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Help for parents to tackle risk of kids' video-game addiction

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The University of Hong Kong is reintroducing its Game Over Program through an online platform to help parents reduce the time their children spend on video games.

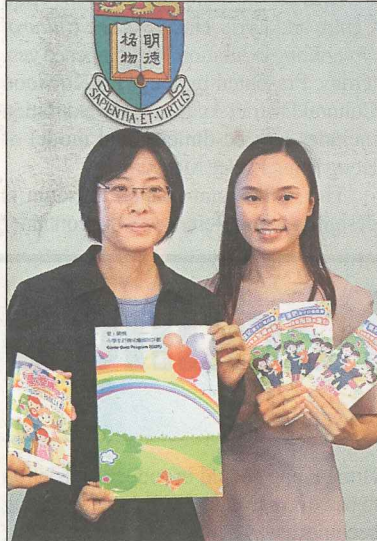
The program, first introduced in 2015, offers talks and training aimed at helping parents better communicate with their children so as to reduce the time they spend on gaming.

The university decided on again pushing the program after a survey of 2,006 Primary Four to Six students from eight schools from March to May showed that nearly 10 percent were at risk or might have already become addicted to games.

On average, students spent eight hours a week playing video games. Boys spent 11 hours on average, and 13.9 percent of them spent three hours a day. One in four students played violent video games.

The university's Social and Health Psychology Laboratory of the department of psychology, which conducted the survey, said 60.3 percent of the respondents acknowledged spending too much time playing video games while 55.2 percent answered "Yes" to the statement "I want to play video games after I am done playing video games."

Professor Cecilia Cheng, who led the



Cecilia Cheng, left, with colleague Angel Li, the project coordinator. MATTHEW LEUNG

study, attributed the cause of gaming addiction to boredom and stress from school.

"Students use video games as an escape from reality and depression," she said.

The survey also found that more than 40 percent of male students but fewer than 10 percent of female students had exposure to violent images when playing video games.

Cheng said a higher addiction level was

shown among students who played violent video games more frequently.

"Violent video games may influence children's temperament, make them feel irritable, or desensitized to violence and thus agree with violence," she said.

Cheng suggested parents communicate with their children to agree on a time limit on playing the games, while helping children develop a variety of hobbies to reduce their reliance on video games.

A student guardian officer from a local primary school said the more time a student spent on gaming, the poorer his or her academic performance. She believed parents should set a good example by mobile gaming less and spending more quality time with their children.

The research team urged the government to consider including prevention of gaming addiction in the "Healthy School Policy," which only focuses on combating drug abuse, so students in need can receive relevant preventive education as well as professional counseling and assistance.

More than 90 percent of the 229 parents who have so far participated in the Game Over Program say the program has helped them successfully reduce children's gaming time while improving communication with them.

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