -يَعْنِي يَوْمَ لَعَبِ الْحَبَشَةِ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ، وَنَظَرْتُ إِلَيْهِمْ-  
(لِتَعْلَمَ يَهُودُ أَنَّ فِي دِينِنَا فُسْحَةً إِنِّي أُرْسِلْتُ بِحَنِيفِيَّةٍ سَمَّحَةٍ)). رواه أحمد



## SECTION 2:

## VIDEO GAMES

As with social media, video games are very popular among your generation. More than eight out of ten adolescents say they have a game console at home or have access to one, and 90% say they play video games on a computer, game console, or cellphone.<sup>24</sup> This is especially true for boys: 97% of adolescent boys play video games on some kind of device, compared with 83% of girls.<sup>24</sup>

Playing video games is both an active and passive form of entertainment. Research published by the American Psychological Association found that video gaming can enhance multiple cognitive skills, such as attention, visual processing, memory, reasoning and perception.<sup>25</sup> In addition, it can positively influence your mental well-being when playing with others by working as a team and instilling empathy for others.<sup>25</sup>



Gaming also comes with risks. *Roblox* and *Minecraft*, for example, enable young players to work together online and create. However, video games can include elements of graphic violence, and they may expose viewers to inappropriate and dangerous behaviors when playing with others online, especially those older than you.

It is important to be aware of the negative effects that gaming entertainment can have on your mental and spiritual health, such as the following:

- Addiction,
- Increased aggression and
- Exposure to sexually explicit content.

## A. ADDICTION

While gaming can be a fun and beneficial form of entertainment (depending on the game), too much of a good thing can be bad for you. A study found that adolescents are spending more than one-third of their day using some kind of media, including gaming.<sup>26</sup> Even your generation agrees – a quarter of adolescents (26%) believe they spend too much time playing video games.<sup>25</sup>

This takes away from engaging in other forms of entertainment, like playing sports, crafting or reading, and it can also negatively impact productivity in your academics and family life. It may even prevent you from doing your religious duties, like praying and reading Qur'an.

Ibn Al Qayyim said,  
“Losing time is harder than death, as losing time  
keeps you away from Allah ﷻ and the Hereafter,  
while death keeps you away from the worldly life and your people”.<sup>27</sup>

If you are playing video games for long periods of time and having trouble stopping, it may be a sign of addiction. Skipping prayers, avoiding family obligations and feeling distracted and irritated when away from gaming are all signs of an addiction.

### What Are the Risks of a Gaming Addiction?

Researchers have found that gaming addicts develop changes in their brain associated with feeling pleasure similar to other addictive disorders, like gambling.<sup>28</sup> In fact, game makers design their games similar to the way slot machines are designed, by instilling a variable reward schedule into their video games.<sup>29</sup>

This can lead players to seek this reward for longer periods of play time. It may even stop you from sleeping and eating. Dr. Michael Rich, a pediatrician and director of the Clinic for Interactive Media and Internet Disorders at Boston Children's Hospital, said about the addictive effect of *Fortnite: Battle Royale* in his young patients, “They are not sleeping. They are not going to school. They are dropping out of social activities. A lot of kids have stopped playing sports, so they can do this”.<sup>29</sup> In severe cases, youth are even losing too much weight because they refuse to stop playing to eat.



According to the psychiatric manual for mental disorders, gaming addiction is called **Internet Gaming Disorder**. Some symptoms include the following:<sup>30</sup>

- Thinking about gaming all or a lot of the time
- Feeling bad when you cannot play
- Needing to spend more time playing to feel good
- Not being able to quit or play less
- Not wanting to do other things that you used to like
- Having problems at school, work or home because of your gaming
- Playing despite these problems
- Lying to people close to you about how much time you spend playing
- Using gaming to ease bad moods and feelings

Gaming addiction is not very common, affecting about 1-9% of all gamers, and it might be hard to recognize on your own.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, ask your family and friends if they notice these symptoms in you.

