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Ask Ariel: He Just Wants to Play Minecraft



Note to readers: This is the first installment of “Ask Ariel,” a monthly column for Portland Family. I have spent my entire adult life working with children and families as a teacher, a mental health therapist, a school counselor and a mom. I invite you to ask me questions about your kids, about parenting, about how to best interact with school personnel or about family life in Portland. I look forward to hearing from you. —Ariel Frager

Dear Ariel,

<http://www.portlandfamily.com/posts/ask-ariel/>

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All my 9-year-old wants to do is play video games. Gone are the days of family board games, group art projects or storybook time cuddled together on the couch. I'm not sure how to spent time with him anymore.

Mom in a Minecraft Minefield

Dear MMM,

Our kids grow and change so quickly, I'm sure it seems like just a moment ago your son was happily listening to you read "Hands, Hands, Fingers, Thumb." Wasn't it just the other day that he took his first steps, spoke his first word, had his first day of kindergarten? He is doing the important work of growing up and with that, his tastes are changing along with how he wants to spend his free time. From your question, it sounds like you are mourning the loss of your younger child, as he shifts into that middle stage of childhood in which he wants to be slightly more independent. Appreciating each stage of your child's development can be hard because sometimes the end of a stage just sneaks up on you, and family board games have suddenly been traded in for the Xbox.

I know there are lots of opinions about video games and how much screen time should be allowed for our 21st century kids. But this question is about connection, not screen time. I suggest learning about your son's new world — in this case, his digital world. Ask questions about what games he is playing. Watch him play and ask him to explain it to you. Play with him and enjoy his gloating when he pummels you in each and every game. Our kids want us to see them, even if this is an aspect of your son's life in which you have little personal interest. Take an interest. Learn the difference between Creative and Adventure mode in Minecraft, and maybe you can figure out the appeal of the '80s-era graphics and tin-can quality sound (I sure haven't). Make sure your interest is genuine, because children can always tell when we are faking it. If you want to rekindle a closeness you felt with your child when he was younger, learn to love his love of video games.

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Ariel Frager



Ariel Frager is a school counselor and has a private therapy practice that specializes in treating children, adolescents and families. She lives in Portland with her husband, son, dog and kitty cat.



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