

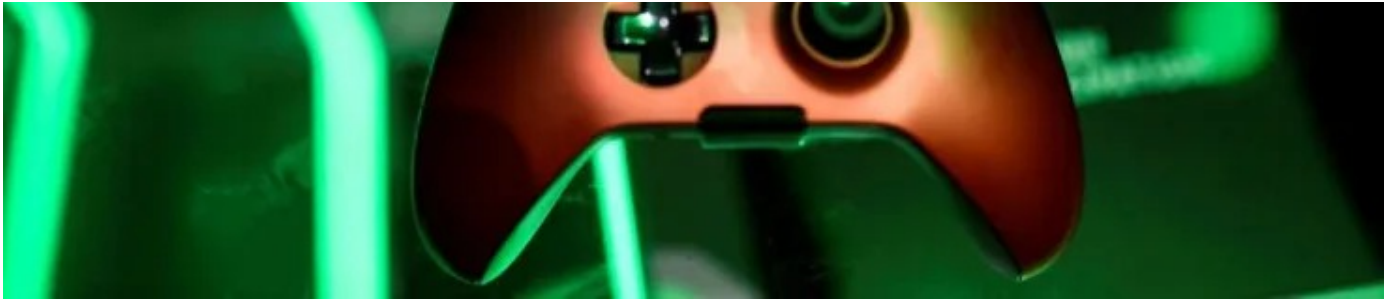


HEALTHY LIVING

# Gaming with Friends Can Combat Loneliness

Published Oct 16, 2020 10:56 AM EDT By Jenna Glatzer





Video games may have a good side to them. (PHOTO: AFP / INA FASSBENDER)



For decades, there's been a prevailing stereotype about gamers: they're recluses who lack social skills. But today's video games are often built for interaction; you can play with people in your house, or with friends you know, or with strangers around the world. With many games, there's a chat component that allows you to have conversations.

So, maybe it's time to update our mental pictures about gamers and recognize that video games can function in the exact opposite way that we've been warned about: They can help defeat loneliness.

Behavioral psychologist Geert Verheijen in the Netherlands has taken a special interest in studying gaming, as he's a gamer himself. He's conducted previous research on aggression and cognition as it relates to gaming. This time, he spent three years studying the gaming behavior of about 600 seventh to tenth graders—about equally split by gender—using questionnaires and an observational in-person study. He wasn't studying patients, but just seeking to get a read on “average, day-to-day gaming behavior of adolescents,” he said in an interview with *Medical Daily*.

What he discovered was this: Kids who play alone for long periods of time *do* feel lonelier, but when they play interactively with friends, the reverse is true. Especially during a pandemic when social interactions are harder to come by, that may come as welcome news for parents.

Long Island, NY mom Andrea Basile Cavese told *Medical Daily* she was worried when her son didn't have great experiences making friends in elementary school; he had a few in-school friends, but they didn't hang out outside of school. But he found "his people" when he started playing [Roblox](#) online. Over the years, those same kids have moved on to other games, and now they're building their own games. Andrea's son is now 14 years old, and he's the animator of the group's creations.

"I was always worried he was spending too much time on the computer, but now I see a possible future for him," she said.

She's happy that not only has he found a passion but he has a low-drama group of friends from all over the country who have formed a long-term bond and provided each other with a social outlet.

Alexander Kriss, PhD, a psychotherapist in New York, isn't surprised to hear that. The author of *The Gaming Mind: A New Psychology of Videogames and the Power of Play*, told *Medical Daily* he thinks gaming has always been unfairly maligned, especially after violent games became a convenient scapegoat to explain the 1999 Columbine High School shooting. (Why would boys become violent? It must be the videogames!) In reality, Dr. Kriss said, that has no scientific basis, and he's happy that we're finally starting to push back against the negative bias.

Limit-setting is an important part of parenthood, so of course there's a point where parents have to push back if gaming is just *too much*, even with the positives. But he suggested looking at gaming obsession as a symptom rather than the problem and trying not to see video games as "a threat that needs to be neutralized." Instead, consider it a window into human psychology.

Particularly now, when the pandemic has upended our lives, we should probably cut gaming some slack; it can be the best outlet we have to hang out with others.