### **How Can I Protect Myself from Gaming Addiction?**

Some tips to protect yourself from becoming addicted or overusing video games include:

1. Setting time limits for playing and sticking to them.
2. Keeping phones and other gadgets out of the bedroom, so you will not play into the night.
3. Scheduling activities to do every day, such as exercising.
4. Remembering Allah ﷻ and your purpose in life. If video games are taking you away from prayer or family responsibilities, then remove them from your life altogether.

## **B. INCREASED AGGRESSION**

While some video games can provide benefits when used in moderation, most of the popular games emphasize violent themes that can negatively impact you no matter how much time you play. Many promote criminal behavior, including killing people and animals and disrespecting authority and the law. Additionally, due to their increased sophistication, violent scenes have become extremely graphic and realistic.

### **How Do Violent Video Games Affect My Mental Health?**

Exposing yourself to violent media as a form of entertainment can have dangerous effects on your mental health, such as the following:

1. **It can lead to aggressive behavior.** A study with more than 17,000 adolescents found that playing violent video games leads to increased physical aggression over time.<sup>31</sup> For example, *Grand Theft Auto*, *Call of Duty*, and *Manhunt* have been found to increase your chances of fighting or hitting a non-family member.<sup>31</sup>

2. **It can make you numb to violence.** Youth who played violent games compared to those who did not were less likely to aid an injured individual, rated violent acts less seriously and were desensitized to hearing fights.<sup>32</sup>

This is especially the case with first-person shooter games. A **First-Person Shooter Game** is where you view the actions and killings through the eyes of the character you are controlling. These games are actually used in combat training by real soldiers as a warfare tactic to dehumanize its enemies. A study found that off-duty soldiers played first-person shooter games to help keep them in the mindset because it felt like real-life combat.<sup>33</sup> One Iraq war veteran described *Call of Duty* video games as “intensive and highly realistic approaches to tactical combat”.<sup>34</sup>



3. **It can lead to engaging in dangerous behavior.** Players of violent video games are at greater risk of engaging in dangerous behaviors, such as reckless driving, binge drinking, smoking, unsafe sex and even murder. For example, the 1999 school shooting caused by two teenagers at Columbine High School has been connected with their playing of the first-person shooting computer game, *Doom*.<sup>31</sup> (It is important to note that such acts are the sole responsibility of those involved, and video games cannot be used as an excuse for their behavior. Research has only found that violent video games and risky behavior are connected but not the cause).

4. **It can lead to behavioral problems.** Players may develop a mindset that violence is an acceptable form of problem solving.<sup>32</sup> It can also lead to poor anger control.

## Understanding Anger in Islam

The feeling of **Anger** is a natural emotion. It is acceptable to feel angered by people or things that happen, but how you choose to express your anger can be a problem.



Losing control of your anger is similar to being intoxicated – you say things you would never say and do things you would never do. It is like an out-of-body experience. Once that anger starts to go away, you may feel immediate shock for what was said or did, regretting your behavior and needing to fix all the unnecessary damage caused.

'Ali bin Abi Talib (ؓ) said,  
“...The beginning of anger is madness and the end of it is regret,  
and anger cannot be justified by offering a humble apology.  
Calamities may come because of anger”.<sup>35</sup>

Having control of your anger and not allowing external sources to impact it is part of the Sunnah. This is a protection from acting in a way that can lead to hurting others or yourself.

A man said to the Prophet (ﷺ),  
“Advise me.  
He (ﷺ) said, ‘Do not get angry’.  
He repeated his question several times and he (ﷺ) said,  
‘Do not get angry’”.  
(Al Bukhari)

أَنَّ رَجُلًا قَالَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ! أَوْصِنِي. فَقَالَ ﷺ: «لَا تَغْضَبْ، فَرَدَّدَ مَرَارًا. قَالَ: لَا تَغْضَبْ». رواه البخاري

Some ways to control your anger in accordance to the Qur'an and Sunnah include the following:

**1. Protect yourself from Shaytan.** Say, "I seek refuge in Allah ﷻ from the rejected Shaytaan".

And if an evil whisper comes to you from Shaytaan [Iblis],  
then seek refuge with Allah... .  
(Surat Al A'raf 7:200)

﴿وَأَمَّا يَنْزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ نَزْغٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ...﴾ [سورة الأعراف 7:200]

**2. Remove yourself.** If you feel angered by someone or a situation, then walk away to calm down before responding.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said to us,  
"If one of you gets angry when he is standing,  
let him sit down, and if that does not take away his anger,  
then let him lie down".  
(Abu Dawud)

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «إِذَا غَضِبَ أَحَدُكُمْ وَهُوَ قَائِمٌ فَلْيَجْلِسْ، فَإِنْ ذَهَبَ عَنْهُ الْغَضَبُ، وَإِلَّا فَلْيَضْطَجِعْ». رواه أبو داود

**3. Perform wudu'.** Wudu' is a spiritual purification that can help you cool down physically and emotionally. If you are in an argument with someone and it's getting heated, change your position from standing to sitting to help you calm down.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Anger is the effect of Shaytan and Shaytan was created from fire and water extinguishes fire, so when one of you becomes angry, he should perform wudu'". (Abu Dawud)

قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «إِنَّ الْغَضَبَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ وَإِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ خُلِقَ مِنَ النَّارِ وَإِنَّمَا تَطْفَأُ النَّارُ بِالْمَاءِ فَإِذَا غَضِبَ أَحَدُكُمْ فَلْيَتَوَضَّأْ». رواه أبو داود

**4. Forgive others.** Give others excuses and forgive those who did or said something to make you angry. When you show mercy to others, you, too, will receive mercy by Allah ﷻ and people, *insha'Allah*.

The reward of an evil deed is its equivalent.  
But whoever pardons and seeks reconciliation,  
then their reward is with Allah.

He certainly does not like the wrongdoers. (Surat Ash-Shura 42:40)

﴿وَجَزَاءُ سَيِّئَةٍ سَيِّئَةٌ مِثْلُهَا فَمَنْ عَفَا وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَجْرُهُ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الظَّالِمِينَ﴾

[سورة الشورى 42:40]

5. **Mental illness.** Violence in video games can cause anxiety disorders due to the aggressive and stressful environments of the game.<sup>32</sup> In addition, it can give people ideas that this world is dark and evil, possibly leading to depression.

### **How Can I Protect Myself from the ill Effects of Violent Video Games?**

Violence is found in many sources, including video games, movies, television and even in books.

#### **Activity 4: Violence as a Form of Entertainment**

**With a partner, discuss if violence in media should be considered a form of entertainment.**

Even if violence in entertainment media does not make you harm others, that does not mean it has no harmful effects. It gives a subliminal effect on your perception of violence, which can impact your mental and spiritual health. It is important that you take time to evaluate how much of an impact this kind of entertainment has on you. Talk to your parents or a trusted adult to determine the extent of its influence on you, whether it should be cut out of your life, and if seeking professional help is necessary.

There are many video games available without violence that not only entertain you but also promote learning, problem solving and help with the development of fine motor skills and coordination. In addition, playing nonviolent video games with others can create a social atmosphere of laughter and excitement.

## **C. EXPOSURE TO SEXUALLY EXPLICIT CONTENT**

#### **Activity 5: Understanding the Video Game Rating System**

The **Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)** assigns the age and content ratings for video games.<sup>34</sup>

**Look up the ESRB and pay special attention to the rating for violence and sexually explicit content per age group.**



## How Does Sexual Content Compare in the ESRB Rating Categories?

According to the ESRB rating system, the amount and type of sexual content in video games varies by age as follows:<sup>34</sup>



### **ADULT** (ages 18 and up):

“Graphic Sexual Content” - explicit and/or frequent depictions of sexual behavior, nudity and/or depictions of sexual violence.



### **MATURE** (ages 17 and up):

“Sexual Content” - non-explicit depictions of sexual behavior, including partial nudity.



