

LIFE TALK NEWS 24



Empowering young people to make life-enriching choices; equipping parents for proactive parenting

DO YOU KNOW WHAT COMPUTER GAMES YOUR CHILD PLAYS?

When your teen (or younger child) is playing computer games, are you **sure** that you know what the game is about? Here's an urgent alert about a hugely popular game called Grand Theft Auto V or GTA V. Hard to believe that anyone would buy this game for their children, especially given its age restriction, but the frightening reality is that millions of parents are doing just that!

A column written by Murray Williams in the Cape Argus highlights the shocking realities of what this game is about. (We've had to tone-down some of Murray's wording to avoid our newsletter being blocked by mail servers.) And this is by no means the only risky game – there are many others that promote destructive behaviour or questionable values, or have the potential to trigger anger, violence or depression.

After you've read this, if you feel as strongly about it as does our Life Talk Forum team, please forward this to everyone you know, and ask them to do likewise. It is essential that we raise awareness about what our children are exposed to under the guise of 'games'.

So what's the big deal about a computer game?

Murray Williams writes: 'My young son and I walked into a games shop at Somerset Mall to look for a present. Facing us was a life-sized cardboard cut-out of a woman in a bikini, holding up the cover of a new *Grand Theft Auto* game. We'd seen her in a few other stores too. 'She looked like a very pleasant young woman. The Beach Boys may have been singing about exactly her in their line, "I wish they all could be California Girls!"

And the title of the game sounded innocuous too. A bit like the movie *Gone In 60 Seconds*. So we sidled up to the counter, and asked for a copy, please.

The young gaming dudes behind the till said: "Sure." And then: "You know it's a bit violent, though." We asked: "How violent?"

Dudes: "Um, very violent. You actually have to participate in torturing people."

Us: "Oh."

Dudes: "And there's also some nudity."

Us: "Oh?"

Dudes: "Ya, like full-frontal nudity. And some 5ex. Um, you have to have anal 5ex with a prostitute."

Us: "What?"

Dudes: "Ya. It's only a game. But it's a bit hectic."

Us: "So, like, can you deliberately skip this stuff?"

Dudes: "No. You have to do the torture and anal 5ex thing to get to the next level."

Us: "No!" We couldn't get out fast enough.

Later, I'm about to Google this game. Hold on. And there it is, indeed, shown on YouTube, titled: "Having 5ex with hookers on GTA V". The man's name is Justin, the "hooker" is named "Poppy". While Justin does his thing, his pants around his ankles, she's playing on her cellphone.

In another scene, a driver picks up another "hooker", pays her \$50, \$70 and then \$100 – for oral 5ex, vaginal 5ex and anal 5ex. "The Bitch" is doing it "to pay off her student loans".

Then there's the torture. Players are commanded by the FBI to torture an alleged terrorist for information, using a selection of torture implements, including sledgehammers and electric cables, The Guardian reports: Amnesty International has slated the game.

At Somerset Mall, we saw the happy, healthy-looking blonde in the bikini standing prominently in a number of stores frequented by families. No IDs are required to buy it and it's flying off the shelves. Reuters reports: "Grand Theft Auto V has crossed the \$1 billion sales mark after three days in stores, a rate faster than any other video game, film or other entertainment product has ever managed."

And the moral of that little experience? What does one say in the face of this material now so mainstream of our society – in our games, films, TV, music? No idea. Does it help to express dismay? Or does one just look like an out-of-touch fool?

Or are we right to ask the buyers of this game – they with their own wives, daughters, nieces, friends – if they will stand up and identify themselves with these values. Go on. Meanwhile, I'm going to the beach. Hopefully the freezing water will wash away the filth from this "exciting popular culture".

* Murray Williams's column **Shooting from the Lip** appears in the Cape Argus every Friday.

WHAT CAN WE (PARENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE) DO?

The famous quote "all that's needed for evil to triumph is that good men do nothing" triggers a vital question. Do we shrug such games off as 'just another 21st century challenge that our kids face, but we can't do anything about'? Do we let our over-stressed and hectic lives lull us into hoping that 'someone else will do something' or do we say that 'enough is enough' and take action?

