Welcome to EGX London, a showcase for all the latest video games. For gamers, this is one of the biggest events of the year. What sort of games do you play? I like playing Zelda games, like I'm dressed up as Link from Zelda. It draws in thousands of people who want to see the latest games and get their hands on the latest tech.

The UK is the largest video game market in Europe and the latest stats tell us 89% of young people play these games in some form or another. According to one support group, there could be as many as one million people in the UK struggling with addiction. That number is just an estimate, though. What we do know is that the World Health Organization now recognises gaming disorder as an official disease which can lead to addiction.

Could these games be having an impact on our health? This investigation is taking a look at gaming addiction. Do we game too much?

Well, I'm going to try to be open minded about this because I know you're probably thinking this isn't a problem. Well, let's just check it out, right? How long do you reckon you spend playing games on the average day? On a weekday, maybe one hour. On a weekend., it can be 2 to 3 hours. I play about 5 hours a day.

I sometimes get worried if I play too long and I damage my eye. You know, when your parents ask you to come off, does that ever create tension? Like, are you ever frustrated? Probably, yes. Especially before bedtime. I'm like, Nah, just please. I would be a bit frustrated if I was in the middle of something and then Mum said "turn it off!"

Well, some days I play for like 10 hours, if it's like a Sunday or something. 10 hours? Wow. That's just made my mind! I caught up with a gaming expert, who gives advice on which games are suitable for children. Me and my friends always get grief from my parents about spending too much time on a game. I mean, how should we handle that?

Well, I think getting your parents playing too is a really nice thing because often parents don't understand like what it's what's happening when you're playing, you know, you're working as a team, you're communicating. And gamers at the e-Sports club in Stratton say they are gaining lots of other skills too. I can express myself when I'm playing, examine the game, focus more, I would build some new friends on the game.

A lot of games take like years to master. The benefits are like reflexes, like faster reflexes on my fingers when I have to go like that on a games controller. I think gaming is similar to like learning an instrument because it takes like the same amount of practice and it takes the same amount of devotion and time. My dad's been teaching me piano because he's a piano teacher.

I know, like you can teach me piano, but for every piano lesson you have, I'm going to teach you one of the games I play for, like, half

an hour. It can teach us many different things. If you're on computers, it really helps the typing because you can learn all the touch type much quicker if you have hand—eye coordination.

What have you learnt so far? Video games are fun, we know that already and some of us do spend a lot of time playing them. But what's the big deal? It's time for player 2 to take control, over the Scarlett. Well, let's find out, shall we? Let's play. I'm taking a hair raising journey down to Plymouth to meet a man who would game up to 24 hours a day.

And he'd even skip meals. How bad did the gaming get? I wasn't sleeping properly. I wasn't eating properly. I didn't feel good. I looked at myself in the mirror. I didn't like what I would see. You know what I mean? I lost a lot of body weight. People were actually making fun of me and they didn't really understand what I was kind of going through, feeling anxiety, feeling low mood, depressed, feeling numb.

So what impact did it have on your school life? From about ten years old, falling behind in school, so not doing my homework, finding it stressful. There were universities I couldn't go to because my grades were so poor and that was a direct result in my effort being low because I was more interested in video games. Do you think the gaming companies have some responsibility for all this?

I mean, it's in their interest to make these games as addictive as possible. It's a difficult question, really, because video games, you know, I find that fascinating. And I agree. But also within the games themselves, you know, there are mechanisms that, you know, the research is showing are tied to addiction. Is it the developer's fault? I don't know.

You know, any behaviour can be addictive. It's just important not to be suffering in silence. I'm hoping we can kind of destigmatise it because I felt so embarrassed and ashamed for years. I didn't think anyone understood it. Would you consider yourself free of addiction now? You know, I'm not playing games in a compulsive way. I'm not gaming at all.

Really. For now, I'm good for now. While Tom found the way out of addiction, a family in Dorset are having problems right now. I went to meet them. Ten year old Kami and his mum have been arguing over how much time he spends gaming. So, tell me what you love about playing this game? I love gaming because all my friends play it and I'm pretty good at it, I think.

Would you say you stay up really late to play video games, or do you wake up really early in the morning to play? Yeah, I'll wake up about five/six—ish. Before school? Yeah. So I've caught him up in the night. I might touch the Nintendo you know that he plays on and then also that it's hot and then I've realized that he's been gaming. I know your mum's a bit worried about it.

I mean, would you think about that? I think, I know this is coming from a ten year old, but I think that all kids should be able to like, have an opportunity at least to like to play games. I think I'm just worried because in the evening when he's gaming and I want him to come off gaming, it's the way he behaves then.

Then it will be, you know, lots of mean words and aggression. And he might have been gaming for about 4 or 5 hours, you know, in one day. So what impact do you think it has on your schoolwork? And I think I'm answering back a little bit more to my teachers and stuff like that. I was called in a few times about behaviours and and changes and his attitude not awful, but just really out of character.

And I realised that at the time when the gaming was at peak. Do you get cross with Mum at all when she interrupts your gaming? I'll get really annoyed, I'll kind of just tell her like "just go away". I'll be like, "nah, I'm literally just finishing this game". Kami's Mum is so worried about his behaviour that she's calling in a parenting expert who helps out family problems.

So how common do you think these sorts of problems are in families whose kids are into gaming? I've been seeing a massive increase of families contacting me, saying that they're having issues with their children. I think also because of lockdown where children have been at home and parents are working from home, they've had more access to their games and their phones when parents aren't really watching.