### **TEEN** (ages 13 and up):

“Suggestive Themes” - mild provocative references or materials.



### **EVERYONE** (ages 10 and up):

“Minimal Suggestive Themes”.

For the age group 10 and older, most video games include a sexual reference. The older the age bracket, the more often and explicit the sexual content. These ESRB ratings of sexual content are in accordance to secular rulings of what is considered age-appropriate. For Muslims, however, there is no rating category. Any sexual content, regardless of how old a person is, is unacceptable to watch.

Tell the believing men to lower their gaze [from looking at forbidden things],  
and protect their private parts [from illegal sexual acts, etc.].  
That is purer for them. Verily, Allah is All-Aware of what they do. (Surat An-Noor 24:30)

﴿قُلْ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ يَغُضُّوا مِنْ أَبْصَارِهِمْ وَيَحْفَظُوا فُرُوجَهُمْ ذَلِكَ أَزْكَى لَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا يَصْنَعُونَ﴾

[سورة النور 30:24]

It is also important to note that the average age of a gaming consumer is 31 years old.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, most video games are made for those over 18. Video games for a younger audience are not a priority since they do not offer a large profit to the gaming market. Therefore, gaming creators prefer to focus their efforts on making the majority of video games for adults.<sup>32</sup> They are more advanced in graphics and storyline, as well as heavily advertised.

As a result, they tend to be more enticing to the younger audience. A survey revealed that 50% of surveyed parents allow their kids to play Mature-rated games. In fact, since 2009, the top selling video games have all been rated Mature.<sup>32</sup> And for those kids who are not allowed to purchase them, they can still be easily accessed online.

## How Does Sexual Content in Video Games Affect My Mental Health?

The unhealthy effects that pornography has on your mental health were previously discussed. However, sexually explicit content in video games has a unique theme – it centers around degrading females.

Female sexual content in video games entertains players, motivates their characters and is even used as rewards or prizes for winning. This can lead to unhealthy views towards women in the following ways:

**1. Sexism.** **Sexism** means to discriminate or stereotype a gender. Certain video games promote the stereotype that women are sexual objects. More than 80% of female characters in video game magazines are portrayed as either sexualized, scantily clad or overtly beautiful, with more than 25% of the characters fitting all three categories.<sup>36</sup>

A study examined how these types of images can influence the underlying attitudes of gamers. With more than 13,000 adolescents, it found a link between video game exposure and sexism.<sup>36</sup> For example, *Grand Theft Auto* gives players few options on how to interact with female characters. Lead researcher, Douglas Gentile said, “You can pay them for sex, you can look at them or you can kill them. This is an extremely limited view of the value of women”.<sup>36</sup>

**2. Misogyny.** **Misogyny** is a dislike or prejudice against women. For example, male characters appear muscular and strong, which gives the idea that they are physically capable of fighting and defeating their enemies. This can lead gamers to think that female characters are less capable of carrying out missions. “It is possible that the participants rated sexualized female characters to be less physically-able because female characters in video games appeal to men and often include potentially degrading qualities”.<sup>37</sup>

There are also less female-dominant roles in video games. In a 2009 study analyzing 60

video games, there were 489 individual characters with identifiable genders. 419 of them were male, and the remaining 70 were female.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, a 2016 study found that out of Nintendo's 47 games, 92% of the characters were male and only about 8% were female.<sup>36</sup> "It was found that females are represented far less often in video games and when they are represented, they are often highly sexualized compared to their male counterparts".<sup>37</sup>



These harmful views of women are not exclusive to video games but are also found throughout entertainment media, such as advertisements, music, television and movies. For example, popular superhero series portray males as capable and powerful and females in distress. If the hero is female, she is usually dressed promiscuously and used for the purpose of sexual appeal.

