

# Fortnite addiction blamed for students failing in class, missing school

**Fortnite is ensnaring kids as young as seven in gaming addictions, turning them into “classroom ghosts” too tired to concentrate or participate in class, an expert warns. Some schools are so concerned they’ve banned any conversation around Fortnite.**

Claire Heaney, Herald Sun  
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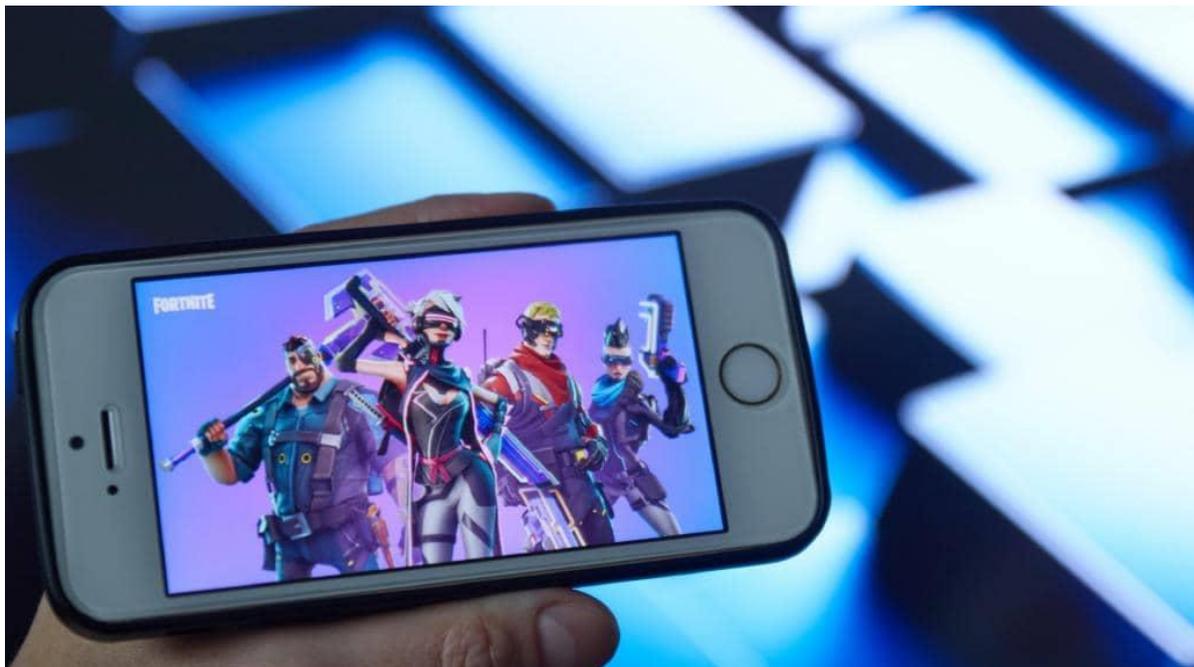
Fortnite addiction is turning sleep-deprived children into “classroom ghosts” and destroying their capacity to learn, an expert has warned.

The overuse of devices and reliance on social media is seen as a problem, but [compulsive gaming centred on the game Fortnite](#) is thought to be reaching epidemic proportions.

Some schools are so concerned they are even banning students from talking about Fortnite or performing the victory dances made famous by characters in the game.

Concerns about absenteeism, truancy, sleep deprivation and lack of attention leading to a decline in academic performance are now being acknowledged by leaders in government and non-government schools.

Independent Schools Victoria hosted neuroscience communicator and learning expert Jill Sweatman last month to speak to educators and parents about how to manage online gaming and social media.



Fortnite is being blamed for kids missing school, turning up late or arriving as sleep-deprived “ghosts” unable to learn. Picture: Supplied

The association has said there were “significant implications in the classroom when a normally healthy child shows up on any day with a distracted, tired mind”.

Ms Sweatman said many families did not understand the gravity of excessive online gaming, which has been classified as a mental health disorder by the World Health Organisation.

Many parents are embarrassed to put up their hand to say that this is occurring in their family home, impacting on relationships and leading to dysfunction and disharmony.

Ms Sweatman welcomed the Victorian State Government’s announcement that mobile phones will be banned in government schools next year.

“I think it is a brave and crucial move on the international stage,” she said.

“In essence, the Victorian Government is leading the way on this. I applaud the Victorian Government,” she said.

Many private schools have tackled the distraction of mobile phones with outright bans or similar approaches to modify use.

Ms Sweatman said parents were not exercising the degree of guidance that was required and the knock on effect of overuse of gadgets was resulting in poor nutrition, sleep deprivation, poor concentration and other woes.

She said signs that children were in trouble with gaming included staying in their rooms, withdrawal, not wanting to leave the house, not joining the family for meals, a disinterest in anything academic and lack of interest in pursuits they previously enjoyed.

“We can’t expect children to police their own fun barometer,” she said.

But, she said, parents seemed unwilling to cope with the pushback, which included tantrums and in some cases violence.

“The brain is an experience dependent organ and will only grow in early years by observing,” she said.

“If parents or primary care givers are distracted with mobile phones that is creating the disruption with the child and we are creating a new form of neglect. That neglect is supporting our children to turn to devices.”

She said children as young as seven were being ensnared by Fortnite which she described as insidious.



Online game Fortnite is being blamed for school woes. Picture: Supplied  
She said she believed some schools had even banned any conversation around Fortnite.

[Trinity Grammar](#), in Kew, banned mobile phones at the start of the year with headmaster Phil De Young saying that many of the boys were playing Fortnite at recess and lunchtime. One term in, Mr De Young reported [a marked improvement](#).

Ms Sweatman said she was constantly surprised to hear and read of families with children who were not going to school and dealing with verbal and physical aggression.

“There is groundswell of children who are not going to school, going to school late or going to school as classroom ghosts,” she said.

She said Fortnite tantalised with rewards and when they came the parts of the brain that were concerned with reward and craving were highly stimulated, reducing the ability for self control.

Ms Sweatman said regular use was profoundly changing brain development with children failing to develop short term memory.

Ms Sweatman said when she spoke to teachers they were lamenting that they were having to recap the same material over and over again because children’s short term memory had been undermined by overuse of apps such as Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube and online gaming.

Ms Sweatman said families had to put guidelines in place and there needed to be consequences.

These include no devices in bedrooms.

“I hear people say their child needs the phone for an alarm. Buy a clock,” she said.

Ms Sweatman said providing unfettered use of phones was killing, disabling and crippling children's potential.

She said there had been an increase in anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts which paralleled use of devices and sleep deprivation.

"Some parents feel impotent and overwhelmed and do not want to make the necessary changes in their own home and are turning to the school for support and solutions. The school has therefore assumed further responsibility for creating guidelines," she said.

She said good teachers were being unfairly criticised because students lacked attention skills. She said delayed gratification and staying with the problem was an issue.

She pointed to children's inability of deep read, use correct grammar and spelling as being linked to overuse of screens.

She said schools had been seduced to think that every lesson must be centred on or optimised by a device when eye-to-eye contact with a student was the best way to learn.

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