

Can video games teach angry kids emotional control?

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Though video games are often blamed for instilling violent instincts in children, the Boston Children's Hospital has developed a game that is designed to do just the opposite.

In a recent study published in *Adolescent Psychiatry*, the children's hospital described a game that they believe will be able to teach children with severe anger issues how to maintain an acceptable level of calm during stressful or angering situations.

The game, called "RAGE Control", was developed by Jason Kahn, PhD, and Joseph Gonzalez-Heydrich, MD, at Boston Children's Hospital when the team realized that though children with severe psychological issues didn't want to participate in psychotherapy sessions, they were enthralled by video games.

The game is pretty simple. The kids must destroy enemy space ships and avoid shooting down ships designated as the good guys. But there is a catch. Each child is connected to a finger monitor, which tracks the player's heart rate. If the rate goes above a predetermined level, indicating the child has become angry or overly excited, the computer changes the game so the player is no longer able to shoot at enemy ships. The basic message? If you want to win the game, you have to maintain your cool.

The study looked at two groups of children between the ages of 9 and 17 admitted to the Psychiatry Inpatient Service. All the of the children had high levels of anger and a normal IQ.

While both groups of children received normal treatments of therapy, relaxation techniques and social skills training, one group was allowed to play RAGE control for 15 minutes at the end of each session. After five days, the group that was allowed to play the video game were "significantly better at keeping their heart rate down" and "showed clinically significant decreases in anger scores on the [State Trait Anger Expression Inventory-Child and Adolescent](#) [1]", which, according to the hospital

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focuses on intensity of anger over a given period of time, frequency of anger, and expression of anger. They also showed a decrease in suppressed anger.

Though more testing is required, the researchers found the results encouraging.

“Kids reported feeling better control of their emotions when encountering day to day frustrations on the unit,” says Ducharme. “While this was a pilot study, and we weren’t able to follow the kids after they were discharged, we think the game will help them control their emotions in other environments.”

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[1] <http://childrenshospital.org/newsroom/Site1339/mainpageS1339P913.html>