

## Screen Time, Devices & Gaming

*“It’s bad for children to spend too much time on devices, they need to be out, playing with friends and playing in the yard like I did when growing up.”*

*“It’s going to teach him/her really bad things if he/she is constantly on devices.”*

*“It can’t be good for their eyes to sit there for such long periods of time.”*

Although the above are common thoughts and feelings and heavily ingrained in society, they are not shared by the adult Autistic community. An Autistic person is quite different to a Neurotypical person for many reasons. This includes different interests, different needs, different sensory processing profiles and a different way of processing information. This is explained throughout this information sheet a little more

with the aim of helping you understand that screen time for Autistic children and adults is a lot more positive than what the world seems to believe.

**Autistic people generally don’t crave social experiences – this is different from craving play with other children though.**

Neurotypical (NT) children love the social and emotional warmth they get from engaging with other children. They love feeling wanted and love feeling loved by others. NT children will often talk about how close they ‘feel’ to others, and they need time with children to bond,

### Why autistic children may need more screen time



develop emotional maturity and feel emotionally validated by the connections they form. The Autistic person is more purpose-driven than this and craves people for 'playing with things', 'meeting a purposeful need', 'making playtime even more fun', 'creating noisy, fun environments' and 'sharing my special interests and teaching other people about things I love to talk about'. This is very different and although it's quite true that many Autistic children and adults still love to socialise, they generally don't do it for the same emotional reasons and thus don't 'need it' for their self-esteem, it's just another toy which is fun at times to play with.

**Autistic children and adults' sensory profile usually requires much greater extremes in seeking input and avoiding input than neurotypical children and adults.**

Many Autistic children and adults live with very complex sensory profiles which require extensive amounts of some sensory input and dramatically hate and avoid other types of sensory input. Just like a person who loves listening to a certain song on repeat, or needs excessive movement to feel settled, a person's sensory profile is so important and not a choice or a want, but instead, it's a NEED. A person cannot pretend their sensory needs don't exist, so it's important to help them meet them. If a person's sensory needs are not met, they will feel **dysregulated**. Feeling dysregulated means you don't feel OK and don't feel settled or right. People who are dysregulated are often erratic, with poor impulse control and might have ineffective or no verbal communication.

**Learning skills and being stimulated in social situations is awkward, hard, and sometimes torturous for Autistic people.**

Being on devices enables people to learn, to be entertained, to be excited, to be stimulated and to engage with others online, thus having friendships, learning to work as a team and learning how to make friends and feel valued as a team player and member. These experiences often are not available for Autistic people outside of an online environment due to the significant impact that social pressures and expectations limit their interest in engaging. Social trauma is also very common, and this can limit a person wanting to be around people at all. The online environment can enable learning of skills, interacting with other people, building friendships, and developing technical skills without the trauma of face-to-face contact or all other expectations and pressures already mentioned.

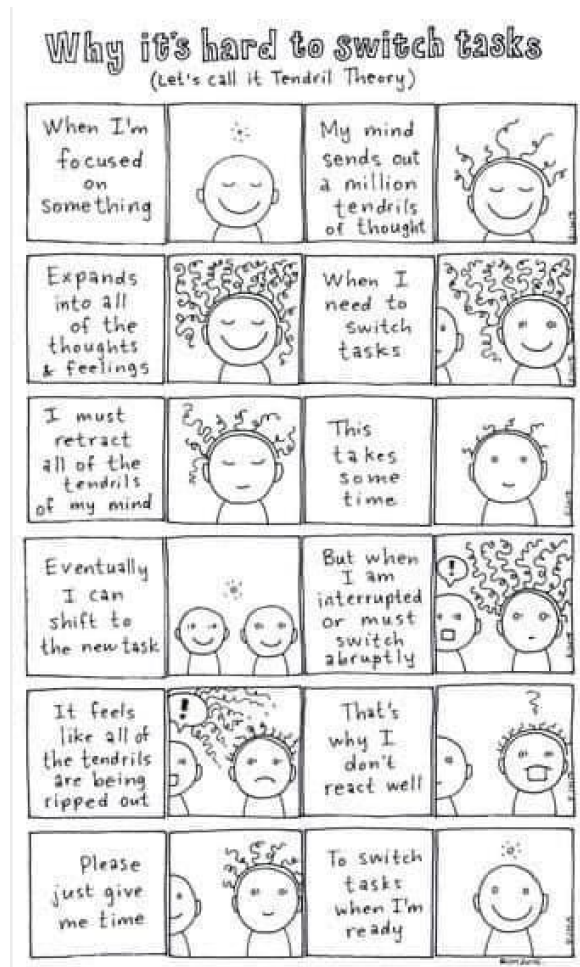
Feeling valued, clever, gaining a sense of achievement and being liked is a core and fundamental need for all people. Yet, if you aren't allowed to do gaming and you're Autistic, where do you get these needs met?