## Sexism and Misogyny in Music

While there may be different religious opinions about music, musical instruments and such, what is clear is that most contemporary music is likened to audio pornography. It not only has bad language but just like video games, it often centers its themes around misogyny and sexism. These types of lyrics are found in several different music genres, including the following:

**RAP MUSIC:** Some rap lyrics are sexually explicit and graphic, limiting women to objects of male desire and, in some cases, even justifying violence against them.<sup>37</sup>

**ROCK MUSIC:** A majority (57%) present women in a "condescending" manner (e.g., unintelligent or as sex objects), a fifth place them as subservient or domestic and 8% display male violence against women.<sup>39</sup>

**COUNTRY MUSIC:** A study of 203 country music videos featuring male performers found that two-thirds devalued women or portrayed them in a condescending manner or in traditional roles.<sup>39</sup>

## Activity 6: The Ruling of Music in Islam

Music is a popular form of entertainment, especially in the West. The Islamic rulings of music involve different opinions on its permissibility, when it can be listened to and what instruments are permissible. However, it's important to note that there is a consensus among Muslim scholars on the impermissibility of songs that carry messages or meanings contradicting Islamic morals and ethics. Lyrics that promote indecency, violence, substance abuse, or anything else prohibited in Islam are to be avoided. Discuss this topic with your family and a scholar to learn more.

A healthy alternative to music that is uplifting and can bring you closer to Allah ﷻ is **nasheed** نشيد. Nasheed is vocal music that is either sung a cappella or accompanied by percussion instruments, such as the *daf* دف.

What are other alternatives to listening to mainstream music?

These depictions in the entertainment media can strongly affect the way you think about gender roles. For women, it can make them think that their worth is only based on looks and that attention from men stems from sexualizing oneself with provocative clothing and seductive behavior.

As for males, it can lead them to think that masculinity or "being a man" means to objectify women, subordinate them or take advantage of them. This creates a sense of arrogance and pride in the male creation. To believe that Allah ﷻ created men to be better than women denies the true creation of humans.

Oh mankind, reverend your guardian Lord who has created you from a single person and has created his mate of like nature... . (Surat An-Nisa' 4:1)

﴿يَتَأْتِيهَا النَّاسُ انْتَفُوا رَبَّكُمْ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَخَلَقَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا...﴾ [سورة النساء: 1:4]

Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while a believer – We will surely cause him to live a good life, and We will surely give them their reward according to the best of what they used to do. (Surat An-Nahl 16:97)

﴿مَنْ عَمِلْ صَالِحًا مِّنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ أُنْثَىٰ وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَلَنُحْيِيَنَّهٗ حَيٰوةً طَيِّبَةً وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ﴾

[سورة النحل: 16:97]

## How Can I Protect Myself from Being Influenced by the Sexual Content in Video Games (And Other Entertainment Media)?

Even though certain activities are enjoyable and may seem harmless, it is important to keep in mind how they can affect you internally. Negative influences can stay with you

long-term, affecting your thoughts and your relationships with the opposite gender. Additionally, Islam emphasizes the importance of seeking knowledge and understanding the world around us. This includes understanding the influence of media on your perceptions and behavior. Muslims are encouraged to critically evaluate media content, recognize stereotypes and resist harmful influences. This aligns with the Islamic tradition of emphasizing knowledge and wisdom.



Certainly, Islam provides a comprehensive way of life, offering guidelines for various aspects, including media consumption. Some ways to protect yourself from this include the following:

- 1. Check the ESRB ratings to select appropriate games – both in content and level of development.** The ESRB ratings can be a practical tool for Muslims to select games that are free from content that might be inappropriate or against Islamic principles, such as explicit violence, sexual content, gambling, or elements that promote *shirk* شرك (association with Allah ﷻ). Do the same for other types of media as well.
- 2. Choose video games that offer entertainment without sacrificing your moral values.** A guide is to choose video games you would be comfortable playing with your parents or a younger sibling, or at least in a public area of your home, instead of in your bedroom.
- 3. Learn how media can influence your understanding of males and females.** Check out documentaries that show the effects of advertisement and media on the status of women and how it influences you.