



Blog written by Natasha, a SNAP parent - April 2026

SNAP is grateful to Natasha for sharing her story, as we feel it may give hope to parents who are struggling with this familiar situation and are feeling there is no way back.

“They Forgot How to Play: Why We Quit Gaming as a Family”

“Just... please, can I just finish this game?”

I can still hear those words as if it were yesterday.

“Alright,” I’d reply, trying to stay calm. “But just five more minutes.” The problem was, it was never five minutes.

I used to hear this all the time. I’d ask them to come off their games, and they’d plead for just a little longer—just enough time to finish what they’d started. But these weren’t the kind of games you could pause. There was always another round, another level, another reason they couldn’t stop just yet. And somehow, by the time they were finally ready to come off, life had moved on. I’d be busy with something else—cooking, working, dealing with everything that fills a normal day—and so they’d start another game. And then another. Before I knew it, hours had passed. Not minutes—hours. Gaming, alongside YouTube, had quietly taken over our days.

At first, I told myself it wasn’t a problem. Everyone else seemed to be saying the same thing—don’t feel guilty, you’re allowed a break, they’ve been out today, it’s fine. And for a while, I listened, because it was easier to believe that. Easier to tell myself that this was normal, that this was just what childhood looked like now. But deep down, I knew it wasn’t okay. We were spending far too much time attached to a screen, and if I’m being honest, I was allowing it. It was the easy option. It kept the peace. It gave me a moment to breathe.

I think, if I’m really honest, our family dynamic made that pull even stronger. My children are currently in the process of being assessed for ADHD and autism, and are already receiving support at school. I also strongly suspect I’m ADHD myself. That tendency towards hyperfocus, impulsivity, and leaning into whatever feels easiest in the moment—it’s something we all seem to share. And screens fit into that space a little too perfectly. They’re immediate, absorbing, and effortless in a way that real life often isn’t.

Slowly, without me really noticing at first, something started to change. My children didn’t stop playing overnight, but little by little, they stopped playing altogether. The toys that used to cover the floor stayed untouched, then they stayed in the cupboard, and eventually they disappeared altogether. I got rid of them one by one because there didn’t seem to be any point keeping things they had completely lost interest in.

When birthdays and Christmas came around, I found myself stuck. What do you buy children who don’t play anymore? In the end, I did what felt easiest—V-bucks, PlayStation vouchers, digital currency for a digital world. Every time I did it, I felt that knot of guilt tighten, because I knew I was feeding the very thing that was taking over. But stopping it felt hard—really hard—so I told myself it was fine. After all, everyone else was doing it.

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Blog written by Nafasha, a SNAP parent - April 2026

And when I looked around, it felt like they were right. Gaming was everywhere—at school, in conversations, in supermarkets, on clothes, in bedrooms. It felt impossible to escape. The more I noticed it, the more it frustrated me, because it started to feel like if your children weren't into gaming, there was very little left for them. Looking back now, I can see it wasn't just about how much time they were spending on screens—it was who they were in between. When they weren't gaming or watching YouTube, everything felt hard. Their behaviour was difficult, they struggled to focus on anything for more than a few moments, and nothing really held their attention unless it was a screen. Even simple things like eating dinner became a rush—"quickly, quickly, so I can get back." They didn't want to sit, didn't want to slow down, didn't want to be present.

They struggled to play together and argued constantly. Nothing seemed to interest them, and their minds never really settled. It felt like they were always switched on—buzzing, restless, hard to connect with. And when the screens did go off, there was often this strange crash afterwards—a kind of hazy, unsettled feeling where everything else felt flat or frustrating. At the time, I didn't have the words for it, but looking back, it felt like we were constantly swinging between overstimulated and underwhelmed.

It wasn't just the screen time itself either, but everything that came with it. They were playing online with friends from school, which at first felt reassuring because they weren't strangers. But what I hadn't expected was how it would blur the lines between school and home. When I was younger, arguments stayed at the school gate. You went home, reset, and by the next day it was usually forgotten. Now there was no break. Disagreements followed them home through headsets and screens, stretching out for hours instead of fading away.