We need to be finding different things for them to do and actually reduce the access to the games. If we don't set limits and those children are going to be on it constantly and it has such an adverse effect on the children as well. Back at Kami's house, Amanda has asked Kami to get off this game and come downstairs.

It's time for family conference. Hi! I think what we need to do is have something where we all get involved as a family to start with. And it's not stop the gaming. It's reduce the gaming. Also, as parents, I think it's really important that we all have some tech free time, so that actually will then show our children, he like we can be like that.

So Mum has to put her phone in a basket. You have to put your Nintendo switch in a basket and we just have time when we all come off it, it does us all the world of good. Yeah. So I reckon that what we need to do with you is we can set up a reward system for you.

Okay, so this is the plan. Kami will be given a whole list of tasks that he has to do, like not playing video games before school, for example. And if he does it without complaining, he'll be given a rewards, agreed in advance with his Mum. So, how does that sound? Does that sound something that you would like to do?

Yeah. Yeah. I was scared if I if I couldn't get it done. And then how can I come back and be like, No, I couldn't do it. And then

they'll be like, no rewards. But I think I'll be able to get it done. Later in the program, we'll be back to see if Amanda's new rules make a difference.

Will Kami be able to stick to what is agreed? Or will Amanda's plans end up causing even more arguments in the family? In the UK, it's up to parents to decide how long their kids can spend playing games. But in some other countries, governments have decided to take action. In China, for instance, if you're under 18, you're only allowed to play for one hour a day and only on Fridays, weekends and public holidays.

So what about parents like Roxy if there were similar rules in the UK? I need to find an expert and quickly. Back in 2020, the NHS set up a National Center for Gaming Disorders and there's now overwhelming demand for its services to help people overcome videogame addiction. How big a problem do you think videogame addiction is in the UK?

We do know from running the clinic that we've had a large amount referrals, many more than we would expect. So we start in 2019 at the end of that year, and we were expecting to see around 50 referrals a year. Since that time we've had over a thousand referrals. What is it about these games, do you think that gets people addicted?

I think that, you know, that designed to be very stimulating, they're very novel, they're very immersive. And often the people we see, actually, they're playing for anything from 12 up until kind of 20 hours a day, often playing throughout the night, not kind of looking after their diet or that kind of physical wellbeing. So it's often very extreme when you're like playing games for that long, know it's going to take a toll on your work at school and things like that, and you're going to end up falling behind.

Exactly. We have seen people actually where they've stopped going to school completely. They've got so dependent and such a compulsive relationship with the gaming that they're they're gaming all through the night, sleeping in the day. You know, that can be reversed. But I do think the key is to get all to these things earlier before it gets to that point.

Yeah. Gamers agree that their parents do sometimes have a point. I think some of the signs of somebody addicted to gaming would probably be them like not coming down to like meals at the right time. If that was me, my parents would say, please get off the game. Do work, get sorted, have food. You shouldn't be ignoring your like necessities for gaming.

So what about the gaming companies themselves? Should they be doing more to stop people our age from getting hooked on their games? I went to meet Daniel Wood, who represents the gaming industry. We're a nation of game players. There's 40 million people that play games in the UK at the moment. There is nothing the Games can't do now.

They help you with problem solving, team building, the way people hang out with friends. There's 2,000 games business in the UK creating jobs up and down the country, so a real UK success story that we should be really proud of. But do you accept that for some people gaming addiction can be a problem? So there's tens of millions of people who play games in a fun, responsible way.

People should be taking a regular break 5 minutes every hour. We back that up with some really sophisticated controls on all consoles so you can actually restrict the amount of time that games are played for. So we want to empower parents in particular to have that decision in their own hands and will always be responsible for making sure all our players have the information and resources to be able to play games in a fun, responsible way.

Having heard all this, I'm heading back to Dorset to see Kami is getting on. Has his mum finally persuaded him to spend less time with his video games?

So Kami, the last time we spoke, I was kind of interrupting your game, but now we're in your local park. Does that mean things have changed? Yeah, I think I've been getting out a lot more, and it's just. It was bad for me. I've been going on my friends a lot more instead of sitting at home and gaming. Me and my mum been getting on quite a bit better now. I definitely feel like he's more present.

So he wasn't gaming this morning. Yeah, the children are at home, and normally he'd be quite disconnected and at the station already. But no, he chose not to and he was playing with his sister and that those things are really nice to see that you've got that balance. I just feel ultimately less stressed about the whole thing.

So do you think the reward system that your mum and Amanda put in has reduced the amount of time that you spend gaming? Or not really? I'm going to be honest, I think I spent nearly the same amount of time. But it's me and my mum relationship. Like we've been not arguing a lot anymore. I think that I better understand and I have that respect for how it feels to be part of a game and a community.

So I think that we're closer because we better understand each other. So when she told you to get off, you actually get off? Yeah. I don't like try sneak it. I'm really pleased that Kami seems to be okay and is getting out and about with his friends a bit more. Yeah. I've got to say, investigating gaming addiction has really made me think about how much time I spend playing games as well.

Really? I'm not saying I want to stop playing games altogether. I mean, look at this. This is pretty cool, right? But I'm just saying, you shouldn't let it take over our lives. Yeah, I agree with that. But how about one last race to the finish line? Oh, you're on! All right, let's go.

Come on, Jeriah, keep up. Don't worry, 'm coming for you!