

USE AND OVERUSE OF VIDEOGAMES



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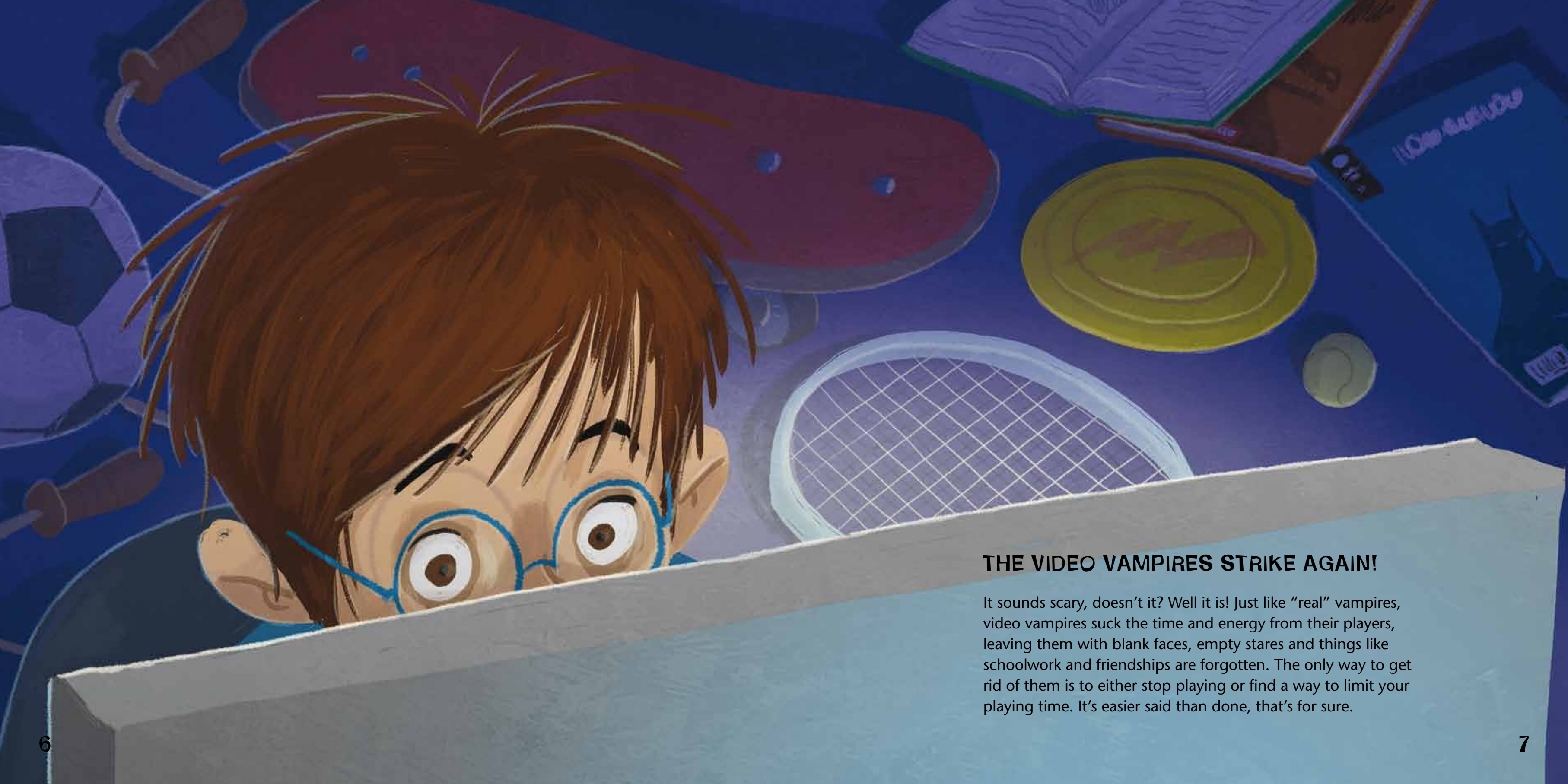
**TOO MUCH OF ONE THING
IS NOT ALWAYS GOOD FOR YOU!**

Nobody knows better than Ryland Wallis that too much of one thing is not always good for you, even chocolate. If you eat too much chocolate, you're going to get a stomachache. And what about staying out in the sun too long? You guessed it, sunburn. Ouch! But for Ryland it wasn't too much candy or too much sun, it was too much time spent doing one thing: Playing video games.

RYLAND BECOMES OBSESSED!

Yes, you heard me, video games. Can you believe it? You name it, Ryland played it and then he played it again and again and again. He couldn't stop. In fact, that was all that Ryland thought about. He thought about it at school, at the dinner table and even late at night when everybody else was sleeping. It was official: Video games were taking over his mind, his life and everything that mattered to him. Ryland Wallis had become a victim of the video vampire syndrome!!!





THE VIDEO VAMPIRES STRIKE AGAIN!

It sounds scary, doesn't it? Well it is! Just like "real" vampires, video vampires suck the time and energy from their players, leaving them with blank faces, empty stares and things like schoolwork and friendships are forgotten. The only way to get rid of them is to either stop playing or find a way to limit your playing time. It's easier said than done, that's for sure.

THE SMALL TOWN OF MONAVILLE...

So you ask yourself, what happened to Ryland Wallis? Well let me tell you... It all started in the little town of Monaville. Now this wasn't any old town; it was a neighborhood where everybody knew everybody's name, including the mailman's. It was a place where kids gathered together to play tag or hide and go seek or to tend to their community garden. And when Ryland's birthday finally arrived, all the kids in the neighborhood were invited to his party.