Alongside that, something else crept in—a feeling I couldn't quite ignore. It started to feel like my home wasn't entirely mine anymore. Other children, other households, were suddenly part of it—listening in, hearing the background of our lives. I found myself hesitating before speaking, lowering my voice, avoiding certain conversations because I didn't know who might be on the other end. I couldn't fully relax or be myself, and I hated that.

Everything I suggested was met with resistance. Crafts, building a den, going outside—none of it landed. Not because they actively disliked the ideas, but because they didn't seem to have the interest or imagination to begin. I remember one moment so clearly: I suggested we build a den and, as usual, they said no. So I started building one myself. I pulled cushions off the sofa, draped blankets over chairs, made a cosy space, added teddies and snacks, and slowly created something for us to sit in together. And I remember thinking, why am I having to teach my children how to do this? Something so simple, something that should have come naturally, and yet it didn't.

That was the moment it really hit me. What had we let this become?

You might be reading this and wondering how it even gets to that point, or thinking you'd never let it go that far. I've thought those things about myself too. I've felt the guilt and the embarrassment, and the sense that I should have handled it differently, sooner.

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But the more I've spoken about it, the more I've realised how many families are quietly dealing with the same thing.

I'm not proud of that time, but I am honest about it—because we did something about it.

One day, I decided enough was enough. I sat the children down and told them we were taking a break: no gaming and no YouTube. Just two weeks to start with. Those two weeks were hard. They were bored, restless, and constantly on me. They didn't know how to fill their time, which is when it really sank in just how much the screens had been doing for them. A huge part of that transition was on me. We played a lot of board games—over and over again. It became our fallback, something predictable and shared that helped fill the gaps when everything else felt difficult to start. I had to be far more involved than I'd been before, actively helping them find ways to pass the time without falling back on a screen.

Just before the two weeks were up, I asked how they felt, and to my surprise, they said they wanted to carry on. So we did another two weeks. That first month took a lot—time, patience, and consistency. We started during the summer holidays in 2025, which helped because the days were longer and there was more time to fill. We bought bikes and made it our mission to learn, and we removed the PlayStation completely—unplugged it, packed it away, and took away the temptation of easy access.

Slowly, things began to shift. They started to play again. They made friends with neighbours, spent more time outside, and began making up their own games. It wasn't instant, but it was noticeable. We rediscovered toys too—things like a second-hand Hot Wheels garage, drawing, Lego, and other small hobbies that gradually became part of everyday life again.

Now, around eight or nine months on from that point, gaming and YouTube just aren't part of our daily lives anymore. They don't ask for it in the way they used to, and it no longer feels like the centre of everything. Their focus is better, they're calmer, and they're far more creative. They build, draw, read, and play in ways I hadn't seen for a long time.

They make dens a lot now. Cushions everywhere, blankets everywhere—usually a mess waiting to be tidied up. But it's a mess I don't mind anymore.

Because it feels like I've got my children back.

They're only little for such a short time, and I know one day I'll miss the toys scattered across the floor. For now, I'm choosing to appreciate it while it's here.

If you're reading this and seeing a bit of your own home in it, please don't feel judged. I know how easy it is to fall into this—especially when you're already navigating children who find the world overwhelming, or a brain that leans towards the easiest option just to get through the day. I also know how difficult it can feel to change it.

But from experience, I know that change is possible—it just asks more of you at the start than you might expect.

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If you would like further support with online safety, here are some resources:

- <https://nipinthebud.org/fact-sheet/smartphones-and-social-media-fact-sheet/>
- <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/gaming/>
- <https://www.flipsnack.com/internetmattersorg/supporting-neurodivergent-children-to-play-safely-online/full-view.html>
- <https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/neurodivergent-children/neurodivergent-children-gaming/roblox-parents-guide-neurodivergent-children/>
- <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>
- <https://mindjam.org.uk/>

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