



## **A FORTNITE GUIDE FOR PARENTS**

“Orange justice!” your daughter screams as you pour her morning glass of orange juice, followed by a display of crazy dance moves.

Sitting at “Parent Day” at school, your child’s teacher says “Brain Break” and immediately every child in the room jumps up and starts swinging their arms wildly as she plays a YouTube video called, “Everybody Floss”... true story!

Even at church, conversations between students of all ages and genders are centered around the newest weapons, the latest “skins,” and yes, even bragging about “kills.”

Fortnite is everywhere and has proven to be more than a game but rather, a cultural phenomenon. With close to 80 million people plugged into playing, spending an average of \$85 on “V-bucks” and “skins” on this free game, it’s influence has soared to epic proportions.

Even if you wanted to live under a rock, you would just be “bush camping,” because it is everywhere, including your family life. The

Battle Royale is no longer just a game as parents everywhere, maybe even in your home, are fighting to get their kids to put down the remote/device and come back to the real world.

So, let's "pop your shield," allow us to share some "heals," and see if we can help you have a few family "victory royales"!

## **Risks and Rewards**

What makes this game so exciting and addicting to players, especially young players? It is all about the "risks and rewards."

The human reward center of our brain (ventral striatum) is the area of the brain that is affected most by addictions. Just like anything else – from drugs to gambling to eating to playing games -our brain seeks to be rewarded.

During the brain's preteen and teenage years, this area is continually development and restructuring. A game like Fortnite and others like it can offer exciting risks and even more exciting rewards. The near wins, hidden treasures, and ultimate "jubilation" of the victory contribute to what keeps Fortnite popular with your child.

This is not a completely evil or negative thing, if you, as parents, are just aware of what is going on and the reason why it seems so addicting. Make sure to balance out the time they spend on virtual risk and rewards with real-world risks and rewards. This also can be a great time to teach self-regulation and self-awareness to your child, before other more dangerous things become "addicting."

## **Relatable Relationships**

Another feature that makes Fortnite so appealing and popular is that it is a group game that can be played with friends. It skyrocketed into popularity during the summer months when your child and others could not see each other. It was a way to still connect, play, and communicate with friends.

The game offers a mutual point of interest and gamers find community among players online and even offline. During the younger years of your child's life, relationships were arranged playdates by parents or based around proximity or neighborhood. In the late elementary years through teenage years, relationships are about mutual interests and personal connection.

Our brains are built for relationships, connection, and community. The tween and teen years are important times of social development, while at the same time insecurity presents itself. Just like any other social activity (sports team, music group, or club) where interest and activity are shared relationship dependency develops.

As parents, we can view this as negative or use it to our advantage to talk through real-world relationships and community; including the value of regular church community attendance. Your child needs and desires community around common interests to offer those types of opportunities.

## **Relevant Rules & Restrictions**

With the above being said, there is still a need for parents to have realistic rules and restrictions. A balanced approach that is neither over-reaction or under-reaction.

You don't have to join a Fortnite Parents Support Group (yes, they are a real thing) to form a family plan for some basic guidelines concerning spending, safety, and schedule.

- **Spending:** Fortnite is a free game, but there are plenty of ways to spend a lot, and we mean A LOT of real-world dollars on skins, weapons, and upgrades. Sit down together with your child, as a family, and agree on the spending limits. Consider opportunities to earn an extra allowance or ways to earn money to be spent on the game. Make sure to make it clear there is no spending without permission.
- **Safety:** Just like everything else online, and virtually everywhere, there is a dark side and a door for child-predators to try to misuse it. Take time as a family to talk through realistic and age-appropriate warnings about child-predators and the importance of not sharing private personal information. Even in the teenage years, your child still may need to be reminded of the old "stranger danger" side of our world.
- **Schedule:** Probably the most frustrating part of the Fortnite phenomenon is the amount of time kids are spending plugged in and obsessively playing. Again, sit down together and come up with an agreed schedule, times of day, and limits on how church time is spent on the game. Similar to spending limits, consider coming up with a "time allowance" that your child can earn bonus time, but doing something around the house or even going and doing physical exercise to counteract the time spent sitting. There are apps and parental controls you can set up.

Fortnite, while involving shooting and "kills" may be considered by some to be a violent video game, overall, it is cartoony and relatively less violent than most comparable games on the market. Like everything else, there are pros and cons, take the

time to decide as parents what your best path forward is going to be. Here is a great all-inclusive resource that you can look over, that we believe will help you greatly as you seek the real long-term victory in your home, over this temporary passing fad!

*Written DAN ISTVANI, our Lead Content Writer at Ministry to Parents and is also a 5th to 8th-grade pastor in Lancaster, PA. He has been working in youth ministry for over 24 years, serving churches in Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Wisconsin, Ohio, and Virginia. He is a speaker, ministry coach, and writer, contributing to a variety of other great ministry resources. He shares daily middle school ministry specific resources, and hints on his own site "The Middle Years" at [www.middleyearsministry.com](http://www.middleyearsministry.com).*