"Social interaction comes with new rules, barriers and anxieties. Simple daily tasks are

infused with questions of risk and safety,” Dr. Kriss said. “Some activities and locations are simply inaccessible. Games can provide a way for children and adults to make contact with those important aspects of real life—social interaction, learning skills, accomplishing goals, having fun—while staying contained within the safety of virtual space.”

Socializing in games can offer more emotional possibilities than other forms of distanced interaction, he said, because “it brings players into a shared world separate from physical reality (and therefore apart from the pressures and anxieties of the pandemic era), where cooperation, competition, frustration, joy and so on can be experienced without becoming overwhelming. Playing a game is not a passive hobby; it’s interactive, meaning it can simulate aspects of being alive that may be otherwise unavailable right now.”

*Jenna Glatzer ( [www.jennaglatzer.com](http://www.jennaglatzer.com) ) is the author of more than 30 books, including Celine Dion’s authorized biography. She and her daughter live in New York.*

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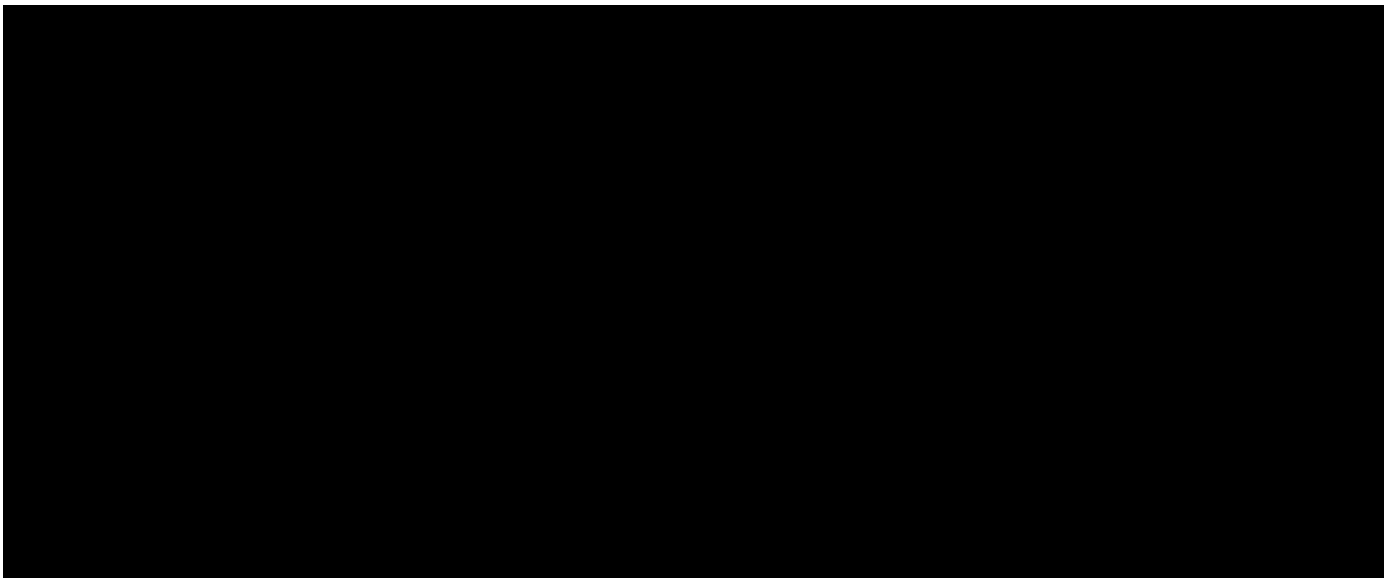
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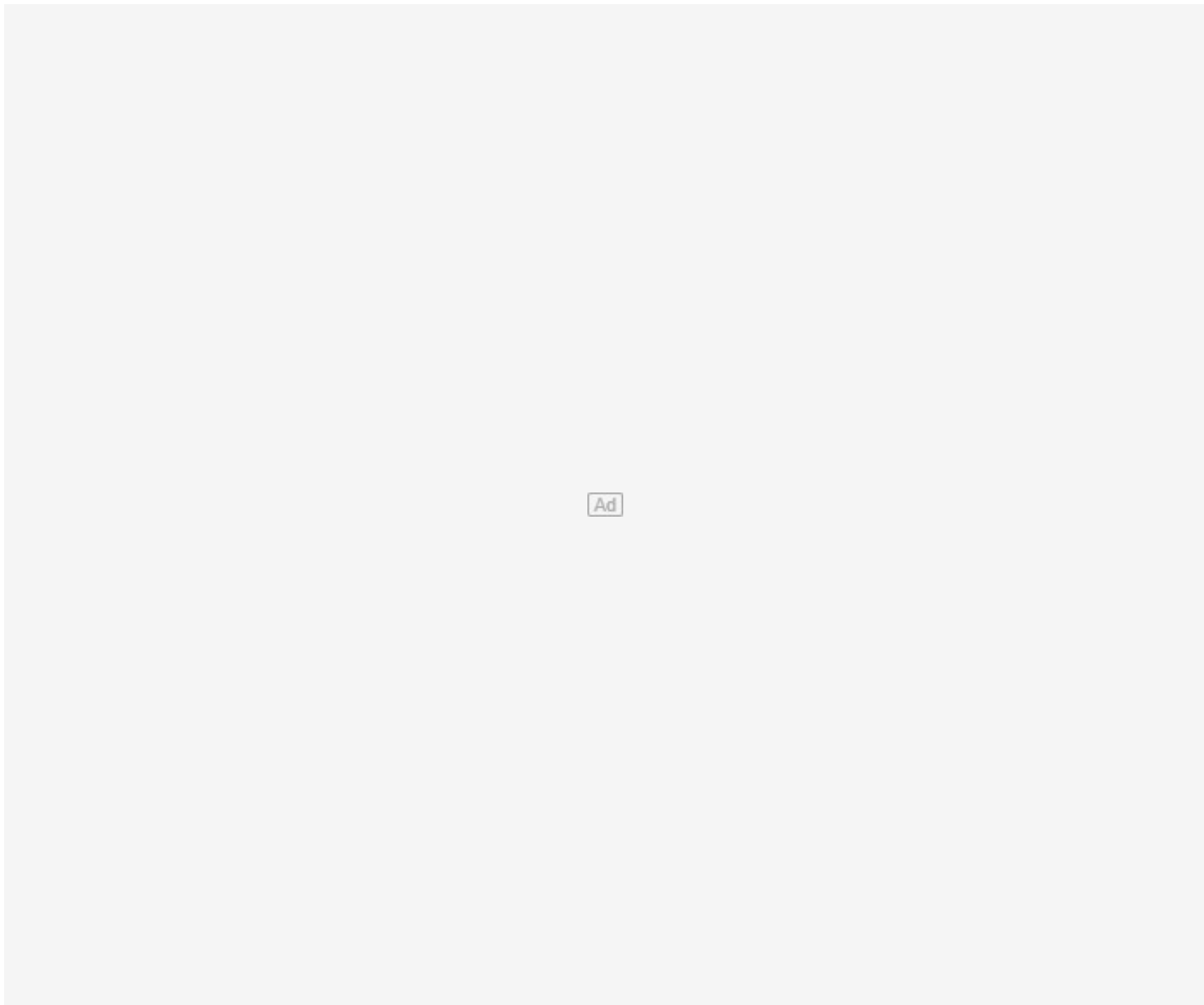
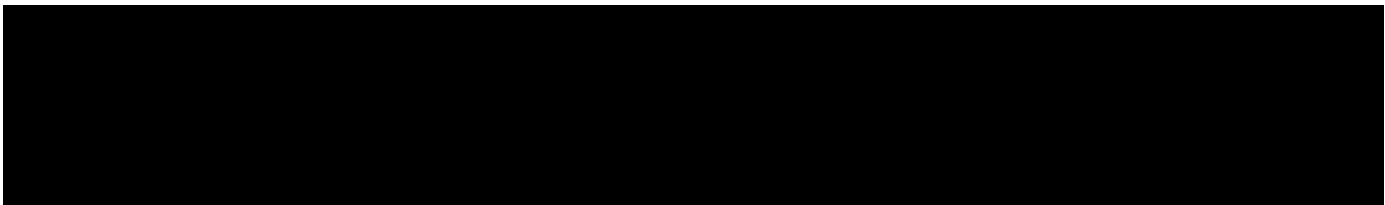


