

Are 3-D Movies & Games Safe for Kids?



Wednesday at 4:00 PM

HEALTH CHECK

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1



From **3-D movies** to **video games**, kids are inundated with opportunities to feel more immersed in their entertainment than ever. If you've watched your child sit wide-eyed through a feature film, those red-and-blue glasses firmly in place, you may have thought, *Wow, that 3-D stuff seems to have really sucked him in...* That's when a tiny little voice in the back of your mind might start wondering whether the push into the third dimension may be having some nefarious long-term impact on your child's eyes, brain, or all of the above.

Recent research by Ohio State University suggests there *is* reason to worry: when 194 college students played *Grand Theft Auto IV* for 15 minutes -- some on a 3-D screen with glasses, others in 2-D -- those who'd played the video game in 3-D felt angrier afterward than those who'd done 2-D. The reason? Three-D games felt more "real," so **they elicited stronger emotions**. While these findings are preliminary, they have other experts worried as well.

"From my clinical perspective, you are likely to get more violent kids after playing 3-D violent video games than 2-D," explains Charlotte Reznick, PhD, author of *The Power of Your Child's Imagination*. "It's similar to when people are more traumatized being closer to a disaster (living in the area of an earthquake, tornado, flood) versus seeing it on TV (a step down) or reading about it in the newspaper (least traumatized). With 3-D video games, kids are 'closer' to the trauma because they are closer to the action. They actually feel they are *in* the action."

More from *The Stir*: [Why I Let My Kids Play Video Games](#)

As if that weren't worrisome enough, 3-D games and movies may have **unsettling effects on kids' vision too**.

"Three-D technology can be visually stressful, which has caused concern about children using the technology due to their developing visual skills," says Dr. Nathan Bonilla-Watford, an optometrist at [VSP Vision Care](#). Some kids may even experience "vision sickness," characterized by blurry or strained vision. The good news? Vision sickness is generally a short-term problem that will disappear once your child stops using 3-D technology. What's more, 3-D can actually unearth *other* undetected vision problems your child has been struggling with.

"According to the American Optometry Association, about one in four children might have vision problems that can be detected by watching 3-D content," adds Linda Chous, chief eye care officer for UnitedHealthcare. These problems include: amblyopia (lazy eye), strabismus (misaligned eyes), or convergence insufficiency (difficulty turning the eyes in when looking up-close).

So if your child is showing warning signs such as **red eyes, eye rubbing, and squinting** when watching 3-D images, you should schedule a vision checkup to check for these specific issues.

But don't cancel the family trip to the movies just yet.

"The optometric community agrees that 3-D movies and games don't cause permanent damage to your eyes, and are safe for children to use in moderation," says Bonilla-Watford, who advises kids to take breaks every so often. "One rule of thumb is the 20-20-20 rule," she says. "Every 20 minutes, look 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds and give your eyes a break!"

Same goes for the psychological impact of 3-D: used in moderation -- i.e., one movie every few weeks -- it's probably okay, *provided* it's non-violent.

"For movies it really depends on the movie," says Reznick, adding that parents should use the movie rating (PG or R) as their guide. "Most 3-D movies aren't violent and don't require kids to be interacting, like the video games do. That said, movies are longer than TV shows and video games, so I'd **take any violent 3D movies off the table** until they are 17."

And even if your teen is begging for some hot new 3-D video game, don't feel like you have to bar them completely.

"The truth is sometimes teens make a good case for their independence," says Reznick. "If you are inclined to acquiesce, then I'd definitely have some guidelines around playing. For example, limit time spent to 30 minutes of video games twice a week, with some physical exercise right after to get their aggressive impulses out in a healthier manner."