Being online and gaming provides an awesome opportunity for children and adults to have big wins, to develop their confidence and to be respected by their peers. In some situations, this is the only opportunity they have to meet their needs of feeling valued, wanted and needed by others in a way that means something to them. For quite a lot of Autistic children and adults, this need isn't met in any other way. They are often told they aren't being compliant, school is often a place of trauma, due to how often they get in trouble and cannot meet their sensory needs and even family events can be awful and traumatic due to the social expectations and pressures that exist.

### Transitions to doing something else is really hard and can be exhausting

One of the things that make some parents think that technology is bad is that changing to do something else is sometimes a very traumatic and exhausting experience. However, this is part of the nature of Autism and the way the brain can hyperfocus on certain tasks. It can be really hard to switch to something else and can feel like the person is experiencing significant loss and feeling very unsettled when this happens.

The Unsolved Problems and Strategies Information Sheet on Pathological Demand Avoidance provides a lot more information about how to help with transition planning.



The following was a Facebook Post by a group called Autability and speaks to some of the important reasons to not question parents who provide unlimited access to devices and don't impose restrictions.



**Autability**

25 June · 🌐



Screen time. A topic we hear about a LOT in parenting. Some People see it as a treat, some people see it as dangerous. But what if someone has a genuine need for it? Many autistic children and adults get lost in their electronics. It's helpful for so many reasons yet people will often judge parents who let their children use ipads, phones and laptops frequently because they don't understand what is happening when they use it. So what does screen time actually do for an autistic and/or ADHD child?

1. It helps them regulate. Watching familiar videos or listening to favourite songs over and over can actually be a form of stimming. It helps the child regulate their emotions, calm their brain and rest mentally from an arousing and stressful world.
2. Many autistic children will learn in their own way, in their own space, in their own time. Educational videos can often teach autistic children more than a teacher due to their surroundings at home being more comforting, familiar and quite than a classroom. My child learnt to read fluently by the age of 4 via his ipad.
3. It allows the child to block out stressful external stimuli such as hospital waiting rooms, supermarkets or restaurants. They absorb themselves in their game, maybe with headphones on, and means they can cope in an environment which would otherwise cause sensory overload.
4. Autistic children can find relationships in the outside world difficult. Many form friendships online or are able to communicate far easier with their friends online than in person. It can actually be their least stressful way of socialising. Of course, online safety measures must be put in place.
5. It can allow children to take part in family time. ADHD children can really struggle to watch a film without becoming bored. But if they have a tablet or phone to play on, they can happily take part in family movie nights as they can occupy that part of their brain that causes boredom or under stimulation. The same goes for board games and meals out.
6. Just like everyone else, autistic and ADHD children need time to rest even if they are regulated. Their version of rest often means occupying their brain with games. It's simply their version of chilling out.

As with all things, screen time shouldn't be overdone. Without a doubt though, autistic and ADHD children will need these tools more often to try and exist peacefully in this neurotypical world.

So if you see a parent allowing their children to play on a tablet on the dinner table, at a family outing or disapprove of the number of hours they have electronics for, stop and think first. You have no idea what the purpose is or what they might be trying to achieve.

# Why gaming is actually GOOD for Autistic children

from "Spectrum Gaming" (on You Tube)

This is based on the concept of 'neural harmony' which is a term designed to support people to find a common ground in understanding that we aren't all alike and this doesn't mean some are right or wrong. Neural harmony is about finding a safe space

to be different. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMV8XP7veaw&t=1s> (full clip here, my points below have been taken from Spectrum Gaming and the you tube clip referenced).