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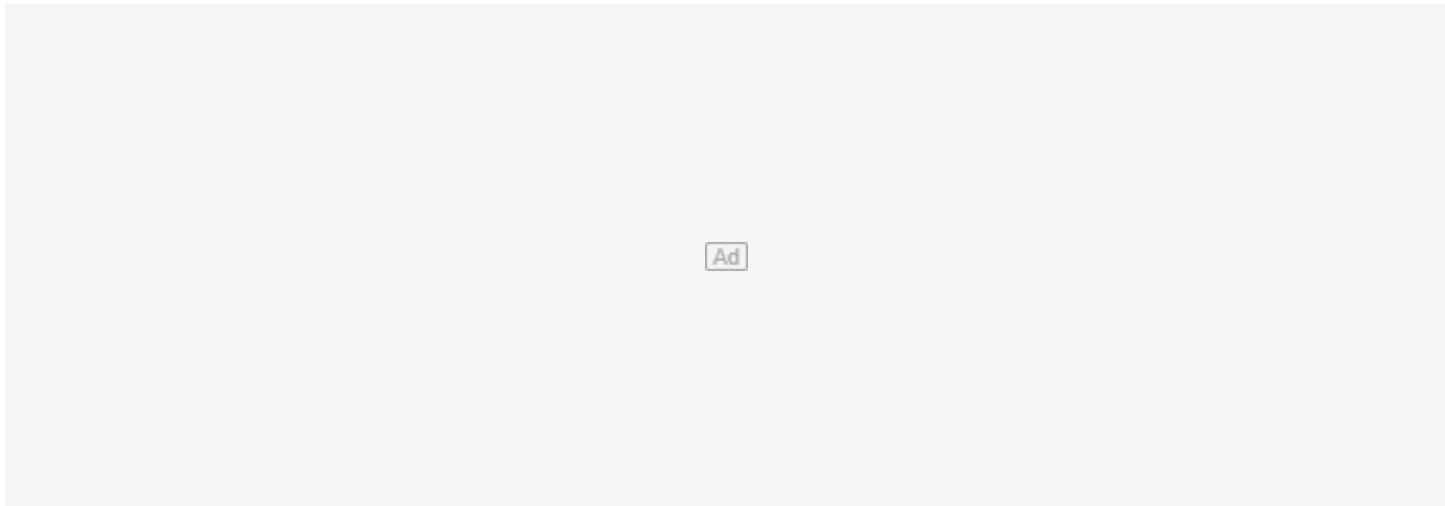


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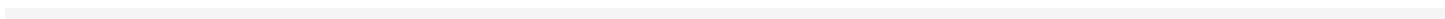




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## Conditions

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### A-C

Acne  
ADHD  
Alcoholism  
Allergies  
ALS  
Alzheimer's  
Amputation/Prosthetics

### D-F

Dementia  
Dengue Fever  
Dental Health  
Depression  
Dermatological Disorders  
Developmental Disorders  
Diabetes  
Diarrhea  
Digestive Disorders  
Down Syndrome





## G-I

Gastrointestinal Disorders  
Genetic Disorders  
Genetics  
Genital Warts  
Geriatric care  
Gerontology  
Gout  
Gum Disease  
Gynecological Disorders  
Head And Neck Cancer



## J-L

Kidney Cancer  
Kidney Disease  
Knee Problems  
Lead Poisoning  
Leukemia  
Lice  
Liver Disease  
Longevity  
Low Testosterone  
Lung Cancer

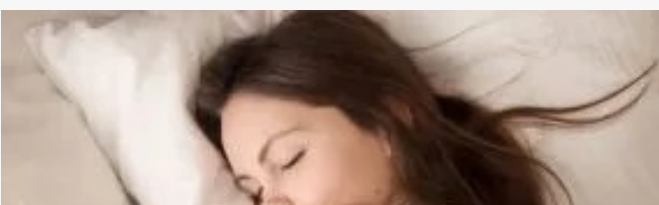


## M-O

Macular Degeneration  
Malaria  
Melanoma  
Men's Health  
Meningitis  
Menopause  
Menstruation/Periods  
Mental Health  
MERS  
Metabolic Disorders

## P-R

Pain  
Pancreatic Cancer  
Paranoia  
Parasitic Infections  
Parkinson's Disease  
Pediatric Diseases  
Pertussis  
Pneumonia





## S-T

Schizophrenia  
Scoliosis  
Seizure  
Senior Health  
Sexual Health  
Sickle Cell Disease  
Skin Cancer  
Sleep  
Sleep Apnea

## U-Z

Ulcers  
Uterine Cancer  
Varicose Veins  
Viral Infection  
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