THE MYSTERIOUS GIFT

Ryland's birthday party was terrific! There were balloons, games, cake and ice cream and lots of presents. Mysteriously, however, after all the gifts were opened, one more present with Ryland's name on it was found in the backyard. It said "To Ryland, From V." Ryland did not know anybody whose name started with the initial "V" but he decided to open the gift anyway. Inside the box was a video game called "The Ultimate Challenge."



THE VIDEO VAMPIRES ARE BROUGHT TO LIFE!

Up until then, Ryland never really thought much about video games. He was too busy with his schoolwork, friends and sports teams to think of anything else. But Ryland’s curiosity got the best of him and he decided to give it a try. Little did he know that the Video Vampires were lurking, waiting for him to bring them to life. And that’s just what he did; he plugged in the game and began to play.

THE VIRTUAL WORLD IS A DANGEROUS PLACE!

It was just a matter of time and Ryland Wallis was hooked. He became possessed with the technological world of endless challenges, completing levels and the ongoing battle to win. As soon as he picked up the controller to play, nothing around him mattered anymore; it all suddenly disappeared and became invisible. The only thing he could see was the video screen and the world behind the screen.



THE VIDEO VAMPIRES HAVE SUCCEEDED!

Of course, this made the Video Vampires very happy because the more time that Ryland spent in front of a video screen with a controller in his hand, the more powerful the vampires got and the harder it was to get rid of them. Ryland had turned into a zombie during the day and a crazed, bugged eyed video game competitor the rest of the time.



NOTHING IMPORTANT MATTERS ANYMORE

Nobody saw what was happening to Ryland until things started to fall apart. First Ryland's schoolwork was not getting done and his marks began to suffer. Yes that's right, Ryland went from an A student to a student who was failing. And to make matters worse, he let down his soccer and baseball team because he decided that playing his video games was more important than showing up to practice and even games.





WINNING GAMES BUT LOSING FRIENDS...

It was clear; Ryland had become obsessed. In fact Ryland had become so obsessed that he could not stop playing long enough to go to the neighborhood festival with his friends like he did every year. After that, his friends stopped calling on him; he was alone. It was just him and the Video Vampires! Just the way they liked it!

OLD AND ALONE!

Sadly, time began to slide by and before Ryland knew it, several years had past and the town of Monaville had changed. All of the children had grown up and moved away except for Ryland; he stayed glued to his remote control. Not only had Ryland grown old playing video games, but everything that mattered to him had disappeared. His teachers, his friends and even his family had given up on him. The only friends he had were in his virtual world. Was it too late to change the past?



WAKE UP!

"Wake up Ryland, it's time to get up" Mrs. Wallis said as she kissed his cheek. "It's your birthday!!!"

Startled, Ryland sat up and ran to the mirror. He was expecting to see himself old and covered in cobwebs with a video controller in his hand but he didn't; it was just a dream. He was relieved!

"Happy Birthday Ryland," his mother said as she handed him his present. "Go ahead, open it!"

A STRANGE COINCIDENCE...

Ryland carefully unwrapped the gift. He couldn't believe his eyes. His mother had just given him the same video game that he had dreamt about that night. Ryland looked around his room in fear; he knew that the Video Vampires were waiting to make their move. But not this time, Ryland thought.



SAVED BY THE TIMER!

As Ryland stood up to give his mother a hug, something else fell out of the package and onto the floor. It was a timer.

"What's this?", Ryland asked.

Mrs. Wallis said "Whenever you play any video game, you have to set the timer. When the timer goes off, that means that it's time to put the game away. Ok?". And Mrs. Wallis added very seriously, "Oh yes, and one more thing. This timer will help keep those Video Vampires away!". She said with a wink. "We wouldn't want them to take away all of your time."

Ryland's mouth dropped open! Maybe he hadn't dreamt it after all!



PARENT'S GUIDE

We live in a world surrounded by technology and as a result our children are exposed to a variety of electronic gadgets from an early age. The issue however, is not the use of these devices rather than overuse.

Just think of all the electronic gadgets we use everyday. Between computers, ipods, cell phones and even video games, we very rarely spend a day without using one or all of them. Whether our use is for business, or pleasure/entertainment, we rely on technology to make our lives a little easier and a little bit more interesting.

As discussed in the book, when children become preoccupied with video games by spending excessive amounts of time playing, they tend to neglect other important things in their lives and consequently the things that matter begin to fall to the way side.

It does not take much for any individual, children and adults alike, to become "obsessed" with video games. The driving force to keep playing is usually one's desire to master a certain level and a competitive nature to win. Each time a player is successful, he feel rewarded and is evidently inspired to keep playing, therefore feeding into the cycle of obsession.

As a parent I understand how easy it is for us to rely on electronic technology such as television or video games as a means of keeping our children entertained while we attempt to get things done around the house or even for a break. Let's not fall into this trap as it is very difficult to get out of it.

Many concerns arise when children begin to overuse video games. For example, the lack of physical activity is a big concern. Children who spend an excessive amount of time sitting down and playing video games, not only become lethargic or zombie-like but they don't get the exercise they need to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Perhaps the world of technology is a contributing factor when it comes to the increase in childhood obesity within our society. However, this can change, but it is up to us to make a difference.

Another concern is the importance children place on mastering each challenge. This inadvertently affects the amount of time children invest in trying to win. As a result, things that were once considered important such as schoolwork, friendships and staying active become forgotten and neglected.

Just like many things in life, video games should be played in moderation. Too much of anything (whether things that are considered good for us or not) is never a good idea. It is therefore up to us to monitor the amount of time our children spend playing video games and help them to exercise moderation. Using a timer to help facilitate this is not only useful in keeping playtime in check but also to prevent overuse.

Technology will always be a part of our lives. We need to embrace it with caution while at the same time providing our children with the opportunity to enjoy its many benefits.

Remember, the video vampires are always lying in waiting for their next victim. BEWARE!





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