

VIDEO  
L.R. Koop

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Mr. Leo Freihofer  
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Dear Leo:

Your letter about your problems with video games concerns me. Too much of almost anything, even if it is normally safe, can be dangerous to your health. Addiction causes physical and psychological (mental) dependence. People who have problems with substances usually thought of as addicting -- alcohol, drugs, tobacco -- can go to organizations already set up to handle their problem. These people all agree that the addict must realize that he has a problem (and you've already taken the first step).

Leo, I don't know if you just have a strong habit or are actually addicted. Neither do I know about any organizations for people who are "addicted" to video games. But I do suggest that you talk to some people who may even be better -- your parents. Please be patient with them; as you have noted, people who aren't addicted may have trouble understanding what the addict goes through. They want the very best for you, and I think that they will listen to you if they know that you really mean it when you tell them your problem. They are really very special people, you know. I think they will understand and help you.

So, go back to your parents before trying anything else; they care a lot about you. As a second choice, your school counselor might be able to help you. Trying to keep it to yourself is probably the hardest way to go; you need somebody to talk with so they can encourage you. But, if you decide to go it alone, you might try totally ignoring the games, and

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substituting something else -- reading, perhaps -- when you feel the urge to play a video game. Don't even watch others play until you feel you have your problem under control. Even then you might have to be careful or else it will start all over again. (A really hard test would be to allow yourself to play only one game a day.)

I hope you overcome your problem.

Thanks for writing.

Sincerely,

C. Everett Koop, M.D.  
Surgeon General

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