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Video Game Violence: What the Science Shows

The Supreme Court decided today that it's unconstitutional for the state of California to bar minors from buying violent video games ([here's the WSJ story](#)). The 2005 law, which never took effect, violates children and adolescents' right to freedom of expression, [the court ruled](#) by a 7-2 margin.

But do video games actually provoke aggressive feelings, reduce activity in the frontal lobe of the brain and promote violent behavior, as the California law asserts? (Justice Stephen Breyer believes so; [his dissenting opinion](#) includes an extensive bibliography of academic literature on the topic.)



Many academics and medical professionals say yes, though [not all agree](#). The [American Academy of Pediatrics came out with a statement](#) in 2009 concluding that exposure to different forms of media, including video games but also TV, movies and music, “can contribute to aggressive behavior, desensitization to violence, nightmares and fear of being harmed.” The American Psychological Association takes a similar stance [in a resolution on violence in video games](#) and advocates reducing the amount of violence in them.

[Craig A. Anderson](#), a professor at Iowa State University who has extensively studied video games and violence, is less equivocal. In a [FAQ about violent video games](#) on his website, Anderson states that there is a “significant relation between exposure to media violence and aggressive behavior” and the relationship is causal.

He also [has some recommendations for parents](#) about video games.

There's also been a lot of debate about whether excessive video game playing should be considered a mental illness or not. The [American Medical Association considered whether it should be considered an addiction](#) but concluded there's not enough research. Meantime, the [American Psychiatric Association is currently thinking about including internet addiction](#) in its new diagnostic manual.

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