For those who are keen to take action, our Life Talk team invites you to join us in addressing this (and many other challenges faced by our children). What can you do? Here are some suggestions:

1. Send a copy of this email to everyone you know.
2. Discuss the game and its negative implications with your children (and spouse/partner).
3. Check if your children currently have access to this (or other potentially harmful games):
 - a. Check whether your family has copies of Grand Theft Auto V loaded. Many parents don't know which games might be harmful so you can Google the name of any games you find by entering 'game-name unsuitable'. Searching for associated words like 'unsuitable' or 'negative effects' can highlight potential problems.
 - b. Ask every parent/family where your child spends time, about the games that they have at their homes. It'll be a lot easier if you first show them this alert before you ask (it'll avoid them classifying you as a neurot/nutcase before they hear the facts).
 - c. Ask your school to check if they have copies of undesirable games available.
4. Get as much information as possible about challenges facing children and teens, as well as risky activities and other aspects that children are engaging in. (For quick access, our Life Talk website has free newsletters that can be downloaded, and *Life Talk for Parents* covers all the major issues faced by adolescents and parents.)
5. Join parenting forums where you can meet like-minded parents, swap information, and hear expert speakers addressing relevant topics. If your school doesn't have one, consider starting one. We can supply start-up tips.
6. Don't be afraid to ask questions and share your concerns, with your children and with other parents. For example, don't be afraid to ask whether parents hosting a party or sleepover will be present, and what their attitude is to aspects such as: serving alcohol to underage children, showing porn, hubbly-bubbly, allowing dodgy games, providing drugs etc. It's amazing how many hosting parents do all of these and more! (If you could see the thousands of stories shared with our Forum, you'd be mind-boggled for ages!)
7. Check details before you buy. As a young guy we know replied in response to my querying email: "Ah, typical Grand Theft Auto storyline. Not my scene. You're allowed to viciously club old ladies to death with a golf club in that series. GTA has always had a reputation for very aggressive story-telling and extreme violence. However, computer games are all supplied with age restrictions and explicit content warnings on the cover. Parents need to be aware of what they're buying their kids and what their kids are watching and playing. 3 seconds of research on your phone in the store would be able to tell you that GTA is really not for kids!"
8. Encourage the implementation of the Tug-of-Life initiative at all schools (and churches and other organisations). The Tug-of-Life is about empowering young people to make life-enriching choices, and about equipping parents for proactive parenting. Its focus is on identifying challenges, choices, consequences and desired outcomes. The Tug-of-Life is simple and practical, and starts to change lives with immediate effect. The initiative is receiving rave reviews and is being rolled out countrywide, our aim being to reach millions of young people as soon as possible.

SPECIAL NOTE, SUBSEQUENT TO SENDING THIS NEWSLETTER OUT TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS:

We had an angry gamer email us, very upset about our warning. He says we have no right to criticise the game because he says that it is parents who are at fault for buying games without checking (and adhering to) the age restriction.

TO SUBSCRIBE TO THE LIFE TALK FORUM:

Visit www.lifetalk.co.za and enter your details on any of the 'subscribe' pages.

Join us on **Facebook Life Talk Tug-of-War and TugOfLife** –

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DOWNLOAD FREE NEWSLETTERS, 1 – 23 COVER:

Alcohol and the teen brain; huffing; clubs; Facebook guide for parents; drugs; cell phones; pocket money; hubbly bubbly; chewing tobacco; clubs & fake IDs; communication; discipline & boundaries; depression; Grade 8 hiccups; promiscuity; self-mutilation; eating disorders; self-esteem; bullying; abuse; ADHD; EMO; subject choices; MXit; divorce; ice-spiking with 'eye drops', head injuries; cults; chat-rooms; child-trafficking; cyberbullying, choking games; exam stress; tips for hosting parties; prescription drug-abuse, and many others.

SPECIAL ON LIFE TALK BOOKS!

Buy 4 books for R520

Life Talk for a Daughter, *Life Talk for a Son* and *Life Talk for Parents* include 15 new chapters covering many of the latest issues being faced by teens and young adults. (So even if you have the pre-2012 edition it's worth getting a new copy!)

The Tug-of-Life underpins the Tug-of-Life initiative. It provides a unique approach to tackling life's challenges, and identifies the very choices and challenges that we all face (children and adults alike). It empowers young people to avoid the very challenges mentioned above, and helps them to take control of (and enrich) their life.

THE BOOKS ARE A GREAT GIFT FOR YOUR CHILDREN, FRIENDS & FAMILY!

Price on our website is R160 each, now get the set of 4 for R520 (save R120)

Send our orders@tugoflife.com or buy online on www.tugoflife.com

■ Total excludes postage/courier, depending on chosen option.

More info: www.lifetalk.co.za or www.tugoflife.com

Watch our 'life is a tug-of-war' video on our homepage

PLEASE FORWARD TO ANYONE WHO MAY BE INTERESTED!