1. **Learning Social Skills:** Not everyone has the confidence to socialise. Many have had negative and difficult experiences with other children. They have also found certain environments to be a sensory overload and thus not wanted to socialise due to lights, noise, people, smells etc and they avoid social environments as a result of this. However, being online and gaming with other people is a great way to avoid many of these issues and still have a social world with other people who are all aligned to your interests. Gaming is a great place to be able to learn social skills without having to be face to face.
2. **Learning Key Life Skills:** Some games are very complex. Some are required you to pick characters using strategical thinking and requires team-based play. Communication

and teamwork is necessary in order to work together successfully. Some games may look like “just a shooting game” but the games in fact are about dynamic problem-solving, critical thinking, communication etc. Games like Minecraft are known to people as ‘killing zombies and building blocks’, but this game takes strategical planning, and some have to map out castles, work out resources, work in a team collaboratively and using appropriate time management skills and leadership skills. You get to learn great life skills in an environment which is safe and doesn’t have those social pressures or expectations that can be quite crippling for Autistic people. Lessons aren’t often learned in those environments as the social pressures are too overwhelming to actually benefit from the life lessons buried underneath. Confidence is also developed as a result of developing skills in these games and occupying prominent positions in some of these games. Learning life skills is optimised when you can learn these in an environment that makes you feel safe.

3. **Having a community:** “Ready Player 1” is a great example of this. There is a quote in that which is *“being human totally sucks most of the time, video games are the only thing that makes life bearable”*. In the real world you can sometimes feel so disabled and so terrible as a person who hasn’t achieved what others have and haven’t done the things that others can do and don’t have a job the same as others do and generally feel like they’ve let down everyone due to their lifestyle choices. In games however, you can be the leader of a clan and have people who rely on you, who look up to you, who celebrate you and tell you that you’re awesome and make you feel like you really know what you’re doing and can achieve such amazing things. You can have so many positive experiences. In some situations, this is the only thing that makes you feel like you’re succeeding. Another awesome quote from this movie is *“this is the oasis; we exist as nothing but raw personality in here”*. This speaks to the specific communities which share your special interests, and you can find entire communities which also love trains, or Pokémon or whatever your interest is. Third quote (in response to the comment about the oasis, in previous quote) *“I beg to differ, everything about our online personas is filtered through our Avatars which allows us to control how we look and sound to others. The oasis lets you be whoever you want to be and that is why everyone is addicted to it”*. Some people don’t have meaning and acceptance in normal life. They don’t feel they are meeting anyone’s

needs and really need and rely upon their online persona to feel validated and important.

4. **Sense of Achievement:** Not all games are easy, some take hundreds of hours to get anywhere or achieve anything. When you have a great win on a game, you get the most amazing feeling and rush. Spectrum Gaming explains some of the huge challenges he has overcome in gaming and how complex it can be for some people. Achieving success in some of these games has provided immense validation and support to feel so able and successful. Gaming enables that immense sense of achievement and provides gamers the opportunity to not only develop skills, but to benefit from the amazing feeling of doing things that you know others cannot. Happiness is not a stationary thing – you can't get to one place and then suddenly always be happy. If someone wins the lottery, they will be happy for a while, then get back to how they were. Happiness is about making progress, goals and achievement. Gamers should be proud of their achievements.
5. **Developing Friendships:** Some really great friendships are made through gaming. The author explains he made his first friend online and although he's still never met him, he's been great friends for years. Making a friend online enabled him to go into the real world and not be afraid of making friends in the real world. Being able to make online friendships is really important as they can be a first step of stepping out into the real world and making friends in real life as well.

Hobbies are important to people; gaming should be no different to this and needs to be respected as a very important hobby to those who love to do it.

Help us move the change to non -ABA strategies by adopting brain-based and sensory based integration interventions.  
Join FB group "The OTHER Way" to find the community pushing this movement.

[The OTHER way \(public group\) | Facebook](#) \*There are no copyright restrictions on this work and you're welcome to share it.